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Alistair Hunter

# Retirement Home? Ageing Migrant Workers in France and the Question of Return

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Alistair Hunter

# Retirement Home? Ageing Migrant Workers in France and the Question of Return

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*In memory of my migrant grandmothers,  
Jean and Lorna,  
and my grandfathers, Sam and Tom.*

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# Abbreviations

A&E	Accident and Emergency (hospital department)
APA	<i>Aide personnalisée à l'autonomie</i> (Personalised Aid for Autonomy)
APL	<i>Aide personnalisée au logement</i> (social security housing benefit)
ASPA	<i>Allocation de solidarité aux personnes âgées</i> (old-age income support)
ATMF	<i>Association des travailleurs maghrébins de France</i> (North African Workers' Association)
CAF	<i>Caisse d'allocations familiales</i> (Family Benefits Fund)
CLIC	<i>Centre local d'information et de coordination gérontologique</i> (local coordination service for elder care)
CMU	<i>Couverture de maladie universelle</i> (state-subsidised health insurance scheme)
CMU-C	<i>Couverture de maladie universelle complémentaire</i> (as above, covers 100% of costs)
CNAV	<i>Caisse nationale d'assurance vieillesse</i> (National Old-Age Insurance Fund)
EHPA	<i>Établissement d'hébergement pour personnes âgées</i> (retirement home)
EHPAD	<i>Établissement d'hébergement pour personnes âgées dépendantes</i> (nursing home)
FLN	<i>Front de libération nationale</i> (Front for Algerian National Liberation)
GP	General Practitioner (medical doctor who works in primary care; family doctor)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INSEE	<i>Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques</i> (National Statistics and Economic Studies Institute)
NELM	New Economics of Labour Migration
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PRI	Passage to Retirement of Immigrants survey
Sonacotra	<i>Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs</i>
Sonacotral	<i>Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs algériens</i>
Unafo	<i>Union professionnelle du logement accompagné</i> (Union of Professionals in Accompanied Housing)
WHO	World Health Organization

# Chapter 1

## Journey's End? Old Age in France's Migrant Worker Hostels



*Les vieux ne bougent plus  
Leurs gestes ont trop de rides  
Leur monde est trop petit*

Jacques Brel, Les Vieux

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*(The old ones don't move any more  
Their gestures are too wrinkled  
Their world is too small [author's translation])*

Later life is synonymous with reduced mobility in many cultures: gradually older people's physical and social worlds contract as movement becomes more taxing on the body and friends and relatives pass away. A second normative expectation of later life is that younger family members are able to alleviate, to some extent, the physical and social isolation associated with reduced mobility. This has led to the propagation of the widely-held ideal of old age as a time of repose surrounded by one's family.

In this book, I seek to understand and explain a situation which does not conform to this normative image of old age. I am referring here to the experiences of a particular group of older men, of North and West African origin, living in migrant worker hostels in France (*foyers de travailleurs migrants*). The migrant worker hostels were initiated by the French state in the late 1950s and 1960s. Their original purpose was two-fold: as a means of monitoring a suspect foreign male population at a time of decolonisation and workers' struggles, and as a short-term housing solution for a supposedly temporary migrant labour force. Yet against all expectations the hostels continue to exist today, hosting an ageing cohort of men whose presence in France has proved far from temporary. The men themselves also defy expectations: 'geographically single', they did not bring their wives and children to France while they were working, yet at retirement they do not return definitively. Instead they constantly travel back-and-forth between their hostels in France and their families in places of origin, even in quite advanced states of frailty and ill-health.

As a counterpoint to the image of a sedentary old age surrounded by one's family, the experiences of the older hostel residents are by no means novel or unique. Indeed scholars are increasingly drawing attention to the phenomenon of transnational ageing. King et al. (2000: 31) note how "improved accessibility by both surface and air transport, measured in cost and time" has broadened the opportunities for late-in-life migration. Because of the end of working life and exportability of pensions, retirement marks an appropriate juncture to relocate if so desired.<sup>1</sup> In some countries a clear 'retirement effect' is observable in the return migration rates of older foreigners at or around statutory retirement ages (Klinthäll 2006) and statistics collected by many OECD countries show growing numbers of state pensions paid to recipients who live abroad (Warnes 2009). Mirroring this development, the academic literature on late-in-life migration and transnational ageing has expanded greatly in recent years, including the publication of several monographs (Baldassar et al. 2007; Jovelin and Mezzouj (2015); King et al. 2000; Lulle and King 2016; Oliver 2008), edited collections (Horn and Scheppe 2016; Karl and Torres 2016; Walsh and Näre 2016), and journal special issues (Ciobanu and Hunter 2017; Ciobanu et al. 2017; Horn et al. 2013; Jaeger and Madoui 2015; Torres and Lawrence 2012; Warnes and Williams 2006; Warnes et al. 2004).

In a seminal text, Warnes, Friedrich, Kellaheer and Torres make an important contribution in highlighting the diversity between categories of older migrants (in terms of wealth, health, legal rights etc.).<sup>2</sup> They identify three main groups of people who migrate later in life: amenity-seeking movers, family-joining movers, and retirement returnees (Warnes et al. 2004).<sup>3</sup> 'Amenity-seeking' migration refers to (recently) retired, relatively affluent individuals who move (on a short- or long-term basis) to locations perceived to be conducive to a higher standard of living, thanks to factors such as climate, scenery or cheaper living costs. A sizeable body of literature now exists on amenity migration at retirement, both internally – such as 'sun-belt' migration within the United States (Longino 1992; Rogers 1992) – and internationally, as documented in studies of affluent Northern European retirees who migrate to warmer climes for some or all of the year (Benson 2011; Botterill 2016; Gustafson 2008; Hall and Hardill 2016; King et al. 2000; Oliver 2008; O'Reilly 2000). 'Family-joining' migration refers, as the name suggests, to retirees who move to join adult children who emigrated previously. These seniors are also referred to as 'zero-generation' migrants (Nedelcu 2009) and are often involved in providing informal support to their children and grandchildren (King et al. 2014; Zickgraf 2017). Older people may also migrate when ill-health forces them to move

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<sup>1</sup>While retirement is a key juncture for return, other factors – especially related to family obligations, divorce or widowhood – may intervene in the years leading up to retirement (Conway et al. 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Although as subsequent scholarship has underlined, it is important also to recognise the diversity of resources *within* such categories (Ciobanu et al. 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Warnes et al. (2004) differentiate the latter category into returns to 'first-world' countries and 'third-world' countries.

closer to sources of appropriate support, be that formal care in specialist institutions or informal care provided by younger relatives (Baldassar et al. 2007; Rogers 1992). In addition to these established categories, Lulle and King (2016: 3) draw attention to the largely ignored phenomenon of women in the period prior to retirement who “engage in labour migration to improve their lives.”

The third category identified by Warnes et al. (2004) is return migration at retirement, the focus of this book. Retirement returnees are individuals who emigrated for work earlier in adult life and choose to return to their places of origin following retirement (Cerase 1974). Until recently, this phenomenon was under-researched (Warnes and Williams 2006; Warnes 2009), if not dismissed outright for concerning “insignificant demographic cohorts” (Conway and Potter 2009: 224). The limited quantitative evidence does indeed indicate that definitive return is a minority choice, and that most older labour migrants prefer to ‘age in place’ (Attias-Donfut et al. 2006; Bolzman et al. 2016). There has thus developed a quite large body of literature on migrants who primarily age in place, with a particular focus on the vulnerabilities which such individuals confront (Buffel 2015; Burholt 2004; Ciobanu et al. 2017; Fokkema and Naderi 2013; Ganga 2006; Gardner 2002; Leavey et al. 2004; Samaoli 2007; Torres 2006; Victor et al. 2012; Zontini 2015).

By contrast, in an overview of retirement return migration, Warnes (2009) noted only four publications which focus on ageing migrant populations undertaking definitive return (Byron and Condon 1996; Klinthäll 2006; Malcolm 1996; Rodríguez and Egea 2006). As with other categories, however, recent years have witnessed increasing attention in this area (Barrett and Mosca 2013; Baykarakrumme 2013; Gualda and Escriva 2014; Sun 2016), including an edited volume on the topic (Percival 2013). Some of this work points to the frustrations and difficulties which returnees encounter in their efforts to re-integrate and adapt to life in places of origin (Barrett and Mosca 2013; Gualda and Escriva 2014; Olsson 2013; Sun 2016). A significant body of literature has also emerged on the determinants of the decision to return, a question of central importance in this book (for an overview see Ciobanu and Ramos 2015). This literature in particular points to the influence of age, gender, property ownership, income, family and social ties, health status, and citizenship acquisition as key influences on return decision-making (Attias-Donfut et al. 2006; Bolzman et al. 2006; de Coulon and Wolff 2006; de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Hunter 2011; Klinthäll 2006; Mesrine and Thave 1999; Razum et al. 2005; Yahirun 2014).

However it is important not to reify the distinction between migrants ageing in place and those who return, as such categories risk obscuring commonalities, limiting the applicability of insights from the wider literature on ageing and migration. Thus Walsh and Näre (2016: 7) propose viewing “return not as a singular migration event but as a structuring narrative marker in transnational lives, through which ideas of home and belonging are negotiated, irrespective of whether physical return has occurred, is projected or is even possible.” Furthermore, scholars have drawn an important insight, namely that return should not be conceived as a once-in-time definitive and permanent movement from country B back to country A. Rather, the

circular migration strategy of 'bi-residence' – involving regular back-and-forth moves between countries of origin and immigration – is more and more in evidence among ageing migrants (Ahmadi and Tornstam 1996; Attias-Donfut et al. 2006; Baykara-Krumme 2013; Böcker and Balkır 2016; Bolzman et al. 2006; de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Ganga 2006; Hunter 2011; Schaeffer 2001). Warnes alludes to “transnational patterns of residence” by which “older people can exploit, maintain and continue to develop residential opportunities, social networks and welfare entitlements in more than one country,” facilitated by low costs of travel and communications (Warnes 2009: 259–360). This can be a ‘best of both worlds’ strategy, to valorise their “duality of resources and references” (Bolzman et al. 2006: 1361), but may also reflect a situation of ‘double absence’ (Sayad 1999), “perpetually missing something” (Liversage and Mizrahi Mirdal 2017: 295). Furthermore, the bi-residence option can only continue as long as health and finances allow (Lulle and King 2016).

Despite the development of these more nuanced academic categorisations of late-in-life migration, it seems these concepts are yet to be transmitted into public discourse or policy discussions. A more typical approach in lay discussions is that migration and ageing are related in quite different ways. In many OECD nations, there is mounting concern about demographic ageing, perceived as a problem not only for economic growth but also for the increasing welfare burden falling on a smaller working-age population. One solution proposed by some policy makers is for an opening of the borders to younger labour migrants, preferably well-qualified in today's global, knowledge-based economy (Annan 2004; United Nations 2001). A second solution to the growing needs generated by this ageing population is the immigration of younger care workers to look after the native elderly. In sum, when migration and old age are linked, it is usually in terms of younger migrants who are seen as a solution for balancing out the demographic problem of ageing in developed countries. What is less readily recognised is that an earlier generation of labour migrants to Western Europe is ageing (and dying) on European soil, namely those Southern Europeans, Turks, Yugoslavs, and formerly colonised populations from across Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean, who arrived in the three decades after World War 2 (WWII), the epoch referred to in French as *les trente glorieuses*.

## 1.1 Post-war Migrants to Western Europe: Settling into Old Age

A dominant representation of the post-WWII labour migrations to Western Europe was the youth, if not agelessness, of the migrant workers. “So far as the economy of the metropolitan country is concerned, migrant workers are immortal... they do not age: they do not get tired: they do not die” (Berger and Mohr 1975: 64). This myth



of agelessness can no longer be entertained. Those who were once young and gainfully employed have now reached, or are approaching, retirement age.

If one had predicted in the 1960s that the ageing of the post-war pioneer generation of migrant labour would take place in Europe, one would have been met with incredulity, so strong were the assumptions – of employers, policymakers, and the migrants themselves – that this presence would be temporary. Yet in time it became apparent that intersecting with the fiction of agelessness of the migrant workers was a second myth, the myth of return (Anwar 1979).

The guestworkers' return dream was put on hold. Inexorably, through a confluence of economics, family dynamics and the unintended consequences of immigration policy, migrant communities began to form in Western Europe (Bolognani 2007; Piore 1979; Sayad 2006). Recession meant that unrealistic savings targets could not be attained, and with the looming uncertainty of continued family separation as stricter immigration controls were introduced, wives and children began to arrive in Europe while they still could (Anwar 1979; Castles et al. 1984; King 1986). The establishment of these new communities provoked a reorientation in motivations – work lost its purely instrumental role, and became a basis for identity and a means of ascribing status within the migrant collective (Piore 1979). Critical in the transition from provisional presence to permanent settlement was the schooling of young children, when “parents find their children speaking German better than Greek or Spanish or Turkish. Then they realise that their children will stay, and that if they themselves return, the family will be irrevocably broken” (Castles et al. 1984).

In countless families, then, the parents' dream<sup>4</sup> of return was pushed further and further back: postponed initially until children had finished their studies; then delayed again until grandparenthood and retirement. Although retirement is a potential juncture for labour migrants to relocate to places of origin, in the case of Europe's guestworkers return at retirement has not occurred *en masse*. Katy Gardner records how Bengali migrants in London initially envisaged Bangladesh as the spiritual homeland to which they would return at retirement, but with time they began to feel less 'at home' there. Healthcare issues also weigh in their decision to stay in the UK. Furthermore, their children and grandchildren see their future lying in Britain, not Bangladesh (Gardner 2002). Turning to the geographical focus of this book, similar factors are underlined in studies looking at the return decision-making of ageing migrants in France, as I will now elaborate.

**Ageing Migrants in France** Survey data highlight the settled nature of the elderly immigrant population in France. Several hypotheses have circulated about the determinants of migrants' decisions to settle or return, but empirical evidence and quan-

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<sup>4</sup>As several studies have shown, willingness to return is not always shared equally in first-generation migrant couples. Generally, male partners are more willing to return permanently than female partners (Böcker and Balkır 2016; Bolzman et al. 2016).

titative analyses have regrettably remained limited across the main migrant destination countries.<sup>5</sup> As a response to this lack of data, as well as to better know the scale and scope of the needs of older immigrants, in 2003 the national old-age insurance fund (CNAV)<sup>6</sup> and INSEE, the national statistics and economic studies institute,<sup>7</sup> conducted an internationally pioneering quantitative study, the 'Passage to Retirement of Immigrants' (PRI) survey (Attias-Donfut et al. 2006).<sup>8</sup> A significant section of the PRI survey was devoted to the mobility and residential decisions of immigrants at or near retirement.

The survey's principal findings confirmed the settled situation of older immigrants in France. A clear majority of the sample – 60% – indicated a firm preference for living out their old age in France surrounded by their children and grandchildren. 25% preferred the circular migration strategy alluded to above, involving regular back-and-forth moves between France and their countries of origin. The study authors referred to this as the *va-et-vient* option (literally 'coming-and-going'). Tellingly, only 6% of the sample foresaw a definitive return to their place of birth (Attias-Donfut et al. 2006).

It was argued by the PRI research team that their findings provide strong support for explanations based on the 'implantation' of migrants in a given setting. This theoretical approach which the PRI team integrated directly into their research design was based on the work done by Annie Mesrine and Suzanne Thave (1999) on the return decisions of elderly immigrants. Their aim was to evaluate the 'implantation' of an immigrant in France according to four variables: whether the migrant (i) had a partner/spouse who was also a migrant or was on the contrary French-born (i.e. 'mixed marriage'); (ii) had children resident in France; (iii) was an owner of property in France; or (iv) had acquired French citizenship. Applying these categories to the PRI sample, it was shown that being in a mixed marriage and acquiring French citizenship is strongly correlated with remaining in France past retirement.

The implantation approach bears a strong resemblance to the concept of 'moorings' developed by the eminent American gerontologist Charles Longino:

Like boats to a mooring, persons are tied to their environment by investments in their property, by the many community contexts in which they find meaning, by friends and family members whose proximity they value, by the experiences of the past, and by the lifestyles that weave these strands together into a pattern of satisfying activity (Longino 1992: 23).

---

<sup>5</sup>National statistics agencies' lack of interest regarding return migration, coupled with the difficulties in collecting population data on the phenomenon, have meant that "[r]eturn migration has always been one of the more shadowy features of the migration process" (King 1986: 1).

<sup>6</sup>*Caisse nationale d'assurance vieillesse* (CNAV). CNAV is the agency which administers the state pension in France.

<sup>7</sup>*Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (INSEE).

<sup>8</sup>The PRI sample consisted of 6221 randomly selected individuals aged between 45 and 70, born outside France, with nationality at birth other than French. Since the survey was restricted to individuals living in 'ordinary households', hostel residents and other people living in a 'community' setting (care homes, prisons, and so on) were not included in the PRI sample.

Longino was writing in the context of older people's migration within the United States, though his insights equally apply to international migration. In Europe, given the importance of family reunification (or family formation) in the establishment of immigrant communities, researchers have put greater emphasis on the location of family members as a determinant of residence decisions at retirement, (Attias-Donfut et al. 2006; Baykara-Krumme 2013; Bolzman et al. 2006; de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Dustmann et al. 1996; Ganga 2006; Liversage and Mizrahi Mirdal 2017; Rodríguez and Egea 2006; Schaeffer 2001; Warnes 2009). For Augustin de Coulon and François-Charles Wolff, location decisions at retirement will depend not only on a comparison of living standards in the countries of origin and immigration, but also on the strength of family relationships (de Coulon and Wolff 2006).

However, my early fieldwork alerted me to the presence in France of immigrants whose migration trajectories do not correspond to the family reunification narrative prioritised by the myth of return literature. I am referring here to those migrants discussed in the French migration literature as *faux célibataires* or 'geographically single',<sup>9</sup> who have remained apart from their families throughout the long sojourn working abroad. Despite such long absences, these individuals have remained bound to their families through an obligation to send remittances.

## 1.2 France's Migrant Worker Hostels and the Question of Late-in-Life Return

Emblematic of the geographically single situation are the older men of North and West African origin living in migrant worker hostels. On the basis of the four criteria of the implantation scenario outlined above – presence of children in France, marriage with a French-born non-migrant, property ownership in France, and acquisition of French nationality – the hostel residents do not appear to be likely candidates for living out the rest of their days in France:

- Being resident in hostels for 'single men', clearly they are not in a married relationship with French-born partners. But this does not mean to say that the men in the hostels are actually bachelors: according to the most recently available census data, close to two-thirds are married to partners who live in countries of origin. Half were already married before emigrating to France (Gallou 2005: 127–8).
- Likewise, in terms of property ownership in France, this criterion clearly does not apply to individuals who reside in collective accommodation such as the migrant worker hostels. If they do own property, it is in the country of origin (El Moubaraki and Bitasi Trachet 2006).

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<sup>9</sup>The term 'geographically single' refers to a migrant whose spouse and children have remained in the country of origin.

- Thirdly, their children have neither been born in France nor grown up there. Yet 72% are fathers to at least one child born in places of origin. One in two residents has fathered four children or more, with the average being 3.8 children per resident (Gallou: 2005: 128).
- The fourth criterion, acquisition of French nationality, is a further indicator of their lack of implantation. Based on the 1999 census data, the men in the *foyers* are much less likely to have acquired French nationality (6%) compared to the migrant population as a whole (33%) (Gallou and Rozenkier 2006: 54).

Beyond their affective ties to countries of origin in terms of marriage, property ownership, children, and nationality, there is an incontrovertible economic rationale for older hostel residents to return home definitively at retirement. I am referring here to the neo-classical economic models by which labour migration has long been analysed. Broadly told, the neo-classical approach has been to analyse migration in terms of the expected costs and benefits to an individual, or put differently, “the response of individuals to economic opportunity at a distance” (Sjaastad 1962: 80; also Harris and Todaro 1970). Wage differentials are the key variable of analysis: in other words, the individual’s decision to relocate is based on his or her expectations of wage differentials between countries of origin and destination (Harris and Todaro 1970). This applies to first-time emigrants as well as subsequent migration decisions such as return. Regarding this latter scenario, “for a deliberate return it is necessary that the difference between the benefit and the cost of being in the host country is decreasing over the migration history, and that a point exists where costs overtake benefits” (Dustmann et al. 1996: 226–7).

In a situation of retirement, where employment and earnings are no longer a factor in the decision, the usual neo-classical cost-benefit calculation of wages needs to be reformulated (King et al. 2000). Wage differentials in such a situation are irrelevant. Instead, what is relevant is the purchasing power of one’s pension (de Coulon and Wolff 2006; Klinthäll 2006). For example, Byron and Condon (1996) note that in the case of French Antilleans and British West Indians returning to the Caribbean, most of their sample only had the financial means to return *following* retirement, thanks to the income security inherent in their pensions. Cooperation worldwide between sending and receiving countries on social security means that in many cases pensions are exportable in their entirety, minus any currency exchange fees and deductions made by national social security agencies. For those migrants who have migrated from non-OECD countries to affluent European states, the higher purchasing power of the host country pension in the home country can be taken as a given. Return in such scenarios is the rational choice from the neo-classical perspective.

In summary, therefore, hostel residents appear to be unlikely candidates for living out their days in France, both on affective grounds (family localisation) and economic grounds. And yet, despite their lack of affective ties to France, their retention of ties to the place of origin, and their financial incentives to return, the men in this situation do not return on a definitive basis.

Instead of definitive return, the *va-et-vient* option is the overwhelming preference of the residents, alternating their time between France and their place of origin. According to the management of 75 hostels surveyed by Françoise Bitatsi Trachet and Mohamed El Moubaraki, 95% of retired residents regularly do back-and-forth trips (Bitatsi Trachet and El Moubaraki 2006: 101). Data provided to me by the largest hostel company, Adoma (formerly Sonacotra),<sup>10</sup> confirms the salience of this phenomenon for older residents, with figures for surveyed hostels revealing that between 80 and 90% of residents over the age of 56 engage in back-and-forth migration. Two distinct mobility patterns at retirement are apparent: the norm for West African hostel residents is that their return visits are less regular but much longer, often 6 months or more. West Africans are obliged to travel by air, and the market dominance of national carriers (and lack of low-cost alternatives) means that fares are considerable. Only the wealthiest West African pensioners are able to afford more than one (long) return trip per year. In contrast, North African elders can choose between competitively priced flights with budget carriers, or the equally economical (but time-consuming) coach-and-ferry combination. These different circular migration patterns are pertinent to the research question insofar as they may be symptomatic of different *motivations* for the back-and-forth preference, as will now be elaborated.

**The Central Research Question** The two theoretical paradoxes mentioned above constitute the basis of the book's central research question. Firstly, hostel residents' decision-making at retirement is puzzling insofar as it calls into question the assumptions of the myth of return literature, which explains non-return on the basis of family localisation. Just like their compatriots who reunified with families in France, the geographically single retirees do not return definitively at retirement. However, the grounds for this non-return cannot be family localisation, since their families remain back home, hundreds if not thousands of miles away. Secondly, their behaviour is puzzling insofar as it is irrational from the standpoint of neo-classical economics. The men remain unmoved by the financial incentives of a return homewards, where their French pensions – paid in euros – would have far greater purchasing power. In the case of North and West African retirees in receipt of a French pension, definitive return is the rational choice since a pension drawn in euros will clearly stretch further in Morocco or Mali than it does in Montreuil or Marseille.

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<sup>10</sup>Much more will be said about this company in Chap. 2.

Despite their lack of affective ties to France and their retention of ties to the place of origin, the men in this situation have by and large not returned on a definitive basis.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the 700-or-so hostels<sup>12</sup> operating in France today constitute a predominantly middle-aged, if not elderly, environment. This ageing was already noticeable in the French census of 1990, when the average age of the men in the hostels was 46 years. By the time of the next census in 1999, this figure had risen to 51.7 years (Renaut 2006: 172). Unfortunately, changes to the categories used in the census after 1999 mean that it is no longer possible to distinguish hostel residents from other segments of the population living in collective accommodation such as nursing homes, hospices and longer-term medical care establishments: they are all grouped together under the category of *service de moyen ou de long séjour* (Croguennec 2012). As a result, up-to-date statistics for France's migrant worker hostels are not available and researchers are obliged to make demographic estimations based on the 1999 census (Croguennec 2012). The data do show however that as of 1999 there was a massive preponderance of long-term residents among the hostel population: 34% of residents first entered this type of accommodation in the 1960s, with a further 36% entering in the 1970s (Gallou 2005). In other words, the hostel population is residentially static and ageing "within the walls" (Renaut 2006: 175). Given the static nature of this population, one can be reasonably confident in estimating the current demographic trends on the basis of the 1990 and 1999 census figures. Two such trends will be noted here. Firstly, an increase in the average age of hostel residents: based on the earlier census data, this is now likely to be in the late 50s or older. Secondly, an increase in the number of residents aged 55 or over: in 1990, 23% of residents were aged 55 or over, equivalent to nearly 22,000 men, yet by 1999 the proportion over 55 years had risen to 51% (Gallou and Rozenkier 2006). Reliable estimates now put this figure between 35,000 and 45,000 (Croguennec 2012; Plard et al. 2015).

The paradox of non-return and ageing in the hostels, already surprising from a theoretical standpoint, is yet more unexpected when one considers some contextual factors regarding the accommodation in which the men elect to grow old. The historical context to the migrant worker hostel policy will be more fully unpacked in Sect. 2.2. Before then I would like to underline three puzzling aspects.

The decision of the French government in 1956 to begin constructing hostel accommodation uniquely for migrant workers, and initially for Algerians only, cannot be disassociated from the contemporaneous struggle for independence in Algeria

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<sup>11</sup>An element of self-selection should be acknowledged here: some men did indeed return on a definitive basis following retirement. Unfortunately, no reliable statistics have been collected on this phenomenon: data on French pensions paid abroad is available, but it is not possible to filter such data to include only those pensioners who used to live in hostels. Nevertheless, definitive return by hostel residents is notable by the very fact of its exceptionality, as the testimony of hostel staff made clear to me.

<sup>12</sup>This figure includes those former *foyers* which have acquired the legal and administrative status of *résidence sociale* (see Sect. 2.2 for more details). In this book I will use the term 'hostel' to describe both types of accommodation, except where otherwise stated.





**Fig. 1.1** Image of a hostel, with cemetery in foreground

(1954–1962). The hundreds of thousands of Algerians working in metropolitan France at that time<sup>13</sup> were considered to be a security threat by the French Ministry of Interior. Hence one of the core aims of the hostel policy was to keep Algerians apart from the rest of the population, grouping them together in dreary concrete housing at the edge of towns and cities for means of surveillance (Bernardot 1997). A number of observers have noted the ‘extra-territoriality’ of the hostels, on the fringes of the major conurbations<sup>14</sup> (Desrumaux 2007; Sayad 2006). Frequently, hostels were constructed beside cemeteries, railways, and other undesirable locations, or implanted in the middle of sparsely populated industrial zones (Ginesy-Galano 1984). Fifty years later the hostels tend to remain cut-off from population centres and are poorly served by local amenities and public transport, constituting a form of “spatial discrimination” (Bernardot 1997: 10). The first puzzling aspect therefore is that older hostel residents prefer to remain isolated in these dreary, poorly connected localities (see Fig. 1.1).

<sup>13</sup>According to Viet (1998), there were 240,000 Algerians living in France as of 1953.

<sup>14</sup>The greater metropolitan areas of Paris, Lyon and Marseille in particular: as of 1999, 53% of hostel residents lived in Ile-de-France (Paris and region), 13% in Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur (Marseille and region), and 12% in Rhône-Alpes (Lyon and region). In other words, eight out of ten hostel residents live in one of the three most urbanised regions of France (Gallou 2005).

Secondly, a labour market rationale also dictated the location and functioning of the hostels, which were often constructed close to local employers and industrial zones. Once the Algerian War was over, the demands of the labour market began to weigh more heavily than security concerns in the French authorities' approach to migrant workers. The latter were deemed necessary only so long as industrial growth depended on their manpower (Sayad 1999). Marc Bernardot argues that the hostels constituted the housing dimension of a broader labour force policy which aimed "to limit the durable settlement and family reunification of these workers" (Bernardot 1997: 12; see also Ginesy-Galano 1984). On the second count, the policy has been successful insofar as it has inhibited the reunification of many families on French soil. Yet on the first count the residents themselves are evidently well 'settled' in France. If they are not integrated according to customary indicators, it is puzzling that they remain in France for much of the year.

Thirdly, the hostels were explicitly designed as temporary accommodation for temporary workers. As such, the hostels were built quickly and cheaply, according to substandard norms of construction and using materials which were not designed to be durable. The long hours which the men worked meant that the hostel room was usually considered only ever as a place of sleep, needing only to fit a bed and precious little else (Sayad 2006: 94). Hence the miniscule rooms on offer, typically measuring between 4.5 and 7.5 m<sup>2</sup> in surface area (see Figs. 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6).<sup>15</sup> From being a temporary accommodation solution for young workers, the hostels have become permanent housing (if not 'home') for elderly retirees. The architectural layout and facilities are patently not suitable for the needs of older people who may have cause to spend long periods of time in their rooms: despite this, the men stay on in their small rooms in France.

In sum, then, older hostel residents are not integrated in France according to the conventional reference groups (family, property-ownership, and nationality) and instead retain multiple and durable ties to their homelands. Furthermore, the men remain unmoved by the financial incentives of a return homewards, where their pensions would have far greater purchasing power. Despite these incentives, they do not return definitively, preferring instead to circulate regularly between places of origin and their peripheral, inadequately equipped hostels. These theoretical and empirical puzzles come together in the central research question of this book, namely:

What explains the hostel residents' preference for back-and-forth mobility over definitive return at retirement?

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<sup>15</sup>The cramped living conditions are improving (slowly) as more *foyers* pass to the status of *résidence sociale*. See Chap. 2 for more details of this change.



**Hostel Living** In the following excerpt from one of my interviews, Jawad (69, Taroudant, Morocco)<sup>16</sup> describes his hostel to me. I took the accompanying photographs (Figs. 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9 and 1.10) in the same hostel, inspired by Jawad's words.

**Fig. 1.2** A hostel room, with the author



Jawad: Ah the hostels, you know the hostels, the people who live there, it's like being in limbo. Like being in a barracks, or down a mine, or like prisoners in jail. It's the same thing.

Jawad: Well the room, you know the room.

AH: Yes of course.

Jawad: Just 7 square metres,

AH: Not even!

<sup>16</sup>Henceforth, the age and origin of all hostel residents cited in the text is formulated according to the following character key: pseudonym; age; region of origin; country of origin.

**Fig. 1.3** Wardrobe and washbasin



Jawad: Not even. Well, 7 metres. You have the washbasin, the wardrobe...

**Fig. 1.4** A hostel room



... and then you have the table, the television, and there's nowhere else to move!

Jawad: If you're in bed and you're six feet tall, you touch the wardrobe.

**Fig. 1.5** A hostel bed





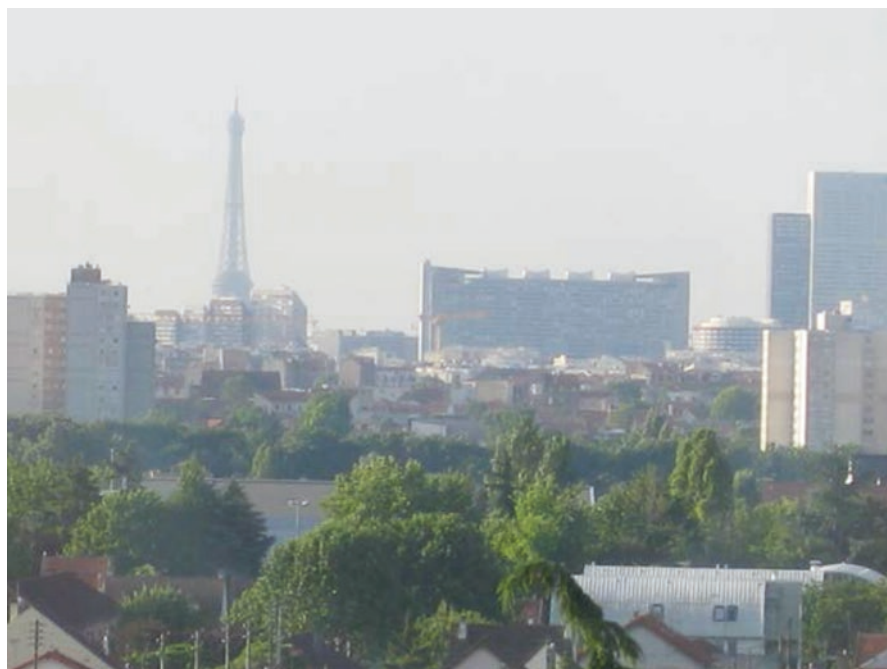
**Fig. 1.6** The shared kitchen, with gas burners and sink

Jawad: If you want to go to the kitchen, watch out – thieves about! There are eighteen people on each corridor. There are four stoves, with eight burners, OK ...

Jawad: ... also, everyone has a small locker where they can put their groceries, potatoes, onions, pans, cups etc.



**Fig. 1.7** Communal dining area (with lockers for storing food and utensils to rear)



**Fig. 1.8** The view from the kitchen (Eiffel Tower 12 km away)

If you arrive late, and find all the stoves taken, you have to wait ...

Jawad: ... one hour, two hours, it depends – because some people don't eat until half ten in the evening.

AH: At least you have a nice view to look at while you're waiting.

**Fig. 1.9** Communal showers (with blocked drain)



Jawad: Well, the showers are communal ...

**Fig. 1.10** Squat toilet

The toilets – communal.  
The kitchen – communal.  
Even the bedcovers and sheets – communal!  
You don't have the right to anything!

### **1.3 Purpose, Title and Structure of the Book**

As of 1999, when the last census measuring the hostel population was conducted, the hostels housed almost 80,000 male migrants, amounting to only 3.6% of all foreign-born men in France (Gallou 2005). Given this numerical insignificance, and their particular family situation (i.e., geographically single), the hostel residents are far from being representative of all older foreign-born individuals in France (Gallou 2005). Tony Warnes, who has contributed significantly to the study of older migrants, writes that “[t]he attention of journalists and researchers is drawn to the more unusual forms [of migration], which are visible and available for study but unrepresentative” (Warnes 2009: 343). This critique undeniably applies to the population



selected for study here. In light of this, readers would have legitimate grounds for asking: 'Why is this worthy of our attention? What contribution can this research make to the migration studies field?'

To respond firstly by way of intellectual justification, my interest in the hostels initially came about during earlier fieldwork in France, through interviews I was conducting with migrants' associations in Paris. In response to my question about what the priorities for their associations were, several representatives highlighted the topic of the older men living in migrant worker hostels, and their problematic health and welfare situations. Intrigued, I subsequently discovered that there was very little known about these institutions outside France. While drafting this book I was able to source only three English-language references devoted primarily to the hostels (Jones 1989; Diop and Michalak 1996; Mbodj-Pouye 2016). More intriguing still was my discovery that much of the major francophone scholarship on hostels has been conducted by former employees of the main hostel companies.<sup>17</sup> From the outside, it appeared to me as if the hostels constituted a 'dirty little secret', knowledge of which has been controlled by certain vested interests.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, other literature which in places alludes to the hostels is misleading. In their widely cited *Here for Good: Western Europe's New Ethnic Minorities*, Stephen Castles and colleagues argue that in terms of housing provision in Western Europe, "[a]part from a few restricted schemes in France and West Germany, very little in the way of housing or social amenities was provided especially for migrants" (Castles et al. 1984: 29). Under any circumstances, it is hard to concede that a total complement of over a quarter of million hostel beds for migrant workers constitutes a "restricted scheme," as was the case in the mid-1970s heyday of hostel construction (Lévy-Vroelant 2007).<sup>19</sup>

In addition, earlier literature on return migration tended to focus on the impact of emigration and return on places of origin (King 1986; Cerase 1974). This tendency has continued in contemporary analyses of what is known as the migration-development nexus. Against this trend, Laura Jeffery and Jude Murison have drawn attention to a less discussed issue: the impacts of the return process on the returnees themselves. As they note, "[r]eturn and re-integration into the home

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<sup>17</sup>Jacques Barou, Marc Bernardot, Mireille Ginesy-Galano and Choukri Hmed have written extensively on the hostels and prior to becoming academics worked for Sonacotra-Adoma, the largest hostel company. The latter three are responsible for the major reference works on the topic. I do not mean to suggest that these scholars' work has been compromised by their prior association with Sonacotra-Adoma: indeed, in some cases it appears that this scholarship is a reaction *against* the experience of working for the company. What I would underline however is the idea that insider contacts seem to have been necessary in the past to do academic research on and in the hostels.

<sup>18</sup>This impression was only reinforced when I attempted to negotiate permission to undertake research in hostels managed by Sonacotra-Adoma. My overtures to the company's head office met with delaying tactics and, ultimately, refusal to respond. Access was eventually secured at a much more devolved, local level.

<sup>19</sup>Lévy-Vroelant (2007: 21) enumerates 264,800 hostel beds as of 1975. Given the fluid definition of what counted as a migrant worker hostel, other estimates are somewhat lower. Patrick Simon (1998: 46) enumerates 680 hostels operating as of 1974, housing some 170,000 workers.



country may be rife with difficulties for returnees” (Jeffery and Murison 2011: 132). While this book does not neglect the former concern with returnees’ impact on their places of origin (see Chap. 6 particularly), above all I am concerned with hostel residents’ perspectives on their own return decisions.

Empirical gaps aside, this book also aspires to make a substantive theoretical contribution. Arguably the lion’s share of the francophone literature on the hostels has focused – not without eminent justification – on hostel residents’ alarming health and welfare situation (Boyer 2001; El Moubaraki and Bitatsi-Trachet 2006; Gallou and Rozenkier 2006; Samaoli 2007). While my focus on return does not prevent me from considering such matters (see Chaps. 4 and 7), I would argue that the hostel residents also constitute a population which can generate significant new insights for migration theory, despite their numerical insignificance. Indeed, the theoretical value of this research lies in the very fact that it takes an anomalous case. Of all the post-WWII labour migrants to France, the hostel residents would appear at first sight to be the most likely candidates for return. The myth of return literature has relied on family localisation as the principal explanation for the lack of return amongst the post-WWII immigration cohort in Western Europe, yet this explanation cannot apply here. Just as fundamentally, the decision not to return definitively calls into question neo-classical economic theory.

What then can account for this paradox? In Chap. 2 I present four distinct theoretical frameworks which may provide answers and help us to understand and explain late-in-life mobility. The new economics of labour migration proposes that return decisions are part of wider household strategies to minimise risks to family income (Stark 1991). Structuralist accounts (e.g. Cerase 1974; Sun 2016) draw attention to the political, social and cultural structures in places of origin to which returnees have to re-adapt. The literature on transnationalism (e.g. Portes et al. 1999) by contrast stresses the ties which migrants retain both to their host countries and to their homelands, and the evolutions in technology, transportation and governance which facilitate such ties. Finally, the theory of functionally differentiated social systems developed by Niklas Luhmann (1990) gives priority to the role of the welfare state in mediating the exclusionary tendencies of modern society. Access to healthcare and other forms of social protection becomes more important in later life and may have a bearing on return decisions.

**Title and Structure of the Book** The question of continued residence in hostels past retirement is what I seek to explain in this work. The original title of the research project from which this book derives was: ‘Retirement Home? France’s migrant worker hostels and the *puzzle* of late-in-life return.’ As I have tried to convey in this Introduction, there was something initially very puzzling about hostel residents’ non-definitive return at retirement, from the point of view of the family localisation thesis as well as the argument from pension purchasing power. However, in time I came to understand various aspects of the research question better. Instead of a puzzle, I began to appreciate the issue from the perspective of the residents themselves, as a *dilemma*, given the difficult choices they have to make between unfavourable alternatives. Reducing their experiences to the level of a theoretical

'puzzle' would risk dehumanising and trivialising what can be a highly fraught situation.

From time to time the human drama of the hostel residents' lives is the subject of public discourse and controversy in France. Headlines like "Immigration: the forgotten hostels" (Decugis 1998; author's translation);<sup>20</sup> "The refuge of the uprooted" (Guyotat 2004; author's translation); and "Forgotten, more and more immigrants are growing old alone in France" (Bernard 1999; author's translation) give an indication of the tenor of this discourse. Other articles note with alarm that the Sonacotra hostels are "transforming into retirement homes" (Serafini 1999; author's translation), or worse, *mouroirs* – a pejorative term implying a refuge of last resort, where one goes to die (Guyotat 2004; Decugis 1998).

Such headlines are the inspiration in part for the interrogation found in the title to this book, *Retirement Home?* This interrogation works on several levels. Firstly, it speaks to the question of whether the hostels constitute an appropriate living space for older people: can we really consider the hostel to be a retirement home like any other? Secondly, it speaks to the difficult question the men face at retirement: to return home definitively or not? Thirdly, in this book I question what retirement means for these ageing migrants and find that in several ways their passage to retirement does not correspond to normative expectations of later life, be it in France or in places of origin. Finally, I conclude by asking what 'home' can mean for the hostel residents: are they 'homeless' everywhere, as the more pessimistically-minded scholars conclude (e.g. Sayad 1999), or have they found home in new and unexpected places?

Chapter 2 sets the scene, reviewing the history of the hostels and the relevant theoretical literature, before providing details of my multi-sited research design spanning France, Morocco and Senegal. At this stage I underline the importance of the concept of biography for this work. In Chap. 3 and thereafter, key elements of residents' biographies are characterised as deviating from the 'standard' lifecourse expected by various welfare state institutions. Now that they are older and no longer working, the men's biographies – recorded in documents such as passports, social security files and payslips – mediate their difficult relationship with the French state, notably in terms of social security benefits and healthcare.

Accessing these two goods is a principal rationale for the retired hostel residents' preference for the *va-et-vient* over definitive return, as is elaborated in Chaps. 3 and 4 respectively. Many social security benefits are subject to minimum residence conditions. Administrators at various state agencies seek to territorially 'fix' and temporally 'timetable' the hostel residents through strategies such as passport checks, tax declarations, and targeted fraud investigations. With healthcare, the better-quality, subsidised services available in France mean that it is the preferred location for most treatments. This implies that a large burden of care falls on the French welfare state, since the men have no family in France to look after them.

Instead, hostel residents' families are transnational. In Chap. 5, it is shown how fundamental these family ties are for respondents, as manifested in their remittance

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<sup>20</sup> © Le Figaro 17.11.1998.

sending practices: it was the dream of family prosperity and financial security which spurred their emigration in the first place. Unexpectedly, the families of some hostel residents remain dependent on remittances even following the emigrant's retirement, leading to prolonged stays in France in order to claim certain social security benefits which are subject to a minimum period of residence being observed. However, the long period of exile can lead to loss of influence within the family, especially for North African respondents. From the perspective of hostel residents, this undermines patriarchal norms in gender roles and family relationships.

Chapter 6 discusses the possibility of re-integrating to communities of origin. Many North Africans complain that they have 'lost their bearings' in their families and in the wider home community, thus rendering difficult their prospects for re-integration there. Most West African men, it transpires, are better able to re-integrate thanks to their involvement in hometown associations. These structures enable them to maintain a political, social, and economic presence despite their long absences, facilitating re-integration when the men come to retire.

A further function of hometown associations is to provide repatriation insurance in case of death in France. Chapter 7 documents how hostel residents approach physical frailty and the end of life. The *va-et-vient* can continue only so long as the men are in a fit state to travel: eventually, ill-health and/or loss of autonomy force the men to choose where to live out their days. The options in France are unappealing. In terms of facilities and architectural layout, most hostels are an entirely unsuitable environment for older people with advanced dependency. Yet to enter a dedicated residential care home is to renounce the remittance sending role, given that the fees charged are so high. Hence some undertake a 'penultimate voyage' homewards – returning home to die – in order to benefit from family care in their last days and also to be assured of a funeral in accordance with Islamic rites.<sup>21</sup> That such rites might not be properly followed in France is a source of existential anguish to many.

The book concludes by offering an answer to the guiding question of why the hostel residents prefer back-and-forth mobility over definitive return at retirement. Given the limited explanatory value of the arguments from neoclassical economics and family localisation, I assess the merits of the rival theories which were proposed: the new economics of labour migration, structuralism, transnationalism and social systems theory. In the light of the findings of Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, no one theory adequately accounts for all the phenomena observed: at various points in the data there is support for different theories. Nonetheless, I argue that Luhmann's theory of social systems has the greatest potential for fruitful application in the future, since it offers a radically fresh perspective on why people migrate and the structure of the society into which they integrate. This insight is developed by applying an innovative systems theoretic approach to an idea which features prominently

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<sup>21</sup> Although no statistics exist for hostel residents' religious affiliation, as collecting such statistics in France is illegal, the vast majority are (at least nominally) Muslim. The main countries of origin for the hostel population (Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey) are all countries where Muslims constitute at least 92% of the population (Pew Research Centre 2012).

in migration research, including in the title to this book, namely the concept of 'home'. Building on conventional conceptions of home predicated on bonds to social group or territory, I argue that to be 'at home' can also mean upholding claims to be 'included' in different social systems. This argument is particularly salient in light of a recent policy measure offering a guaranteed monthly income to hostels residents who return to countries of origin, and in the book's final section I consider the prospects for this legislation and the ageing residents which it targets.

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## Chapter 2

# Points of Departure: Geographical, Historical and Theoretical Contexts



*A young French guy passes an old immigrant on the street, and wonders what the hell he's still doing here. But he doesn't know that it was the old immigrant who built the street, who built that very pavement. It's very important that people know what we immigrant workers did.*

Interview with Habib, 65, a hostel resident from Oran, Algeria.

This chapter situates the late-in-life mobility of hostel residents in its geographical, historical, and theoretical contexts. As noted in Chap. 1, the vast majority of hostel residents hail from France's former colonies in North and West Africa. Section 2.1 charts the geography and history of migration from these areas. Section 2.2 pursues the historical theme by elaborating how France's migrant worker hostel accommodation came into being in the late 1950s and subsequently developed. While originally envisaged for a young working-age population, the migrant hostels now host an ageing cohort of men who, defying expectation, do not return definitively to their families at retirement. Section 2.3 sketches four distinct theoretical frameworks which have the potential to explain this counter-intuitive behaviour: these are the new economics of labour migration, structuralism, transnationalism, and social systems theory. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the methodological implications which follow from the study's stated aim to explain hostel residents' late-in-life mobility.

## 2.1 Contexts of Emigration

As noted, the hostels house a population of predominantly North African and West African origins. Although developing at different times, flows of migrants from these regions to France display significant similarities. For the North African context I will focus on flows from Algeria and Morocco, since all of my North African

respondents originated from these two countries.<sup>1</sup> For the West African context I will confine my discussion to the case of a single ethnic group, the Soninke, inhabiting a triangle of borderland where the frontiers of present-day Senegal, Mauritania and Mali intersect (see Figs. 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). All of my West African respondents hailed from these three sending countries and with few exceptions identified as Soninke. The Soninke dominated flows from West Africa to France up until the 1970s (Manchuelle 1997). Early flows in the Algerian case (ca. 1905–1945) and the Moroccan case (ca. 1914–late 1950s) are also dominated by a single ethnic group from a clearly-defined geographical region, respectively the Berbers of mountainous Kabylia (to the east of the capital Algiers) and the Chleuh (also Berber-speaking) of the Souss in southern Morocco (Lacroix 2005; Manchuelle 1997).

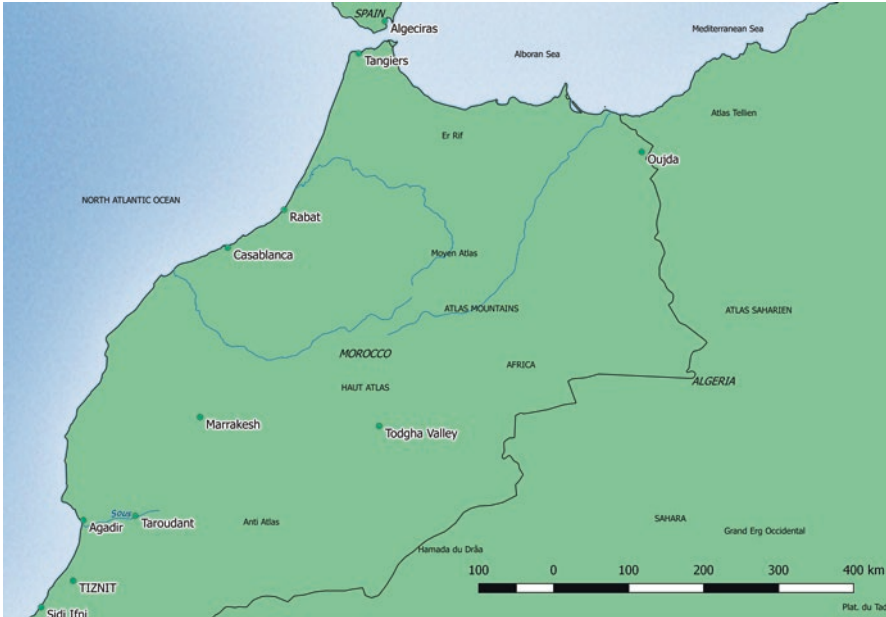
Given the heavy boot-print of French colonisation in these three sending regions, many scholars have subscribed to the view that emigration was a movement of ‘uprooted’ populations reacting to tumultuous change (Amin 1974; Bathily 1972; Silverstein 2004; Sayad 2006). In all three cases, however, contemporary scholars have been at pains to demonstrate that initial flows were *not* a response to the colonial violence and economic disruption (e.g. taxation, forced imposition of a market economy) perpetrated by the colonists on local populations (Lacroix 2005; MacMaster 1997; Manchuelle 1997). Instead, migration from these regions (be it internal or international) was at the outset a consequence of climatic and topographic conditions.<sup>2</sup> All three sending regions experienced short growing seasons, and in each case there were few non-agricultural employment opportunities locally, hence the resort to migration to pursue alternative livelihoods in the off-season. In the nineteenth century, this livelihood-based mobility, whether through trade, soldiering or agricultural employment, quickly brought the three ethnic groups into contact with the French colonists, making them privileged interlocutors. It is no surprise therefore that these ethnic groups dominate the first emigration cohorts from their respective countries.

Turning to Morocco first, emigration was for long the prerogative of the Berber-speaking Chleuh ethnic group, from the mountainous Souss region, covering the provinces of Agadir, Taroudant and Tiznit (see Fig. 2.1). Significant emigration from Morocco to France began during WWI. By 1929, of 21,000 Moroccans in France, 95% were from the Souss (Lacroix 2005). Lacroix sees Chleuh migration as “anything but an exit” provoked by the lack of natural resources in the Souss or a crisis in the social and economic order there (2005: 27). Rather emigration was based on long-standing pre-colonial traditions of livelihood mobility to Northern

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<sup>1</sup>Tunisians are also prominent in the hostel population: as of the 1999 census 6725 Tunisians resided in this accommodation (Renaut 2006). However, it so happened that there were very few Tunisians resident in the hostels I visited during my fieldwork.

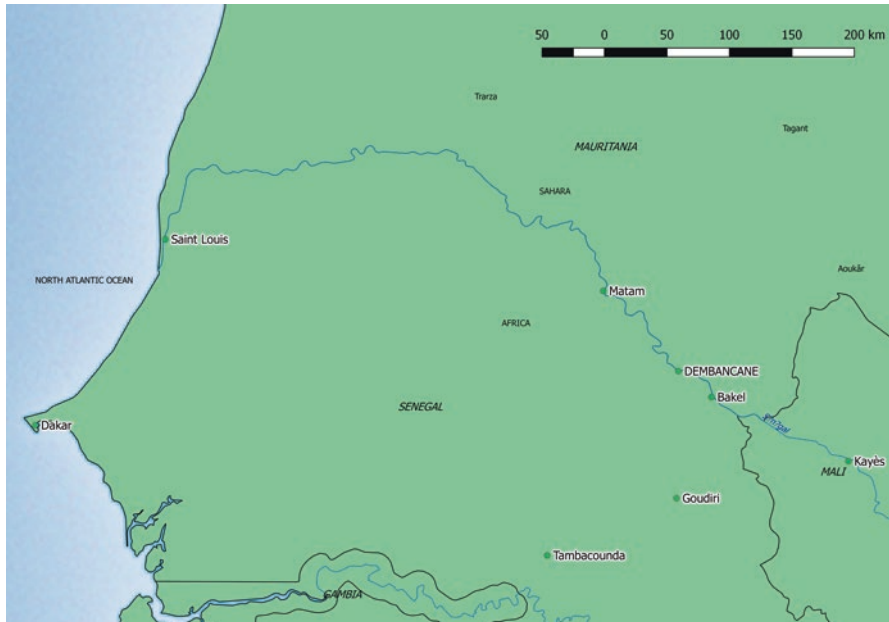
<sup>2</sup>The Soninke lands border the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert and the climate there is typical of Sahelian zones, with an annual short rainy season providing a regular if reduced source of water for cultivation purposes. The Kabyle and Chleuh peoples inhabit mountainous regions of Algeria and Morocco respectively. Regular rainfall and sunshine permit a wide range of crops to be grown, but the mountainous topography prevents large yields.



**Fig. 2.1** Map of Morocco, showing the main towns and regions cited in the book. Map made with Natural Earth free vector and raster map data and created using QGIS free and open-source software (<http://www.qgis.org/en/site/index.html>)

and Western Morocco during the agricultural off-season, engaging in trade, military service or seasonal agriculture (Lacroix 2005; de Haas 2007). The end of WWII is a key moment in the history of migration to France, and not only from Morocco. In 1946, in response firstly to the vast rebuilding effort which was required after the war and secondly to France’s worrying demographic position due to low birth rates, an open-door immigration policy was initiated. The French government, like other war-torn European states, had a “cultural preference” for immigrants of European origin (Viet 1998: 21–2), but labour supply (notably from Spain and Italy) could not match the demands of French industry. Solutions were soon sought in the colonial territories of North Africa. Recruiting agents hired migrant workers ‘on the spot’ in the main towns of the region, often on marketdays.<sup>3</sup> The ‘candidates’ for emigration (including some of those interviewed for this book: see Chap. 4 epigraph) were selected in the *souks* (markets) and conveyed by bus, boat and train directly to the mines of northern France. A second route into France, less official than the recruitment organised by the mining companies, was to enter as a tourist and then secure paid employment, which in turn secured a residence permit. Knowledge about job vacancies was relayed by friends and family already in France. Following Moroccan

<sup>3</sup>The most famous of these agents, Félix Moura, supervised the hiring of 78,000 people between 1956 and 1977 (Lacroix 2005).



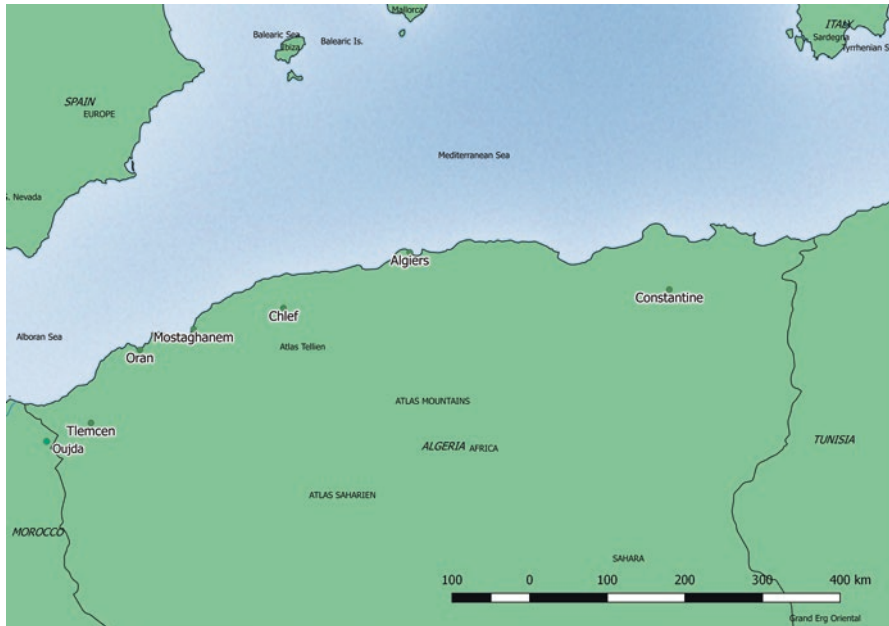
**Fig. 2.2** Map of Senegal, showing the main towns and regions cited in the book. Map made with Natural Earth free vector and raster map data and created using QGIS free and open-source software (<http://www.qgis.org/en/site/index.html>)

independence in 1956, the newly sovereign government began to encourage emigration from the rebellious Rif region in the North (de Haas 2007). Nonetheless, emigration from the Souss remained very high: in 1980, “one in every five people of working age from the Provinces of Tiznit, Agadir and Taroudant worked abroad” (Lacroix, 2005: 36).

Migration from Soninke lands to other parts of West Africa has a far longer history than Soninke emigration to France, which only began in the mid-1950s. The Soninke inhabit a narrow wedge of territory flanking the Upper Senegal River Valley, beginning around Matam in Senegal and spreading south-east through Bakel into Mali and parts of Mauritania, extending past the city of Kayès (see Fig. 2.2). During the eighteenth century, the Soninke were “the most important slave owners and slave traders in West Africa” (Manchuelle 1997: 145) and became the privileged partners of the French in this trade. From the mid-nineteenth century, Soninke migrants also travelled to Gambia for seasonal agriculture, in particular the harvesting of groundnuts. A third avenue of labour migration was more military in character, with young Soninke men, especially the sons of more prestigious families, finding employment as armed guards (*laptots*) on French-owned boats trading up and down the Senegal River. Contacts with French traders gave these men advance notice of job opportunities further afield. A major shift in Soninke migration is evi-

dent from the 1930s, and especially after WWII, changing from seasonal short-distance moves to pluriannual and eventually life-long emigration, initially to Dakar and other major urban centres, and then to France. The creation of a deep water port at Dakar saw *laptots* switching to ocean-going vessels. By 1930, the Soninke sailors were the most numerous African group transiting the port of Marseille. Employment on French ships in time led to employment in France itself, beginning in the mid-1950s. The Algerian war accelerated the arrival of Soninke in France. In 1956, the French authorities imposed visa controls for Algerians, only lifted in 1962 by the Evian accords. Hence French industry's call for a more diverse foreign workforce, to which the Soninke migrants readily responded (Manchuelle, 1997; Adams, 1977). Indeed, François Manchuelle in the title to his 1997 book characterises the Soninke in the period 1848–1960 as 'willing migrants'. By 1968, 85% of West Africans in France were Soninke (Manchuelle 1997). However, from the 1970s Mahamet Timera (1996) sees a shift from 'willing' to 'uprooted' migration, firstly due to the global recession, and secondly due to successive droughts (1968–74). These two developments led to greater dependence of migrants' families on remittances (Manchuelle 1997). Manchuelle notes that "the drought may have left few other options to the Soninke apart from migration" (1997: 212). Adrian Adams, in her fascinating account of Soninke village life, also argues that from 1970 emigration was a "movement of self-defence" (1977: 97).

Last but certainly not least is the Algerian context. Indeed, the migration of Algerians constitutes the numerically most significant population movement into France of the twentieth century. Most observers locate the beginning of Algerian emigration to France around 1910 (Sayad 2006; MacMaster 1997). Travel restrictions were partially lifted in 1904, and then completely abolished in 1914. Counter-intuitively, it was in those areas *least* affected by colonial violence and uprooting that *most* emigration took place, particularly the mountainous Kabylia region east of Algiers (see Fig. 2.3) which was not suited to commercial agricultural exploitation. By contrast, emigration from the fertile coastal plain (to the south-west of Algiers) – which witnessed the most destructive colonial intrusions – was strongly discouraged by the authorities because the plain-dwellers constituted a cheap and compliant local labour force (MacMaster 1993, 1997). As in the Moroccan and Soninke cases, Kabyle emigration was a response to local climatic and topographic conditions and the resulting lack of employment opportunities outwith the short agricultural season. Thus, the Kabyle flows to France were primarily seasonal or temporary sojourns of at most a few years prior to returning to the village of origin and the family lands. In terms of numbers departing, WWI was a significant juncture and provided many Algerians with their first experience of France, either as soldiers or as workers in munitions factories (a slim majority were volunteers not conscripts). Following WWI, many Kabyles decided to return to the *Métropole* on a seasonal or temporary basis. By 1923, a Berber-speaking Kabyle was 16 times more likely to emigrate than an Arabic-speaking inhabitant of the coastal plain (MacMaster 1997).



**Fig. 2.3** Map of Algeria, showing the main towns and regions cited in the book. Map made with Natural Earth free vector and raster map data and created using QGIS free and open-source software (<http://www.qgis.org/en/site/index.html>)

Yet the aftermath of WWII is arguably a more important turning point than WWI. A travel blockade had been in effect between Algeria and France between 1942 and 1945. With the implementation of the open-door immigration policy in 1946, the built-up pressure to emigrate from Algeria exploded. Importantly, the Kabyle pioneers were this time joined by the inhabitants of the coastal plain, who were fleeing desperate poverty and colonial dispossession. This resulted in a massive increase in the Algerian population in France, which doubled in 4 years from 120,000 in 1949 to 240,000 in 1953 (Viet 1998). The following year, 1954, would see the opening shots fired in the Algerian War of Independence. The importance of this conflict in France's recent political history is hard to overstate, and its effects continue to resonate today. However it is in the stark form of the migrant worker hostels (Fig. 1.1) that the Algerian War has left one of its most concrete and lasting marks on France.

## 2.2 The Three Ages of the Hostels: Sonacotral—Sonacotra—Adoma

For any newly-arrived migrant, quickly finding appropriate accommodation is a basic priority. Most often, this occurs through the mechanisms of the private housing market, according to a logic of supply and demand. More rarely, employers may

be mandated to organise housing for their foreign employees, as occurred for example in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s (Bernardot 1999; Castles et al. 1984). In neighbouring France, however, the state deemed it necessary to intervene in this sector and invested a great deal of money and administrative energy in the creation of hostel accommodation solely for labour migrants. It was Algerian workers who were the initial targets of the migrant worker hostel policy, implemented as it was by the state-financed Sonacotral company (*Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs algériens* or National Housing Construction Company for Algerian Workers), created in 1956. While other hostel companies have existed, the case of Sonacotral will be treated as exemplary here because it was the first and largest such company and because the changes it has experienced have been reproduced later in other hostel companies.

In the present section covering the development of this very specific form of housing I will distinguish between three key phases or ‘ages’, to paraphrase the landmark text of the French-Algerian sociologist of migration Abdelmalek Sayad<sup>4</sup>. The first age corresponds to the period 1956–1962, when Sonacotral specialised in housing Algerian workers only. The *raison d’être* of hostels at this time followed a security logic, as hinted in the conclusion to the previous section. The second phase begins in 1963, when Sonacotral’s mission was expanded to cater not only for Algerians but for all migrant workers. The reorientation was reflected in a slightly modified and more generic name, Sonacotra (*Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs*). In this second period I argue that the guiding logic of the hostels was to reconcile the twin imperatives of restricting family reunification and maintaining a flexible labour market. This period also witnessed significant industrial unrest and political activism on the part of hostel residents. The third period commences in the early 1990s, heralding the most recent phase during which the company has sought to diversify its clientele to other precarious populations. This latest phase has been accompanied by a further name change. As of 2007, the company is called Adoma.

**Sonacotral: “the Algerian War in Concrete” (1956–1962)** Post-WWII labour immigration coincided with a severe housing shortage in French cities and towns. This shortage was due to three principal factors: war damage, substantial rural-urban migration, and insufficient production of new dwellings. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, housing was not a priority for the French government as its focus was rebuilding France’s industrial infrastructure and economic base (Power 1993). With not enough habitable dwellings for the French-born population, it is no surprise that immigrant workers could not access the housing market. Instead, foreigners (and many French citizens too) had to get by as best they could, in the form of self-constructed shantytowns (*bidonvilles*) springing up on disused ground, often near industrial sites on the edge of the major conurbations – Paris, Lyon and Marseille. The poor hygiene conditions found in the shantytowns constituted a major public health risk, as an internal government memo from 1948 remarks: “the situation of the North Africans (...) is quite alarming (...) Many of them are tainted

<sup>4</sup>I am referring here to Sayad (1977) *Les trois “âges” de l’émigration algérienne en France. Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 15(1), 59–79.



with ‘infectious illnesses’ and the absence of hygiene as well as their cramming together in cramped spaces, multiplies the dangers of contamination” (cited in Atouf 2002: 63; author’s translation). However, the *bidonvilles* were not officially acknowledged or reported in the press until the mid-1950s (Bernardot 1997; Hmed 2006). At that time the uppermost estimates put the total population in the shantytowns at 25,000 (Bernardot 1997). Contemporary scholars, however, put the true figure between 200,000 and 300,000 people (Power 1993; Lallaoui 1993: 44–5; in Bernardot 1997). Atouf (2002) cites sources which estimate that one third of all North Africans in France were living in slums or shantytowns as of 1953.

The housing crisis became a major preoccupation of the French government and the press somewhat later, in the mid-1950s, as my research at the Sciences-Po Press Archive underlined. A 1958 article in the newspaper *La Croix* is not unrepresentative of the moral panic which slum housing provoked:

In the matter of housing, [France] presents the undeniable characteristics of a pre-revolutionary state. There exists now, in this country, the seeds of a revolt, sown and nurtured in the inhuman constraints of the slums. (...) This growing number of people in sub-standard housing, recruited from younger and younger classes who are less and less resigned, constitutes a stick of dynamite which only needs a spark to be set off. (Boissonnat 1958; author’s translation).

One such potential spark was the insurrection in Algeria. Indeed, the Algerian War (1954–1962) was decisive in the genesis of the migrant worker hostels. The shantytowns were widely believed to provide substantial funds for the Algerian independence movement, spearheaded by the FLN (*Front de libération nationale*) (Boutaleb 2000; Petauton 2007; Viet 1999). The minutes of a government meeting in January 1956 give an inkling into the mindset of the public powers, conflating security concerns in Algeria with the ‘problem’ of housing North African workers in metropolitan France:

As regards the [housing] needs of the 300,000 North Africans, working or otherwise, in this country, the required effort remains considerable and yet peace in North Africa will perhaps depend on the solution which Metropolitan France will be able to find to the problem of housing for Algerian workers (Conseil économique 1956: 57; author’s translation).

The ministries of Interior, on the one hand, and Work and Social Security, on the other, clashed over what this housing solution should be: the security rationale of the former prevailed (Bernardot 1997; Viet 1998). By directing the shantytown dwellers to a different type of accommodation, the French authorities believed they would be better able to fight against the “FLN contamination”<sup>5</sup> in these marginal spaces where the forces of law and order feared to tread. Given the security risk posed by this population, ministers were persuaded that whatever the type of housing chosen to replace the shantytowns, it would have to incorporate a surveillance function.

Indeed, all historians of the hostels are unanimous on this point: its aims were to “group together the Algerians, to count and register them, and to put them under

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<sup>5</sup>This phrase appears in the statutes of the *Maison de l’Afrique du Nord* housing association in Lyons, founded in 1952 and considered to be the blueprint for Sonacotral. See Hmed 2006: 90.



surveillance in order to cut the artery which furnished the FLN with money" (Boutaleb 2000: 151; author's translation). Marc Bernardot describes the hostels memorably as "the Algerian War in concrete" (Bernardot 2001: 162; author's translation). What the Ministry of the Interior feared above all was the appearance of a second front to this rebellion composed of Algerian workers in Metropolitan France, starting in the numerous and hard-to-police *bidonvilles*. Given the war in Algeria, the authorities decided that the colonial population working in France should be kept away from the town centres, and that a policy of strict social and political control, amounting to a carceral control (Petauton 2007; Viet 1999), should be instituted for them.

**Sonacotra: Provisional Housing for Provisional Workers? (1963–1992)** The Algerian War came to an end in 1962. The following year Sonacotral underwent a change of name, becoming Sonacotra. This change signified the company's reorientation from housing Algerian workers only towards its new mission to provide housing for all migrant workers.<sup>6</sup> In this second period, the rationale behind the state's continued tutelage of the company shifted from the security logic of surveillance to a labour market logic. In the early 1960s France found itself in the middle of a three-decade long economic boom, a period which would come to be known as *Les trente glorieuses*. To maintain economic growth, the country relied on a large influx of cheap, foreign and low-skilled labour to man the production lines in its factories and the building sites of its public infrastructure projects. At the same time, the French authorities wished to benefit from this influx of flexible low-cost labour without having to pay the indirect costs associated with it, namely the housing, schooling and healthcare costs of hosting the migrant workers' dependent family members. Employers also favoured hiring single foreign workers as such workers could be made redundant more easily than local employees, the latter having both economic and social ties to their locality and therefore more inclined to vehemently oppose mass redundancies. Thus, as Marc Bernardot argues, the hostels functioned as the housing side of a broader "labour force policy which had as its objective the limitation of the durable installation and family reunification of [migrant] workers" (Bernardot 1997: 12; author's translation). Similarly, Mireille Ginesy-Galano writes that one of the primary purposes of the hostels policy was to "prevent [migrant workers] taking root, that is to say, prevent their installation in France with their families" (Ginesy-Galano 1984: 282; author's translation). By keeping the rents as low as possible, the initiators of the hostel policy aimed to encourage the men to remain geographically single and send as much money as possible homewards, thus benefiting their families more than would have been the case had the latter come to live in France, where the cost of living was more expensive (Viet 1999).

More broadly, Abdelmalek Sayad argues that what dictated the approach of the public authorities above all was the notion of migrants as temporary workers *par*

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<sup>6</sup>Sonacotra stands for *Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs* (National Housing Construction Company for Workers).

*excellence*, with only their labour to offer, “all their other properties being only ever impedimenta to be treated at the least cost” (Sayad 2006: 129; author’s translation). This goes especially for the type of accommodation accorded these labourers, the migrant worker hostel, which Sayad describes as “provisional lodging... for a provisional resident, as this is how the immigrant is always imagined” (Sayad 2006: 82). This short-term vision materialised in the very fabric of the dwellings, described by Ginesy-Galano variously as “sub-housing” or “travesties of housing” (*simulacres de logement*) (1984: 1, 280). The design on which the first Sonacotra hostels were based is known as the F6 model: family apartments of five bedrooms plus a kitchen/dining area (hence F6) were reconfigured into living quarters for ten men. This was done by dividing each bedroom in half with a light plasterboard partition, creating in total ten tiny rooms of approximately 4.5 square metres each.<sup>7</sup> As late as 1999, 40% of accommodation in the hostel sector was formed either of individual rooms of 4.5 square metres or shared dormitories (Bernardot 2008: 259). More widespread was the larger F1/2 model which also used light partitions to divide rooms, resulting in housing units of 7.5 square metres. However this is still significantly smaller than the minimum standard of 9 square metres which was legally required in other social housing of the time.

The material inadequacies of the accommodation had considerable negative impacts on the wellbeing of hostel residents. Indeed the attention of psychiatrists was quickly alerted to the effects on residents of the cramped living quarters (Ben Jelloun 1977). The flimsiness of the room partitions manifested itself in a lack of sound-proofing and privacy which was a major nuisance according to surveys of residents (Ginesy-Galano 1984). A further denial of privacy consisted in the very strict regulations regarding good order and morality which were imposed on residents (Viet 1999). For example, hostel staff were entitled to enter residents’ rooms at any time of the day or night, without prior permission, in order to suppress all manner of supposed ills, including political activity, gambling, and overnight stays of non-residents (especially females). Guilty parties were liable to summary expulsion. To ensure the application of these diktats required particular skills on the part of the staff. In the 1960s and 1970s, Sonacotra exhibited a very clear preference for former military men to fill the role of hostel director, particularly those who had taken charge of North African recruits during colonial campaigns (Sayad 2006). These ex-soldiers were able to apply their “sense of command, knowledge of the ‘morals’ and ‘psychology’ of the residents [and] knowledge of Arabic” to a new institutional setting (ibid: 128).

The objectively poor living conditions and infringements on private life described above were at the heart of the contestation which shook Sonacotra to its core during the 1970s: the ‘rent strike’ of 1973–1981. This period was a time of wider industrial unrest in which migrant workers were strongly implicated and, as the longest-running political mobilisation of foreigners in France, the Sonacotra rent strike has become emblematic of the era (Bernardot 2008; Peace 2015; Pitti 2008). Beginning

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<sup>7</sup>The assumption of the authorities was that the hostels would quickly be convertible back to (more spacious) social housing for French families (Gallou and Rozenkier 2006: 64).

in 1973 at two hostels in Bobigny near Paris, residents began withholding payment of their rent in protest over three issues: the miniscule rooms, the oppressive interior regulations, and the elevated rents (Pitti 2008). The revolt quickly spread throughout the Paris region, eastern France, and to a lesser extent around Lyon and Marseille (Bernardot 2008; Pitti 2008). At its height in 1978, 30,000 strikers had suspended payment of their rent across 130 hostels (Hmed 2007). Despite its amplitude, however, the rent strike met with mixed success: a key demand of the strikers – for improved legal status as tenants, not residents – was never conceded by the authorities (Hmed 2007; Pitti 2008).<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, other important advances were secured, such as improved representation through the creation of residents' committees and the extension of *the aide personnalisée au logement* (APL), a social security housing benefit, to those living in hostels. Indeed, this latter measure has had the important long-term consequence of residentially fixing in the hostels a significant cohort of migrant workers whose economic prospects suffered in the 1980s, due to industrial crisis and unemployment. In effect the hostels became the only accommodation which these men could afford, since their incomes were not sufficient to accede to more spacious social housing and reunify their families (Bernardot 2008). Fast forward 20 or 30 years and it is this same cohort which now corresponds in large part to the population of over-60s found in the hostels. The consequence, as encapsulated in this book's title, is that the hostels have become in many cases de facto immigrant-only 'retirement homes'. Against a contemporary public discourse which frequently portrays the older hostel residents as passive victims of social and territorial exclusion in France, it is therefore important to acknowledge the legacy of the rent strike: not only as the precursor of the ageing clientele which now populates the hostels, but also as a reminder that these elders have demonstrated a strong sense of agency and activism in the past.

**Cosmetic Adaptations and Rebranding as Adoma (1992–2012)** In the second half of the 1980s Sonacotra's management sought to reduce its dependence on diminishing public funds and to counter its negative 'migrants-only' public image. It did so by diversifying its housing offer to new and financially better-off clienteles such as students and professionals on secondment (Bernardot 2008). From 1992, unimpressed by the results of this deviation, the various state institutions which held large stakes in the company acted to bring Sonacotra back to its original vocation as an instrument of social housing policy firmly under the state's supervision. However, the company's reboot heralded a break with the past in one key respect, namely that it was no longer just migrants who were to be the target clientele of Sonacotra, but all those in a precarious situation facing difficulties in acceding to ordinary social housing – young workers on short-term contracts, single mothers, homeless families, recovering drug addicts, and so on (Lévy-Vroelant 2007; Ridez et al. 2001).

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the resolution of the strike at local levels was partly achieved by installing prayer rooms in hostels, as religion was viewed as a calming factor by the management. By the early 1990s, Sonacotra was the number one provider of Muslim places of worship in France, with more than 200 hostels disposing of a prayer room (Bernardot 2008).

A key element of this more generalised fight against exclusion in housing was the transformation of the migrant worker hostels into a new and expanded social housing category, the *résidence sociale*. This new statutory mechanism was intended to impel structural renovations to the many hostels which had fallen into disrepair, as well as to encourage more pro-active involvement of local municipalities in the attribution of places in this type of accommodation. Nonetheless, the programme to renovate France's 700-odd *foyers* is far from completion and considerably behind schedule, with the initial five-year programme begun in 1997 having been extended twice, firstly in 2001 and then again for the period 2007–2013 (Union d'Economie Sociale pour le Logement 2007). As of 2012, only 320 of the 680 hostels originally identified in the 1997 programme had been transformed into *résidences sociales* (258 following renovations and 62 without undergoing renovation) (Bachelay 2013: 86).

Indeed, Bernardot argues that the supposed 'transformation' of the migrant worker hostels is in fact largely a cosmetic change designed to "modify the discourse on the population housed in the hostels" (Bernardot 2008: 265; author's translation). Arguably since the rent strike, the company and its stakeholders in government have sought to break the link in the public imagination between Sonacotra and state-sanctioned labour immigration, which has become an increasingly toxic topic in French politics, as the rise of the far-right *Front National* party attests. As one hostel company employee put it to me, "The people who are anti-immigration don't like us because we provide housing for immigrants; the people who are pro-immigration don't like us because they say we lock immigrants up." Outwardly reorienting itself to the new publics described above is one means of decoupling the company from this negative 'migrants-only' image. A second means, again purely cosmetic, was the rebranding exercise which management undertook in 2007, when Sonacotra became Adoma. In effect, with these sleights of hand, the company has undertaken a double decoupling, through its new corporate identity and its emphasis on a new clientele which in numerical terms is insignificant compared to the resident population of ageing former guestworkers. Henceforth in this book the company will be referred to as Sonacotra-Adoma.<sup>9</sup>

For Marc Bernardot (whose publications on Sonacotra-Adoma I consider to be the reference works), these cosmetic changes are consistent with the company's "unofficial mission of 'invisibilisation' for those migrants who are too 'conspicuous'" (Bernardot 2008: 263; author's translation). While other groups of migrants have been subject to 'invisibilisation' at different times,<sup>10</sup> contemporary evidence indicates that the company's older foreign clientele is increasingly a target here. The negative press coverage on ageing in the hostels which was cited in Chap. 1, beginning in the late 1990s, has prompted Sonacotra-Adoma to effectively 'air-brush' older residents from all outward-facing communications and marketing. The com-

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<sup>9</sup>In a similar move, Aftam, the second largest hostel company, changed its name in 2012 to Coallia. Henceforth in the book it is referred to as Aftam-Coallia.

<sup>10</sup>See Bernardot (2008: 262–263) for a discussion of 'invisibilisation' in the context of Malian families who were rehoused by Sonacotra-Adoma in 1990.

pany's 2015 Annual Report is instructive in this regard: of the 24 images of people featured in this 20-page document, just one is identifiable as an ageing resident (Adoma 2016). Yet residents over 60 make up around half the clientele in the *foyers* and *résidences sociales* and they arguably constitute a disproportionate outlay of resources for Sonacotra-Adoma given their age and state of health. Nonetheless, much more visible in this document are the “new missions” (ibid: 4–5) and “new face” (ibid: 8–9) of the company: young adults, both male and female, at the threshold of independence thanks to the dedicated support of the company's staff, who are pictured explaining administrative tasks. Also prominent are shots of children in family settings, alluding to the company's significant diversification into housing for asylum-seeking families since the early 2000s.<sup>11</sup>

In concluding this section, I wish to argue that Bernardot's contemporary insight about ‘invisibilising’ conspicuous foreigners also applies to the previous two ‘ages’ discussed above. In the initial phase – the Sonacotral era – the mission bestowed upon the company by its stakeholders in government was of critical importance given the Algerian war: to efface the insanitary shanty towns at the fringes of France's great cities, and to rehouse the most suspect elements of this population (i.e. single young Algerian men) in segregated accommodation far from the eyes of the native French. Similarly, during the second age of the hostels, when the priority of governmental stakeholders had shifted to maximising the potential for economic growth, Sonacotra became a tool by which France benefited from cheap flexible foreign labour without having to pay the indirect costs associated with it, namely the housing, schooling and healthcare costs attributable to their dependent family members. Thus the hostels served to ‘invisibilise’ the migrant workers' wives and children, by incentivising them to remain in the countries of origin.

Amongst a significant cohort of residents, this labour market-cum-border control strategy has been particularly effective, with the result that these men have lived apart from their families for the duration of their working lives. At retirement, as was intimated in Chap. 1, they tend not to return definitively to their families in places of origin, but instead prefer to constantly circulate back-and-forth between their hostels in France and their families in North and West Africa. As noted, much of the literature on the hostels has concentrated – and rightly so – on the alarming situation facing older residents in terms of ill-health, isolation and poverty. What has been far less evident is any attempt to develop explanatory or theoretical approaches. Indeed, this lack of engagement with theory is a wider feature of literature at the intersection of ageing and migration, as Sandra Torres and Ute Karl argue (Torres and Karl 2016). Yet I would argue that the hostels are rather fertile ground for generating new insights in migration theory. On the basis of both family localisation theory and neo-classical economics, one would expect the retired hostel residents to be the most likely candidates for return. That the men do not return definitively calls these theories into question.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2015, Sonacotra-Adoma disposed of more than 13,000 places in its 169 reception centres for asylum-seekers, constituting a quarter of France's reception capacity and making Sonacotra-Adoma the number one operator of such accommodation (Adoma 2016).

What then can account for the paradox? In the next section I proceed to identify four bodies of theory which could potentially be of use in accounting for the puzzle of the men's preference for the *va-et-vient* over definitive return. These four explanatory frames are the new economics of labour migration (Stark 1991); structuralism (Cerese 1974; Gmelch 1980)<sup>12</sup>; transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999); and social systems theory (Bommes 2012; Boswell and Ciobanu 2009).

### 2.3 Theories of Migration and Return

In Chap. 1 I noted the importance of remittances for hostel residents and their families. Viewing migration as a strategy to insure against risks to household income, the 'new economics of labour migration' approach is far better able to explain the significance of remittances than the neo-classical approach with its assumption of utility-maximising individuals. A second factor is the ability to re-integrate and gain acceptance by the home community after a long absence: the structuralist literature is useful here. Improved (and cheaper) communications and transport is a further factor of note: a burgeoning literature on 'transnationalism' has emerged in the last 20 years grounded largely in these explanatory variables. Finally, I underlined the worrying situation facing many hostel residents in terms of ill-health and poverty, and the importance of accessing healthcare and social security benefits: social systems theory provides an innovative framework for theorising such factors.

For each of these four theoretical models, the relevant explanatory variables are identified below and then applied to return at retirement, before concluding with an assessment of overall strengths and weaknesses.

**The New Economics of Labour Migration** In Chap. 1, the neo-classical economics approach to return migration was acknowledged as the principle alternative to theories prioritising family localisation and group ties. The neo-classical approach is commendable for its theoretical neatness and predictive potential regarding who migrates and under what circumstances. Yet often these predictions do not match the empirical evidence, most notably when people's migration behaviour does not tally with favourable wage differentials or purchasing power considerations. A further criticism is that in the neo-classical approach, to migrate is only ever an individual decision, a perspective which isolates migrants from their social context. Neo-classical accounts also find it difficult to account for the widespread practice of remittance sending. These latter two points can be more fruitfully unpacked using the perspective known as the new economics of labour migration (NELM).

In contrast to the neo-classical focus on the utility-maximising individual, the NELM approach places remittances and the "utility-maximizing family" (Stark

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<sup>12</sup>'Structuralism' is not a term which Cerese or Gmelch themselves used. Instead, I have been guided in this choice of terminology by Cassarino (2004), who uses this term to categorise their contributions in his typology of return migration theories.



1991: 208) at the centre of analysis. Oded Stark argues that migration must be viewed as a strategy for insuring against risk to household income, with the family, rather than the individual, as the decision-making unit. Stark's analysis is built on three premises which challenged the previously dominant neo-classical 'expected income' approach: namely that "there is more to labor migration" than (i) individual utility-maximising behaviour, or (ii) wage differentials, and furthermore (iii) migration is a response to imperfectly functioning credit and insurance markets (Stark 1991: 3–4). Summarising the new economics of labour migration, Stark writes:

The underlying idea is that for the household as a whole it may be a ... superior strategy to have members migrate elsewhere, either as a means of risk sharing or as an investment in access to higher earnings streams. Remittances may then be seen as a device for redistributing gains, with relative shares determined in an implicit arrangement struck between the migrant and the remaining family. The migrant adheres to the contractual arrangement so long as it in his or her interest to do so. This interest may be either altruistic or more self-seeking, such as concern for inheritance or the right to return home ultimately in dignity (Stark 1991: 236-7).

Regarding this last point on returning home, the NELM principle of household risk-sharing means that the returning migrant can count on reciprocal support from the household in the place of origin at the end of working life when income drops. Return is thus the logical final step of the migration project. Unlike in certain versions of neo-classical theory, where return is interpreted as the *failure* of the migration project (see Cassarino 2004 for discussion), in NELM return is the final phase of a *successful* migration project.<sup>13</sup> "Rather than being a mistake, return migration represents the final stage of a pre-established plan" (Constant and Massey 2002: 11). Adopting the NELM approach, Amelie Constant and Douglas Massey (2002) show that remitting regularly and having a spouse in the home country are strongly correlated to retirement return. Likewise, for Russell King, remittances are "an expression of the commitment to the home area and an eventual desire to return" (King 1986: 23).

In summary, NELM significantly advances our understanding of the social context in which migration takes place, most notably in the realm of remittances as household insurance. The individualistic utility-maximising neo-classical approach tends to see remittances as irrational, and can only explain this phenomenon through recourse to the thorny concept of altruism. However, two criticisms have been levelled at NELM: firstly, that motivations to migrate and return are purely economic, with returnees perceived purely in terms of monetary value back home – as "foreign-income bearers" or "financial intermediaries" (Cassarino 2004: 257). Secondly, as with neo-classical approaches, the NELM perspective largely ignores the setting to which migrants return, with return being conditional on economic success or failure in host countries. Although NELM contends that the left behind household is a key

<sup>13</sup> While the question of whether return is the product of a successful or failed migration has been a key debate among scholars in the past (Cerase 1974; Gmelch 1980), I do not find this dichotomy particularly useful, since it reduces the issue to a blunt economic calculation, ignoring social and political factors. As King (1986) points out, what counts as success or failure is highly context-dependent.

referent in return decision-making, NELM is silent on broader social structures in the place of origin. Neo-classical and NELM theories therefore underestimate the issue of re-integration in the ‘home’ community, an oversight which is addressed by the structuralist approach.

**Structuralism** In the structuralist perspective on return migration, the decision to return is not solely a utility-maximising calculation, be it at the individual level or household level. One must additionally take into account social, institutional, and contextual factors in the place to which migrants are planning to return. These factors are summarised by Francesco Cerase as “vested interests and traditional ways of thinking”, and include political norms and institutions; economic structures (dominant sectors and modes of production, as well as the interests of the owners of the means of production); and finally the normative values structuring social relations in a given context (Cerase 1974: 258). The latter theme has been theorised by various scholars taking what has been labelled the ‘cultural embeddedness’ approach (for a discussion, see Boswell and Ciobanu 2009). Foremost among them are William Kandel and Douglas Massey (2002), who speak of a ‘culture of migration’ when cross-border mobility becomes so entrenched in a community’s collective consciousness that it becomes normative. Among countless other phenomena associated with migration, such a culture is likely to generate norms concerning the decision to return. To give one example from Byron and Condon’s work with retired Nevis Islanders in the UK, some find return difficult because it is “important to demonstrate material evidence of ‘bettering oneself’ (...) Return may (...) be prevented by the fear of appearing inadequate. After so many years away, migrants are expected to be wealthy” (Byron and Condon 1996: 99–100).

Structuralism is a perspective emerging from studies in sociology and anthropology, with Cerase’s research on the return of Italians from the United States being a pioneering example. Cerase (1974) posited four motivations or types of return: returns of failure; returns of conservatism; returns of innovation; and returns of retirement. Regarding the latter, the ‘detachment’ of retired emigrants stems from the fact that the individuals in this category tend not to have raised a family in the host society and therefore have “no one to whom they can bequeath the results of their efforts and aspirations. Advancing age and other dissatisfactions in the new society may cause real suffering, which can be relieved only by a return home” (Cerase 1974: 251). In Cerase’s reading, those in the retirement return category, since they reinforce rather than challenge local political and economic structures, find it relatively easy to re-adapt to life in the community of origin. Returnees nevertheless may have to re-adapt their behaviour to the normative expectations of the family and the home society. In Dumon’s words, “the returnee can be defined as the person who, in order to be reaccepted, has to readapt to the changed cultural and behavioural patterns of his community of origin” (Dumon 1986:122). In an echo of Cerase’s ‘returns of innovation’, Ken Sun describes the attempts of ageing Taiwanese returnees to contribute to Taiwan through their professional knowledge and networks gained while abroad. Nonetheless, they face significant structural constraints in their attempts to do so (Sun 2016).



While the structural perspective is invaluable in shedding light on the process of re-integration which is usually ignored in the neo-classical and NELM theories due to the prioritisation of host country economic outcomes, two criticisms can be levelled at the structuralist literature. First of all, such accounts can be critiqued for arguing that the process of return is mediated by structural conditions *only* in the home community, ignoring structural conditions in host countries. Secondly, the principal reason for the difficulties encountered following return in structuralist accounts is that homeland contextual and structural factors can only be fully evaluated once returned migrants have re-installed themselves. They are thus “ill-prepared” for their return, as they have based their decision on “incomplete information” (Gmelch 1980:143). The implication is that migrants do not have reliable information from home because they find it difficult to maintain contact with their places of origin. This latter point is challenged most directly by those working from a transnationalist perspective.

**Transnationalism** The term ‘transnationalism’ as it refers to migration describes ties that migrants in host states maintain with their homelands and with co-ethnics/co-nationals in other locations outside the homeland. Such ties can be material or symbolic, and can take economic, political or socio-cultural forms. The transnationalism literature sets out a range of necessary empirical conditions for the emergence and importantly the retention over time of cross-border ties. These conditions include ease of mobility and ease of communications, as well as the social and political contexts of sending and receiving countries (Faist 2004; Itzigsohn 2000; Kivisto 2001; Portes et al. 1999). While transnationalism is generally deployed to describe migrants’ ties with people and places back home rather than migratory movement *per se*, clearly such movement is a necessary pre-condition for these ties: “It is the ability to return and reemigrate – to circulate, in other words – that underpins transnationalism” (Black and King 2004: 80).

Thus, the ability to circulate becomes a valuable and coveted resource for transnational actors. Regular participation in transnational activities such as home visits, remittance sending, and keeping abreast of economic and political developments in the place of origin means that emigrants are better prepared for return. An important potential resource is the ability to exploit information and communication technologies (ICTs), which can facilitate the exchange of information from home. While generally such communicative tools are depicted as the preserve of younger, technologically-savvy generations, there is some evidence that ICTs are also “manifestly changing older people’s lives, not least those of relatively low income and from ethnic and cultural minorities” (Warnes 2009: 359–60).

The most obvious contribution of the transnational literature regarding return is that it is able to move beyond narrow formulations that restrict the decision to a binary choice between definitive settlement and definitive return. Rather, the transnational approach shows that return no longer needs to be viewed as the end of the migration project. Such an approach is much better able to comprehend the back-and-forth mobility of the hostel residents.

Transnationalism is not without its critics however (Sheffer 2006; Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). Pertinent to the question guiding this book, one critique concerns the determinism that transnational accounts attribute to inherited membership in

ethnic and kinship groups, with relationships between migrants and non-migrant kin being “written in stone” rather than being dynamic over time (Lacroix 2013: 1021; see also Sinatti and Horst 2015). As Cassarino (2004: 265) notes: “[T]he transnational approach to return migration seems to encapsulate [migrants’] initiatives and projects at home in a fundamental set of mutual obligations, opportunities and expectations stemming from common ethnicity (i.e., the diaspora) and kinship (i.e., the family, the household).” Relying on mutual kin obligations in this way, the transnationalism literature cannot explain why some people are heavily invested in cross-border activities while other compatriots are not. In summary, the transnational approach has value in explaining *how* people maintain cross-border social ties (transport, communications technology), but it cannot fully explain *why* they do so.

**Social Systems** By contrast, an emerging approach in migration and integration studies<sup>14</sup> employs a theory of society in which there is no longer a place for pre-scribed membership in kinship and ethnic groups. Instead of society being constituted by large collectivities of individuals – be that in kin groups, tribes, ethnic groups or nations – Niklas Luhmann proposed an alternative theory whereby society is constituted by individuals’ communication in different social realms such as the economy, law, politics, religion, the family, education, and healthcare (Luhmann 1995). Access to such systems operates according to fundamentally inclusive criteria.

In his theory of social systems, Luhmann locates a fundamental break between pre-modern and modern societies beginning in Europe during the course of the eighteenth century. Up until this time, society had been structured on the basis of group membership – either in ‘segmented’ clans or tribes, or in hierarchically ‘stratified’ classes or ranks (Luhmann 1977). With the fundamentally egalitarian restructuring of society unleashed by the French Revolution, membership in groups on the basis of ascribed or inherited characteristics became less and less important. Arguably, even membership in the nation-state has in recent decades lost some of those qualities which led Rogers Brubaker to describe citizenship as the ‘master status’ (Brubaker 1994; Soysal 1994). The organisations of society – with the exception of the national welfare state in the political system – are increasingly unconcerned by demarcations of territory and national belonging (Bommes and Geddes 2000; Halfmann 2000). This is seen for example in the emergence of a global financial system, a corpus of international law, cross-border scientific cooperation, ‘health tourism’, and supra-national political institutions.

At first glance the foregoing may seem somewhat opaque, but Luhmann’s theory of functional differentiation is in fact extremely pertinent both to the question under consideration here, and to migration studies more broadly, for two reasons. Firstly, the theory provides a radical new framework for viewing migration by proposing that international mobility should not be understood as an exceptional act (Goldin et al. 2011), but rather as a perfectly expectable response to the inclusive and deterritorialised functioning of all social systems barring the political system. As Boswell

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Bommes 2000, 2012; Boswell and Ciobanu 2009; Halfmann 2000.

and D'Amato note, "the systems most important to an individual's well-being tend to be blind to their national or ethnic origin" (Boswell and D'Amato 2012: 12). Secondly, the far-reaching implications of systems theoretic thinking become clear when one revisits the earlier discussion about integration and 'implantation' in the reference groups of family, class, and nation. If society is no longer structured along these lines, to theorise immigrant integration in this way is problematic (Bommes 2012). Rather than integrating into such groups, a social systems response to the question 'integration to what?' replies that immigrants integrate into social systems, or rather the *organisations* of the various relevant systems.

In principle, access to these communicative systems is open to every social agent, because the differentiation of society into functions (such as politics and law) rather than social strata (such as ranks or castes) no longer permits discrimination on the basis of inherited or ascribed characteristics. In practice, inclusion in function systems cannot be assumed but instead is processed through organisations such as courts, hospitals, firms, schools, and so on, which can only discriminate on the basis of whether function-specific "rules of access" are satisfied or not (Luhmann 1990: 35). The effect of such rules is to ask, for example, whether a candidate for a job has a certain qualification, whether one is ill or not, or whether one's legal status is recognised under such and such a jurisdiction. In principle, therefore, modern society is much more inclusive and neutral than its pre-modern precursors. Nonetheless, in practice the likelihood of failing to achieve inclusion in a given system can sometimes be quite high (e.g., unemployment). Thus the organisations of the welfare state in the political system have evolved in the last century or so to mediate the exclusionary tendencies of modern society and to equip citizens with the characteristics required to fulfil social participation, via social programmes in education, health, labour markets, and so on.

This is not to say that the effects of welfare state institutions are not discriminatory in their outcomes. Indeed, these outcomes may *appear* discriminatory precisely on the basis of inherited attributes such as race, religion, or other axes of prejudice, as the position of immigrants amongst the most disadvantaged groups in many European countries would indicate (in terms of income, educational attainment, access to housing and so forth). However, Michael Bommes argues that these outcomes are not primarily grounded in nativist preferences but instead are a consequence of migrants diverging from the 'standard' assumed lifecourse institutionalised by the welfare state. Welfare state programmes "accompany individuals from early childhood onwards, through to pension age and death" (Bommes 2008: 144). Given that most people tend not to emigrate until adulthood and thereby miss out on the biographical structuring institutionalised by the welfare state in the formative years (healthcare, education, contributions to social security and pension funds), they face higher "risk of exclusion [e.g., from the labour market] and reduced access to welfare provision" (Bommes 2008: 148). In such a conception of society, it is one's "biographically accumulated" markers of inclusion which are important (Bommes 2000: 91), not inherited attributes. Hence the new significance in this day and age for proofs of identity and life history such as passports, identity cards, CVs, medical records, national insurance numbers, and social security files.

For migrants at retirement, Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation is important insofar as an individual's requirements for achieving social inclusion have a bearing on the decision to settle or return at retirement. In this, a lifecourse perspective is imperative since the relevant systems change during the lifecourse. The critical juncture of retirement means that migration is no longer predicated on employment (i.e., inclusion in economic organisations). What becomes much more important at this stage in the life course is inclusion in the organisations of the healthcare and welfare systems, in order to access goods such as pensioners' allowances and medical treatment. These points will be expanded in Chaps. 3 and 4 respectively. Before then, however, a brief discussion of research methods is warranted.

## 2.4 Methods at the Margins

In terms of research methods, the above review of theories indicated a direction of travel at the outset of this study. Specifically it indicated that neo-classical economics and family localisation theories do not have purchase on the question of the hostel residents' puzzling late-in-life mobility. It was therefore clear to me that to obtain a satisfactory answer would require something other than a quantitative analysis of income differentials, purchasing power, or family structure and location data. Rather, the complexity and sensitivity of the alternative explanatory factors outlined above – family remittance strategies, norms underpinning social relations in the places migrants return to, changing practices of long-distance communication, or healthcare needs, to name only some of the most prominent – suggested that a more qualitative approach was in order. In my research with hostel residents, biographical methods and ethnography became privileged sources of data. When seeking information from the organisations which are called upon to intervene in hostels, such as care providers, social security agencies and NGOs, semi-structured interviewing techniques were more fruitful. To conclude this chapter I now present the design of the study and the rationale for combining these different methods.

**The Lived Life and the Told Story** Biographical research encompasses a broad range of methods and materials which in one way or another make individual lives legible, literally 'life writing'. These include oral histories, diaries, letters, photographs and autobiographical narratives (Denzin 1989). At its core is "the collection and interpretation of 'personal' or 'human' documents" (Roberts 2002: 1). The popularity of biographical research has risen in recent decades, to the point of constituting a 'biographical turn' (Chamberlayne et al. 2000). This reflects both a disenchantment with positivist quantitative social science and a normative injunction to give voice to people's experiences, especially those who have been "hidden from history", or "spoken for" by others (Wengraf 2000: 140). In addition to these normative and epistemological considerations, a biographical approach is particularly suited to the terrain of inquiry studied here.

In this book, retirement is perceived as a significant juncture or turning point in the lifecourse. Indeed for some of my respondents it was experienced negatively as an unsettling *rupture* heralding loss and decline. Biographical methods, as Brian Roberts writes, are useful in such contexts by “reveal[ing] how ageing is experienced and how individuals ‘theorize’ about the changes in their lives as they ‘age’” (Roberts 2002: 28). Migration, too, may entail significant ruptures and discontinuities and biographical methods can likewise enable researchers to access and interpret them (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000; Breckner 2002; Schutz 1971). Indeed it is in migration studies that biographical methods were first pioneered and gained prominence (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 119), in particular via the seminal contribution of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. With explicit reference to late-in-life return migration, Warnes and Williams (2006: 1273) note the contributions which a lifecourse focus can make to understanding “not only (...) one or more linked migration events, but also the antecedents and long-term consequences in their temporal, geographical and socio-political contexts.” In his work about displaced people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Stef Jansen shows how people’s perspectives on return differed according to the stage of life they had reached (Jansen 2007).

Given the above, a biographical lifecourse-centred approach appeared to hold significant promise in terms of accessing nuanced perspectives from hostel residents on their preference for late-in-life mobility over definitive return. This initial hunch was confirmed in my piloting work, during which I came to realise the importance for hostel residents of healthcare and welfare entitlements in France. This led me to accord particular importance to the explanatory potential of Luhmann’s social systems theory, as presented in the previous section. In this paradigm, as noted, societal inclusion is strongly predicated upon the career or ‘biography’ which the individual can offer as proof of meeting the expectations of various organisations in society (Luhmann 1990). In such a conception of society, it is one’s “biographically accumulated” markers of inclusion which are important: in other words, an observable record of the individual’s past development over time (Bommes 2000: 91).

My reading led me to experiment with the Biographical Narrative Interview Method, developed by Tom Wengraf. The observable record of an individual’s past corresponds to the ‘lived life’ (Wengraf 2000) or ‘life history’ (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000), namely ‘harder’ and more verifiable facts. The lived life is not necessarily (only) self-narrated but may instead (or in addition) be comprised of documents from various organisations and institutions (Wengraf 2000), for example certificates of education and training, payslips, identity cards and so on. Thus, a person’s life history forms the backdrop to the other central element of biographical narration, the life story interview (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000) or what Wengraf (2000) calls the ‘told story’. This is an open invitation to the participant to ‘tell your own story, in your own way’ (Wengraf 2000). The result is a self-reflective and interpretive narrative, aiming to present a convincing account of “how we became who we are” so as to appear “both consistent *and* contingent. Even if I have gone through many

contradictory phases in my life, the story I can tell presents me as myself’ (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 115, emphasis in original).

My first months visiting hostels were spent in the company of Abdou, from a migrant rights association which provided weekly drop-in administrative advice sessions in several Sonacotra-Adoma hostels in the northern Parisian suburbs. It was during this piloting phase that I first realised the importance of healthcare and welfare entitlements in *timetabling* the older hostel residents’ transnational mobility, as will be elaborated in Chaps. 3 and 4. I mention this point now however in order to introduce a second important distinction: that between *individual* biographies (i.e., a person’s life history and life story) and what I will call *organisational* biographies. The latter are the timeframes, deadlines and eligibility conditions which organisations impose on individuals in society. As Fischer-Rosenthal proposes:

[Biography] is a structure operating in both spheres. (...) Biography is the social structure provided by society, as it institutionalises and organises the many types of timetables one has to go through in a lifetime and it is the individual story *always in the process of being told*, which he or she can and must tell (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 118; emphasis in original).

In order to access these organisational biographies, I analysed a large number of texts, such as social security laws, administrative regulations, court judgements, documentation from hostel companies and care providers, and legal guidance produced by migrant rights associations. During the main period of fieldwork (2008–2009), approximately 50 semi-structured interviews – with representatives from bodies including care providers, embassies and consulates, various government agencies, migrant rights NGOs, politicians, and hostel companies – gave insights into how organisational timetables were implemented in practice. A further round of interviews was conducted in early 2016 following the entry into force of the Aid for Familial and Social Reinsertion (see Sect 8.3). By elucidating individual stories in their institutional context, I hoped to be better able to understand broader social changes and illuminate what Russell King calls:

the double embeddedness of migration; at the individual scale, migration must be embedded in a migrant’s life course (and in some cases of the lifecourse of the family, even across generations); and at the macro scale, the study of migration must be embedded in the societies and social processes of the both the countries/places of origin and of destination (King 2002: 101).

**Ethnography, an Act of Submission to a Total Institution** Doing good biographical research is an exacting craft. This piece of research was my apprenticeship, and suffice it to say that my early attempts were a failure. This was at the time I was accompanying Abdou at his drop-in advice sessions. On these visits I chatted informally with residents waiting to see Abdou and piloted a technique known as the ‘life grid’ (Parry et al. 1999).<sup>15</sup> My aim with this method was to place the important

<sup>15</sup> Essentially, one starts with a grid, with one chronological axis, and the other axis listing the various relevant life domains – family, work, leisure, housing, health, and so on. Where there is uncer-



events in respondents' lives – connected to work, family, health, migration etc. – in a chronological order. In addition to the important details of life history which I hoped it would reveal, the life grid was a means of building rapport with individuals, since it required an element of team-working to reconstruct respondents' timelines.

My hope was that doing life grids would lead naturally enough to longer life story interviews with respondents, but my invitations to “talk about their life in migration” were always met with polite refusal. In my fieldnotes I recorded that respondents “felt this [request] was too vast, not specific enough. They're not going to want to be that open so early on” (Fieldnotes 17 May 2009). In time I began to realise that these refusals to be formally interviewed were in themselves revealing of the wider dilemma the hostel residents faced at retirement, and for that reason I have included some of this rich testimony in the Appendix for those readers who are interested.

Understanding this reticence to participate was also sometimes a question of interpreting silences and pauses, to read between the lines of my conversations with residents. Although return migration does not appear at first view to be a particularly sensitive topic, this is to forget that the vow to return ‘one day’ – and at the latest by retirement – was a collective promise made to thousands of wives and children ‘left behind’ in places of origin. Such expectations of return were also part of collective consciousness in the home and host societies, among policymakers and the general public alike.

Furthermore, as a corollary of the socio-spatial marginalisation blighting the hostels, I encountered deep suspicion among residents towards the Adoma-Sonacotra company, and its supervisory stakeholders in the French state. Such suspicion logically extended to research projects facilitated by the company, such as my own. The hostel residents' attitudes, bordering on a siege mentality, suggested to me that the accommodation itself had an institutionalising effect on those living there. Indeed research on migrant hostels in both France (Ginesy-Galano 1984; Hmed 2006; Sayad 2006) and South Africa (Ramphela 1993) has made a strong case that such forms of accommodation represent a type of ‘totalising institution’ (Goffman 1968). I began to realise that in order to understand and break down the above barriers to participation, I would need to submit myself in some way to these institutional forces. In short, I realised that I would need to move into a hostel and reside there for an extended period of time. This led me to spend 3 months living in a hostel in a north-western suburb of Paris. Figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9 and 1.10 provide a photographic glimpse of life there.

Ethnographic participant observation is a privileged method to study the effects of such institutionalisation when working with ‘marginal’ groups. Indeed, some would argue that ethnography may be more or less obliged when “poverty, lack of infrastructure, illiteracy, or political violence impede [other forms of] research”

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tainty over a sequence of events in one domain, cross-referencing with an event in another domain, for example the birth of a son or daughter, can aid memory for distant events. It is also a flexible tool, allowing respondents to switch to different domains, start, stop or continue at different places, and cross-reference events in different domains (Parry et al. 1999).

(Schatz 2009: 304). Initially then, there was an element of compulsion in my choice to engage in ethnography, following the futility of my efforts at life story interviewing during the pilot stage. However, with time and – more importantly – practice (of ethnography), I came to agree entirely with Erving Goffman’s approach to studying institutionalisation, when he writes -

It [...] is my belief that any group of persons develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject (Goffman 1968: 7).

As noted, the majority of hostel residents are North African and approximately one third hail from Francophone West Africa. Hostels housing predominantly North African populations are found in great number throughout France, but West Africans have tended to congregate in hostels in the Paris region (Bernardot 2006). To include both North and West African respondents in the study, it therefore made practical sense to restrict the terrain of research to Paris and the suburban *départements* which surround it. Furthermore, given the multi-sited character of hostel residents’ lives at retirement, ‘getting close’ to them necessarily entailed ethnographic fieldwork in their places of origin (see also Rodríguez and Egea 2006).<sup>16</sup> In this, I was fortunate and honoured to accompany a few of my respondents on their visits home. This gave me precious insights into family life as a guest in the family home. But my efforts in ‘following the people’, as ethnographer George Marcus (1998) enjoins, did not mean my multi-sited study was confined to two locations, i.e. France and the place of origin. Rather, I was conscious that the times and spaces of transit between home and host countries could be privileged observation points: to study ‘travelling cultures’ requires travelling researchers (Clifford 1992). These voyages brought home to me the gruelling embodied nature of the hostel residents’ trips, with my journeys to both Tiznit in southern Morocco and Dembanané on the Senegal/Mauritania border lasting several days in each direction. Figures 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7 capture moments from these journeys, by various combinations of bus, boat and plane.

In summary, ethnography became a useful (indeed essential) precursory tool to generate the trust and rapport necessary before the more emotionally involved act of life story interviewing could be undertaken. It is doubtful whether I would have been able to generate the necessary trust and rapport to answer my theoretically-driven questions well if I had employed a more conventional methodology such as semi-structured interviewing. By doing rich, descriptive ethnographic groundwork I was able to get to know my fellow hostel residents well and, in time, to be party to the knowledge required to understand the puzzle/dilemma of the preference for the *va-et-vient* over definitive return. In so doing I was also able to generate a much

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<sup>16</sup>It is noteworthy that, barring a study by Jacques Barou (2001), research about hostel residents has been focused exclusively in France, ignoring the home context which is self-evidently important to many residents, and where some spend the larger portion of their time.





Fig. 2.4 In Dakar, preparing for departure to Dembanané



Fig. 2.5 A bus weighed down by family expectations

**Fig. 2.6** Motorway sign (Andalusia, Spain): the Arabic script at the top says 'rest stop'



richer picture of their lives and, I hope, a more convincing account. I leave it for readers to judge.<sup>17</sup>

The pilot work was not only instructive in steering the ethnographic disposition of the study. As noted, it also revealed the importance of healthcare and social welfare entitlements in decisions about residence and mobility. Time and again, I was struck by the fact that hostel residents felt compelled to justify their presence in France. This justification was offered without my prompting it, and often within a few minutes of meeting. Almost invariably, hostel residents would justify their presence in France on the basis of healthcare needs or administrative paperwork. Healthcare of course becomes more important as one ages, and indeed for some of my respondents the body itself constituted a biographical marker of the hard working lives they had endured, as did their medical records and case notes. These biographical forms are discussed in Chaps. 4 and 7. Likewise, administrative records such as passports, tax files and social security dossiers are all biographical artefacts which have a bearing on hostel residents' late-in-life mobility, as I discuss next in Chap. 3.

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<sup>17</sup>For those who are interested to know more about how the research design was implemented in practice, details are to be found in the Appendix.

**Fig. 2.7** The Paris-Tiznit coach, at the Port of Algeciras, Spain



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## Chapter 3

# Your Papers, Please: The Temporal and Territorial Demands of Welfare State Inclusion



*I was struck once when a migrant worker said to me, “But now at retirement age, I have the impression of finding myself again at age 20 when I first came to France. I am as lost at 60 years of age with my retirement in front of me as I was when I arrived at age 20.” Why? Because they have to quit this identity of ‘worker’ – which is an identity made of flesh and bone, an identity made from work with their body – to an identity of ‘papers’. They have to become ‘claimants’, they have to prove their presence in France, they have to prove their entitlement to a pension. So it is no longer based on the notion of work, but on the notion of pensioner, where the body is no longer the working body but the sick body, meaning a loss of autonomy. Thus, it is necessary to construct a new identity of ‘migrant worker’, of new justifications for being here, for being over there, for being between here and there.*

Interview with a union official

Paperwork and other administrative practices have a bearing on this book’s central question in several significant ways. Papers need to be in order to finalise one’s pension arrangements and to fix the date on which payments begin. Valid papers are required to receive healthcare, which is a key consideration in post-retirement residence decisions, as will be elaborated in Chap. 4. Papers are also necessary to prove eligibility for means-tested social security benefits. In all of these paperwork scenarios a key finding emerges, namely that the legal requirements of welfare state inclusion place significant temporal and territorial demands on hostel residents, a process which I label ‘timetabling’. In other words, hostel residents are required to be in certain places at certain times, or for certain durations of time. Saulo Cwerner describes the legal and bureaucratic requirements which migrants face in such situations as ‘heteronomous times’ (Cwerner 2001). “Heteronomous times are to a large degree inescapable, and it is far more difficult to get rid of their grip” (ibid: 21).



These timetabling effects of the welfare state were first introduced in Chap. 2, via the notion of ‘organisational biographies’. In the present chapter I will begin by examining the implications for late-in-life mobility of these temporal and territorial rules of access to the welfare state. Anoeska Gehring has coined the term ‘legal gates’ to describe the “everyday rules and regulations at different local, national, and supranational levels which facilitate or impede human mobility between one jurisdiction and another” (Gehring 2015). Importantly, legal gates may also enforce mobility. I build on this perspective by arguing that while such legal regulations affect all those living in modern welfare states, citizens and non-citizens alike, the ‘non-standard’ lifecourse typical of migrant workers (Bommes 2000) results in demands being issued to them by welfare state institutions which non-migrants are generally not called upon to answer. As will be elaborated, many of these problematic biographical aspects are documented in administrative paperwork, such as pension records showing later entry to the French job market, and inaccurate or conflicting dates recorded on proofs of identity. At other times migrant workers’ biographies are problematic precisely because they are not documented, for example when unscrupulous employers do not declare migrant staff on their payrolls.

Importantly, these non-standard trajectories and documents, although set in motion from birth and continuing into adulthood and employment, only become critical at retirement: prior to this, they do not have a major influence on life chances and outcomes. This gives credence to the argument made earlier that retirement is a critical juncture, heralding a stage of life where papers become more important, and – for migrants – more problematic. Hostel residents are required to undergo a shift whereby *papers* replace work as the basis for their social identity, as the epigraph to this chapter eloquently evoked.

Likewise, retirement also heralds a juncture insofar as it signals an end to the sedentary constraint of participation in the labour market. In this regard, the hostel residents’ back-and-forth trips at retirement are problematic. Together, their suspect papers and transnational mobility rub up against the temporal and territorial logics of the welfare state. As will be discussed in Sect. 3.3, this leads to enforcement from state officials, aimed at controlling the residents’ comings-and-goings between France and countries of origin. Nonetheless, my focus on the state in this chapter is not intended to downplay the importance of less formal sources of social protection for migrants (Faist and Bilecen 2015), and indeed it will be shown that networks of friends and family may be mobilised by hostel residents to counteract and resist the bureaucratic control of their movements. Nor do I wish – in stressing the timetabling effect of the welfare state – to obscure hostel residents’ agency and resourcefulness in accessing ‘assemblages’ of social protection which operate in places of origin and transnationally (Bilecen and Bargłowski 2015; Levitt et al. 2016). Such assemblages may incorporate provision from the state, the market, the third sector and kin/friendship networks. The salience of agency in these latter venues will be elaborated elsewhere in the book – in Chap. 4 on healthcare, in Chap. 5. on family ties and in Chap. 6 on hometown associations.

### 3.1 Timetabled Lives at Retirement

Early on in fieldwork I became aware that the issue of paperwork was of central importance in the older hostel residents' decision-making about late-in-life return. In particular, three empirical manifestations of timetabling were identified as crucial by hostel residents. These are (i) the French old-age pension system; (ii) eligibility conditions of 'regular and effective residence' for social security benefits; and (iii) the annual tax declaration form. I will take each in turn.

State pension systems are one clear example of timetabling. Timetabling logics are manifestly at play insofar as basic state pensions set minimum retirement ages and incentivise people to work longer. In France, the 'general regime'<sup>1</sup> basic state pension is based on the Bismarckian principle of 'pay-as-you-go' contributions from employers and employees (Thompson 2008). It is administered by the national old age insurance fund (*Caisse nationale d'assurance vieillesse*, hereafter CNAV). An individual's annual pension is calculated on the basis of the average 25 best years' salary. Those having contributed to their pension fund for the equivalent duration of 164 trimesters' full time employment, i.e., 41 years, are entitled to an annual pension worth 50% of this average salary calculation. A lower duration of contributions reduces the rate proportionally, with the lowest band being 25%. The youngest age at which one can begin drawing one's pension is 60 years (62 years for those born after 1955): this minimum age limit is waived if the insured person started working in their teens and had a long career, or for those who are physically incapacitated. As an incentive to work longer,<sup>2</sup> whatever the duration of contributions, a person who continues working until the age of 65 (67 for those born after 1955) automatically enjoys the full rate of 50% (CNAV 2016).

While pension regimes often stipulate such temporal conditions, territorial demands (i.e., eligibility based on place of residence) are less-and-less a requirement for drawing a French pension, thanks to numerous bilateral social security agreements operating between France and third countries. Under such agreements, the pension is an exportable asset to which every non-resident pensioner has rights on the same basis as if he or she were residing in France. In addition, pensionable periods of employment in both countries are aggregated.<sup>3</sup> The only condition for

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<sup>1</sup>Note that there are special schemes for miners, farm-workers, civil servants, and those who worked for the state railway company (SNCF). In addition to these 'basic' pension regimes, there is also the complementary pension regime (*retraite complémentaire*), to which it has been obligatory to contribute since 1973. This is managed by one of two organisms: ARRCO if one is an employee in the private sector, and AGIRC if one is employed in a managerial role. Taken together, the basic and complementary regimes amount to a sum which on average is worth approximately 70% of the average salary for blue- and white-collar workers (Thompson 2008).

<sup>2</sup>The employment rate for over 55s in France (38% as of 2009) is amongst the lowest in the EU (Gendron 2011).

<sup>3</sup>Very few of my respondents mentioned pensionable periods of employment in their countries of origin. Old-age state pensions in most African countries continue to be restricted to specific sectors such as civil servants or contracted wage earners in the private sector (Devereux 2013). Prior to emigration my respondents tended to be engaged in subsistence agriculture or the informal economy, and were thus not part of the contracted wage-earning workforce.

foreigners is that they are in possession of a residence permit (of any duration of validity) at the time they ask to start receiving their pension. However, this request can be effected from abroad: one no longer needs to be physically present in France to start drawing one's pension (CNAV 2004: 24).

A second manifestation of timetabling is seen in the eligibility criteria for means-tested social security benefits. These are to be distinguished from 'pay-as-you-go' social security provisions for old-age, maternity and unemployment insofar as the former are not financed through personal social security contributions but from general taxation, hence their 'non-contributory' designation. An important form of social security for older hostel residents is the Solidarity Payment for Older People (*Allocation de solidarité aux personnes âgées*, ASPA), an old-age income benefit colloquially known as the *minimum vieillesse*. Individuals aged 65 and over in receipt of modest pensions are eligible for the *minimum vieillesse*, which tops up one's general regime pension to a minimum old-age income, set at €708.95 per month in 2010 when research for this project was completed.

Receiving non-contributory social security benefits like the *minimum vieillesse* is almost always conditional upon observing minimum periods of residence in the country paying the benefit. Even in the European Union, which has made great efforts to streamline the transferability of welfare entitlements between different member states for its mobile citizens, non-contributory social security benefits fall outside the remit of the transferability legislation (EC Regulation 883/2004). This has very clear timetabling implications at retirement, both for older EU citizens contemplating mobility within the EU (see Gehring 2015) and for third-country nationals who may wish to divide their time between Europe and their countries of origin (see Harrysson et al. 2016). For hostel residents who wish to claim social security benefits, France must remain their 'regular and effective' place of residence. This in part explains the preference for back-and-forth trips (*va-et-vient*) among the elderly hostel residents, so that they can accumulate the required duration of residence in France. Up until 2007 the qualifying period for 'regular and effective' residence varied considerably across the different benefit agencies in France.<sup>4</sup> As a result of these variable interpretations, in the past the benefits agencies:

basically did what they pleased, which is to say that it was enough that the person left for two months and they would say to him "you are no longer resident here, you have transferred your residence outside France so as a result we are no longer going to pay your benefits." Yet it wasn't true: the person had just gone on holiday (Sandrine, legal advisor, migrant rights association).

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<sup>4</sup>According to Article 43 of the General Fiscal Code, 6 months and one day was the definition employed; according to the Family Benefits Fund, (CCH.R.351-1), 8 months' residence was required to be eligible for the APL, and 9 months for the minimum wage (law of 1/12/88 art. 6–8); according to the National Health Insurance Fund, although not based on any text, 6 months' residence was necessary to receive non-contributory benefits (disability allowance, old age income support and so on).

A prime ministerial decree<sup>5</sup> of 2007 standardised some of these disparate practices, stipulating a 6 month minimum residence period for most non-contributory benefits, such as family benefits, health cover and the *minimum vieillesse*. Some migrant rights organisations have given a cautious welcome to this partially standardised definition of residence. However, during my meeting at a Moroccan consulate in France, officials were under no illusion as to what the 2007 decree means for their elderly compatriots in France and the timetabling pressures to which they are subject: “Instead of spending time with their children, back home in the warmth, they are obliged to stay six months [in France] in precarious conditions in order to get very modest sums of money.” Furthermore two exceptions to the residence rule continue to exist: the APL housing benefit, on which many residents depend, requires 8 months’ residence, while disability allowance stipulates 9 months’ residence. These inconsistencies are potentially confusing for hostel residents.

A third manifestation of timetabling relates to a particularity of the French tax system. Every year in May, all people whose principal residence is in France are required to complete and sign their Tax Declaration (*Déclaration des Impôts*). Crucially, the form is only sent to addresses in April and must be returned by the end of May. A new online tax declaration system is presently being instituted, but at the time this research was conducted only postal returns were possible. The requirement to be at one’s domicile<sup>6</sup> in France at that time was therefore an exemplary manifestation of welfare state timetabling. The tax declaration is a *sine qua non* of French administrative documentation since it is used as a proof, not only of residence (i.e., residence for tax purposes), but also of income, and therefore crucial for proving eligibility for means-tested non-contributory benefits. It is entirely unsurprising then that the period March–May was the peak period in terms of hostel occupancy while I was carrying out fieldwork. Many residents mentioned this as a motive for their periodic return trips, and hostel managers too were very aware of the importance of this time of year:

The period when they all come back is when there is the tax declaration to do. They have to be here to do the declaration and sign the papers. Apart from this period then which is March-May, there is no other peak time, it keeps ticking over (Denis, hostel manager).

March–May was also a peak period for the weekly advice service on social and legal rights which Germain, a volunteer for an anti-poverty NGO, held in the hostel where I was resident. A session which I observed in the last week of May was very well-attended, with upwards of 30 men waiting in line to be seen, almost all of them older residents. By contrast, in the following weeks which I observed, very few residents passed by to see Germain and there were no queues to speak of. I asked Germain why this might be, and he answered quite simply that many residents had gone home, after completing their tax declaration.

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<sup>5</sup>Decree n° 2007–354 of 14 March 2007.

<sup>6</sup>Mbodj-Pouye (2016) likewise notes the importance of having an administratively-validated address (i.e. domicile), particularly for younger West African hostel residents attempting to gain residency rights in France.

### 3.2 Migration, the Welfare State, and Non-standard Biographies

Older immigrants are not alone in experiencing the timetabling demands of the welfare state. Temporal and territorial conditions of inclusion apply in principle to all those who live and grow old in European welfare states. However, in the following section I will argue that there are biographical elements in the hostel residents' passage to retirement which do equate with 'systemic' discrimination. As Michael Bommes puts it, those aspects of the life course which for non-migrant national citizens are normally taken as given "can no longer be presupposed" for migrants (Bommes 2000: 95). Rather, migrants' lives often deviate considerably from the standard assumed life course as structured by the welfare state (i.e., education and preparation for employment, followed by prompt entry to the labour market, child rearing, and retirement). Below I will chart some of the principal divergences, many of which are recorded in administrative documents.

**The Time Factor** At retirement, migrants tend to have lower pension incomes than their non-migrant contemporaries. Generally not emigrating until their mid-20s or later, labour migrants of the post-WWII cohort have had shorter careers than their non-migrant co-workers, and consequently at retirement have amassed fewer contributions to pension schemes (Bommes 2000). On average, hostel residents were aged 25.5 years at the time of their first entry to France (Gallou 2005).<sup>7</sup> Migrant workers in France are also statistically more vulnerable to work-related accidents and ill-health (Alidra et al. 2003), leading to enforced absence from work which may likewise diminish their pension contributions.

While Bommes based his analysis on the German welfare system, his point about the generally shorter pension contribution periods which migrants accumulate holds for other countries, at least in Western Europe. Dörr and Faist (1997) show that in France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, "the time factor – duration of contribution to the pension funds – plays an essential role ... [I]n all systems migrants are usually discriminated against because they tend to start contributing to the funds later than natives" (Dörr and Faist 1997: 414; see also Harrysson et al. 2016).<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>7</sup>This is explained in part by the "veritable recruitment campaigns" in places of origin which marked the immigration of the hostel dwellers in the 1960s (see Chap. 4). The recruiters selected young men in the prime of life, who could adapt to hard work immediately. Those in their teens and early 20s, not fully developed physically, were not as attractive to recruiters (Gallou 2005: 121).

<sup>8</sup>In Germany, one's pension is "almost exclusively proportionate to the time period contributions are made and the income level during employment" (Dörr and Faist 1997: 413). In the Netherlands, the temporal requirements are particularly unfavourable since 50 years of continuous residence – not contributions – in the Netherlands between the ages of 15 and 65 is required in order to benefit from a flat-rate pension indexed above the minimum wage levels (Böcker and Balkır 2016; Dörr and Faist 1997). "In principle, this affects migrants only, rendering the equalising Dutch flat-rate pension discriminatory in such cases" (Dörr and Faist 1997: 413). The UK system also institutes a flat-rate system, but unlike the Dutch one, this is based on duration of contributions, not residence. However, the required contribution periods for the full rate are lengthy.

was prominent in the testimony of my own respondents. Two particularities for migrants contributing to the French pension system are: (i) their comparatively late entry into the job market (Gallou 2005); and (ii) the guarantee of a pension at the full rate of 50% if retirement is deferred until 65 years, regardless of the duration of prior contributions (see Sect. 1). The latter measure provides a strong incentive for many men to continue working in France until this full-rate pension is secured, as my fieldnotes record:

The reason Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco) hasn't taken retirement yet is because he hasn't got enough trimesters for his pension – now you need the equivalent of 41 years' contributions. Which clearly means you need to have started work when you were 20 or thereabouts – something which clearly disfavours these immigrants, who arrived in their mid-20s generally.

Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania) is almost 60 years old (although he looks more like 50!) He won't take his pension for another five years in order to benefit from the full rate.

Amadou (64, Goudiri, Senegal) will be taking his pension very shortly, in February of next year. Again, the reason for delaying is in order to benefit from the full rate.

Few men saw many advantages in working beyond this age. When we met, Mehdi (64, Chlef, Algeria) was planning to retire later in the year, when he turned 65. He had heard that if one works past 65 the authorities now add a small bonus to one's pension (*surcote*), but "it's only 3 %, so if I have a pension of €1000 per month that's only going to be €30 extra for one more year worked. It's not worth it."

**Employment Factors** Sector of employment can also be a critical vector of systemic disadvantage. Some sectors heavily dependent on migrant labour, such as construction, are particularly exposed to recession and unemployment. By contrast, migrants working in manufacturing and heavy industry – sectors dominated by large companies where there is more job security – are often the beneficiaries of substantial pensions. Furthermore, larger companies are much more likely to observe employment laws requiring them to declare employees for tax and social security purposes. Those who worked in construction, on the other hand, were at high risk of not being declared to the authorities.<sup>9</sup> This situation, and the missing pension contributions which it implies, was a feature of much of the grey literature I consulted (Acsé 2011; Unaf0 2002), as well as interviews with administrative representatives. Since the French construction sector is characterised by smaller contractors and businesses at high risk of failure during economic downturns, many companies operating in the 1960s and 1970s are now defunct. This makes getting redress for undeclared pension contributions difficult if not impossible, because the company and its records no longer exist. Saleem, a Renault factory worker, commented:

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<sup>9</sup>Note that construction was a prime sector of employment for immigrant workers. One in five workers in this sector in France is an immigrant (Alidra et al. 2003).

When one works in just one company it's OK but the guys who worked in several companies, it is more difficult because there are some firms which disappear, which don't even exist anymore, that's the thing (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco).

Certainly, most of my respondents questioned on the matter indicated that those employed in the construction sector were most at risk of not being declared by their employers, and therefore at risk of missing periods in their contribution records. Once again, a timetabling effect operates here, since those with missing periods may feel obliged to work until 65 years, in order to benefit from the full-rate pension. Likewise, given that the French basic pension regime is a contributory system, those with missing periods will have paid less money into the system, resulting in a smaller pension fund at retirement. This situation leads to recourse to old-age income support, as a senior civil servant pointed out in an interview. Discussing the case of the hostel residents, he noted:

Then there are the guys who are on the *minimum vieillesse*. It's not that their life has been structured like that, it's the type of employment, the type of employer which counts. In the steel industry, the guy who has worked 30 years in that, 40 years, he isn't on the *minimum vieillesse*. So we have situations which are financially varied and which do not depend in most cases on the working life of the individual. They have often worked for 30 years, but there are cases where they have worked 30 years but they have only been declared to the authorities for five years (...) a few months in one place, a year somewhere else. At any rate it is never clear, especially in the construction industry – there it's a catastrophe. From the point of view of the contributory pensions, the immigrants who worked in construction often got screwed over. So there we have a particular problem (senior civil servant).

Some of my respondents were indeed missing contributions from their employers, as my fieldnotes record:

(Kemal, 62, Algeria) Arrived in France at the age of 17 in 1963. He worked for carmakers such as Citroen and Chaussou, and other places too. He has a basic regime pension at the full rate, but for the complementary pension, ARRCO<sup>10</sup> are not accepting his five years on [unemployment benefit]. Also discounted is two years he spent working in a factory. ARRCO are really giving him the run-around (*l'ARRCO te fait courir*), he repeated that several times.

(Issa, 70, Tambacounda, Senegal) He mentioned that there had been a problem with his longest-served employer, a street-cleaning sub-contractor. The company has not been "honest"; they have not paid him his redundancy payment. What complicates things further is that the company is now bankrupt.

(Mehdi, 64, Chlef, Algeria) We talked about his pension contributions record: there is a year working as a 'temp' which is missing. The year 1989–1990, this year is missing on the record. But fortunately he has kept all his papers, every paper dating from 1979 (the second time he came to France). He has three bags full of papers in his wardrobe, everything dating from 1979.

These observations illustrate some of the differential outcomes associated with different sectors of employment: the retirement incomes of those who were 'temping' or whose former employers have gone out of business are not on an equal

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 1 above for information about ARRCO.



footing with those who worked in steady sectors such as carmaking. Sector of employment is thus one of the social mechanisms by which inequalities in transnational social protection are produced (Faist and Bilecen 2015). The above fieldnotes also reveal differing levels of agency. Issa has little prospect of justice due to the bankruptcy of his former employer, whereas Mehdi had the foresight to preserve his employment documents and can therefore contest the missing year on his record.

**(Mis-) Registration Factors** Systemic disadvantage also occurs through inaccuracies recorded on the documents and proofs of identity which older hostel residents are required to present in everyday life. The inaccuracies contained in these documents stem from two sources: either (i) delayed registration of birth, leading to approximate dates being recorded, or (ii) mis-transcription of names, dates and numbers from one register to another. This has often occurred when documents dating from the colonial period were transcribed into French registers (Hamadache 2002).<sup>11</sup> Both problems have been most accentuated for those who grew up in rural areas. Generally, the authorities in urban areas under colonial rule were more attentive in observing administrative formalities.

Turning first of all to delayed registration of births and approximate records, I discovered during my conversations with Senegalese elders that many men of their generation did not register for birth certificates or Senegalese identity cards until they had reached the age of 18 or later. Given the long period which had elapsed since birth for those in this situation, many had no accurate idea of the year in which they were born, let alone the month or date. The dates recorded were therefore necessarily based on estimations. After estimating the year of birth, administrators tended to record the month and date of birth as 31 December. Unfortunately, putting the end of the year has disadvantageous timetabling consequences, since it pushes back the date one can start to draw one's pension to the end of the year.<sup>12</sup> As Nadia Hamadache notes, "It would without doubt be more just, in these cases, to fix as the date of birth the first of July, which would balance things out" (Hamadache 2002: 22; author's translation).

Significantly, it was the prospect of emigration which prompted many of my respondents to get registered with the administrative authorities in the first place. Had it not been for this motivation they would have not got registered when they did, as they were perfectly well able to go about their business in places of origin without such proofs of identity. As will be further developed in Chap. 8, it is interesting to observe how the requirements of inclusion in migrants' destination countries lead to new administrative practices in places of origin.

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<sup>11</sup> Francophone countries in North and West Africa only became independent from France during and after the mid-1950s, by which time almost all of my respondents had been born.

<sup>12</sup> This problem is not confined to France. Joanne Cook documents similar problems among older Somali women who have been granted refugee status in the UK. Many of these women do not possess proofs of age. The "insensitivity" of the Home Office and state agencies towards the special circumstances of these age women has resulted in their exclusion from the basic state pension mechanism and other old age income benefits (Cook 2010: 264).

The causes of delayed registrations and approximate dates of birth are exemplified in my fieldnotes for two respondents, born within a few miles and months of each other around 1948, in Protectorate-era Morocco (Tiznit district). Morocco became independent in 1956.

(...) Lhoussaine arrived in France in 1971. Although his official date of birth is 1st January 1951, he was born before this, although he is less than sure in which year. Perhaps 1948. His father didn't put him on the *livret de famille*<sup>13</sup> because they didn't want the French authorities to know that the children existed, otherwise they would have been liable for extra taxes and the children could have been liable for conscription.

(...) Badr's birth certificate states that he is four years younger than his actual age! He was born sometime between 1948 and 1949 – he knows this because his dad married his mum in 1947 and divorced her in 1949! But his father never registered him on a *livret de famille* or birth certificate (*acte de naissance*). To be eligible for entry into school when he was a lad, you needed a birth certificate, so what his father did was to make him younger so that he could stay at school longer ... His date of birth was put as 1952. So on paper, he is only 57, whereas in reality he is at least 60 years old, and I should add that he looks his age a little. French people, he told me, are amazed when he tells them that he doesn't have a day or a month for his birthday, but he tells them that, "it's because of the French – and colonisation – they didn't do their job correctly!"

**Mis-Transcriptions** A second type of inaccuracy found in documents concerns variations in spelling when documents are transcribed, or re-transcribed. Such inaccuracies can be due to simple human errors such as spelling mistakes and inverted first and last names. They have also been caused when bureaucrats in newly independent states rectified or standardised the civil registries inherited from colonial administrations. What results is lack of congruence between an individual's premigration records dating from the colonial era, and the contemporary records held by the newly independent state. Proving who one is then becomes even more difficult, and the French authorities – confronted with two different sets of documents, "admit serious doubts about the veracity of these documents due to a fear of fraud" (Hamadache 2002: 22; author's translation). The testimony of Jacques, manager of a local branch of the national old age insurance fund (CNAV), is illuminating of the official mindset:

They arrived in France like that – Mohammed son of Mohammed, born in 1940 – and then ten years later, he comes back to say "I'm no longer called Mohammed son of Mohammed, but I have a surname and a first name and a date of birth," and you have to start all over again, you have to modify the whole record, and re-matriculate it, and give it a new number, making a fusion of the two, the old one and the new one. So that is when we get all sorts of delays! (Jacques, branch manager, CNAV)

Sometimes, the names and dates given in one set of documents do not match with a second set of documents. One example, taken from my fieldwork in Dembanané, Senegal, is the surname Cissoko: variants of this spelling include Sissoko, Sissokho,

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<sup>13</sup>The *livret de famille* is a document which a couple receives after marriage, in which are recorded partners' names and dates of birth, and thereafter the names and dates of birth of any children. It serves as an all-in-one marriage and birth certificate.

Cissokho, Sisoko and so on. Such inconsistencies of spelling, along with the inexactitude of dates of birth, have historically caused major issues for Dembanané men when dealing with the French authorities. In short, these complications have been a factor in welfare state exclusion, at least temporarily (i.e., as long as it takes to correct these mis-transcriptions). “In effect, the variations in the re-transcription of names and the changes to surnames singularly complicates the constitution of dossiers” (Acsé 2011). This complication was echoed by Djimé (Dembané, Senegal)<sup>14</sup>:

You know that the Senegalese registers, in the past, well, there weren't even any surnames or first names: it's that which makes things complicated (...) They didn't pay attention when writing down the names.

Rectifying these inconsistencies and inaccuracies can be a long and costly process (Samaoli 2007), requiring no little time and money if back-and-forth travel is necessary in order to present one's correct credentials to bureaucrats in both countries, or attend court judgements, and so on (Hamadache 2002). Such toing-and-froing between administrations in both countries is another example of how states may enforce mobility on the least resourceful (Gehring 2015). For those who are older or whose health is failing, the burden of going to court (and the time that will take) may simply not be worth it. Badr, whose remark about French colonial administrators not doing their job correctly was quoted above, does plan to get his papers corrected at some point. Presently however he hesitates because it is a time-consuming and complex administrative process. First he needs to find 12 witnesses who will vouch that he was born in 1948 (this is stipulated by Moroccan law, since he needs a new Moroccan birth certificate). Then the case passes to a tribunal and a judge will make a decision. Of course, this is only the Moroccan side of the story, and he is well aware that it would take far longer than his once-a-year month-long holiday in Morocco to arrange, which is why he has not done it yet. It will then be necessary to change all the documentation and records held by the French authorities too.

**Self-Inflicted Problems and Timetabling** Other problematic biographical records are more accurately portrayed as self-inflicted, generating considerable suspicion from administrative authorities. There are three scenarios to note here: (i) those who earlier concealed their true age in order to emigrate to France; (ii) those who ‘share’ what should be a unique social security identifier with undocumented kinsmen and/or compatriots; and (iii) those who have inattentively (or unwittingly) discarded important proofs of employment and income.

I described in the previous sub-section how children were not always punctually registered with the colonial authorities, leading to inaccuracies and approximations in terms of dates of birth. In addition to these uncertainties, some individuals had a

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<sup>14</sup>Compared to the character key for other respondents, the key for Dembanané people is more basic, due to the risk of inadvertently revealing someone's real identity. Since Dembanané is home to only 5200 people, all individuals connected to the town have had their age and other identifying factors (e.g., number of children, occupation) disassociated from their pseudonyms.

vested interest in falsifying dates of birth, since lying about one's age could facilitate entry to France. Jacques Barou relays the testimony of one such individual: "I came to France in 1963, I must have been 16. But on the papers I declared 26" (Barou 2001: 13). As noted earlier, recruiters preferred to hire men in their mid-20s who were in the prime of life. For the same reason, other may have lied to become younger 'on paper'. Several decades later, the consequences of such actions catch up with those concerned. While administratively-speaking an individual might be 60 and still 5 years away from drawing a pension at the full rate, in reality he is aged 70 and still engaged in manual work. Hamid (70, Taroudant, Morocco) recalled that one of his workmates at the car factory was in this category, remarking how tough it was for him towards the end of his career.

A second self-inflicted complication arises when several acquaintances, often members of the same family, 'share' one set of documents between them. This is most likely to occur when one or more of their number does not possess valid residence papers and permits for work. To resolve this problem, they lend each other the same valid set of papers, and as a result, each one begins to contribute social security and pension contributions to the same account. Jacques (branch manager, CNAV) claimed that this tactic was most prevalent in West African hostels where several male members belonging to an extended family from one village may reside, since the postal address always matches. As he elaborated:

We also have big problems with those who are in the hostels. Those in the hostels, they all have similar names, and they borrow the same social security card. They have the same names, they have the same social security number, so they all contribute under the same number, so there are three or four for just one social security number. So we have to find the little bits for each person and that causes enormous problems. That one over there is a case in point! [Jacques points to a large bag of papers: see Fig. 3.1]. The whole thing is made up of small salaries – a whole career – and I have five different people!

That the papers in Fig. 3.1 are in a plastic bag is not incidental. Hostel residents place a premium on the portability of their affairs, since many have had to travel around France for work, while others have changed hostels during renovations or when rents increased (Dimier 2007). "A whole life is contained in a suitcase" (Germain, outreach officer, anti-poverty charity), and clearly there are limits to the amount of material one can place in a suitcase. There are also clear limits to the number of documents which can be stored in one's room in the hostel, given its minimal size and insufficient storage facilities (see Chap. 1). As a result, various documents – considered less important than others – have been jettisoned along the way:

They have one or two suitcases which they have hauled around their whole life. Papers take up room, and they didn't see the importance of them, so they have thrown them out. Often also they said that they would return home one day, so they haven't seen the importance of such papers (Béatrice, health advisor, migrant welfare association).

However, deciding what can be kept and what can be discarded is not always easy when one does not read French well and when the jargon used by administra-

**Fig. 3.1** One social security account, five different people



tive bodies is opaque (Hamadache 2002). Yet discarding papers means the impossibility of contesting decisions about one's basic pension entitlement, as well as one's complementary pension, especially for those who were working in France prior to 1973. Before this date, it was not obligatory for employers to contribute to their employees' complementary pension funds. If one has thrown away one's pay-slips, it is very difficult to trace one's rightful contributions to the latter scheme.

Finally, what is crucial to note is that these problems (mis-transcriptions, loss of important documents, 'shared' social security numbers, incorrect dates of birth, untraceable former employers, and later entry into the workforce) only become apparent or important at retirement. They are rarely of significance prior to this time. These facets of the paperwork experience bring into focus the timetabling function of welfare state inclusion which I have mentioned at various points in this chapter. Once again, retirement is found to be a critical juncture in material terms, seen in the fact of lower pension incomes for hostel residents in many cases.

### 3.3 Suspect Mobility, Enforcement and Tactics of Evasion

In recent years, retired hostel residents who travel back-and-forth between France and their countries of origin have become targets of suspicion for French welfare agencies. Such agencies are increasingly concerned to crack down on what they perceive as fraudulent claims for social security benefits. One clear manifestation of this suspicion and targeting on the part of the authorities is the administrative practice of on-the-spot passport checks. This is a novel practice according to Abdou (outreach officer, migrant rights association):

The means of control is the passport, and the fact of demanding passports is new ... It's four years since I started [doing outreach] in the hostels, and the problem of the passports has been flagrant this year, last year it started to appear a little... These administrative bodies are monitoring more and more the phenomenon – the *aller-retours* (return trips) of the residents are much more scrutinised now.

The procedure of the passport check is very simple. The local Tax Office sends an identical letter to a large number of named individuals living in the hostel in question. The letter requests that the addressee comes to the local office within a certain time period with their passport or a photocopy of their passport. At the office, a member of staff scrutinises the entry and exit stamps in the passport for the past year to verify whether the person concerned has spent 6 months on French territory or not. If it is less than 6 months, the person concerned risks having his social security suspended and his health insurance card invalidated. Likewise, domicile for the tax declaration is recorded as being outside France. The tax declaration and fiscal domicile are important in that they record one's income for the previous year, crucial when it comes to proving eligibility for benefits which are means-tested.

Legally, the checking of passports is regarded as a dubious practice (Hamadache 2005). As one politician who campaigns on behalf of ageing migrants put it, "Since when have the French authorities been allowed to use foreign documents as a means of verification?" Similarly, Ali El Baz, formerly national coordinator of the Association of North African Workers in France (ATMF),<sup>15</sup> has written that "the passport has become a weapon in the hands of administrators to assign those concerned to a state of house arrest" (El Baz 2007: 106). Many of the residents themselves are aware of the dubious legality of the passport checks. At a focus group which I facilitated at the Senior Citizens' club run by a local branch of ATMF, there was quite a lively debate among the participants about the checks which administrative bodies conduct with the passport: one Algerian man felt that it was quite right that there were controls, "because you have to respect the laws of the country where you live", but most in the group felt that it was a blatant discrimination. This was echoed by several respondents who argued that the practice amounted to "racial discrimination" and was "completely abnormal." As one of my West African respondents, Issa (70, Tambacounda, Senegal) pointed out indignantly: "if you're a French pensioner, no one asks you for your passport!"

Yet some French pensioners may just as easily transgress these minimum residence requirements for welfare allocations, notably those sun-seeking pensioners who spend some or most of their time in warmer Mediterranean climes (see also Gehring 2015). Yet in France it is only ever immigrant elders, and particularly those living in hostels, who are targeted with the passport checks. Sandrine, who works at a charity providing legal advice to retired and disabled workers, commented acerbically:

What's funny is that the passport is only ever demanded from people of foreign nationality. We've never had a French person come to us saying "I went on holiday for three months, I used to get the *minimum vieillesse* and now they've cut my benefit." We've never had a single case of that although our services are open to both French and foreigners. (...) It's just foreigners who are checked, so there is all the same a certain suspicion, a certain distrust, vis-à-vis foreigners who 'break the bank', and there is an aspect ... always this aspect of fraud (Sandrine, legal advisor, citizen rights charity).

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<sup>15</sup> *Association des travailleurs maghrébins de France.*

**Box 3.1: Excerpt from Interview with Jacques (Branch Manager, CNAV) 20 July 2009**

Jacques: I do many investigations, because they don't live here. They get themselves domiciled at a hostel, or at a friend's place.

AH: And how do you do these investigations?

Jacques: Well I make a request to our legal department. I send an investigation request along with the aim of the request, and I ask that they check if the person concerned is indeed resident in France as they say they are. So this investigator is going to visit that person, is going to arrange a meeting with the person, and in the meantime the investigator goes to the tax office to see if there is a tax declaration which has been made. He also goes to the health insurance fund to see if there have been any healthcare reimbursements, so he checks a certain number of things (...) And when the person concerned is in a meeting with the investigator, if he comes with his passport of course, we look at the dates of entry and exit. So it's a fairly rigorous check all the same! And I make lots of rejections. Because they aren't there! (...) It's 2 years now that we have been very sensitised to fraud, and all the agencies, be it the Family Benefits Fund, the Disability Agency, the National Old Age Insurance Fund, we are all aware of fraud, and so we are very, very, very vigilant! (...) They are cunning but we are cunning too. They don't know all the tricks.

AH: And so, this fraud awareness, it's quite recent?

Jacques: Let's just say that we have always done this, we have always been sensitised to this, but it is at the level of the other agencies which were less sensitised than us.

Despite the controversy attached to the passport checks, the representatives of various welfare agencies to whom I spoke are quite determined to maintain a tough stance on this issue, as the extract from an interview I had with a CNAV branch manager shows (Box 3.1).

**Tactics of Territoriality: Official and Unofficial Ruses to Avoid Timetabling** Administrators at the various benefits agencies seek to territorially fix and temporally timetable the older hostel population through means such as passport checks, tax declarations, and other official procedures as discussed by Jacques in Box 3.1. In response, hostel residents, and, to a certain extent, hostel managers, exert their own agency in responding with various practices which subvert the intentions of the authorities and which are difficult to control. The contrast between the authorities' procedures and hostel residents' agency can be productively conceptualised by applying Michel de Certeau's distinction between *strategy* and *tactics*. In de Certeau's vocabulary, the former implies the formal, the fixed, the bounded, the proper, the mapped, whereas the latter designates that which is illicit,



informal, mobile (de Certeau 1984). This distinction is above all about power, as Tim Cresswell relates in *On the Move: mobility in the modern world*:

the weapons of the strong are strategies – classification, mapping, delineation, division (...) The weak on the other hand, are left with furtive movement to contest the territorialization of urban space (...) The tactic is consigned to using the space of the powerful in cunning ways (...) the tactic is the ruse of the weak – the mobile drifting through the rationalized spaces of power (Cresswell 2006: 47–48).

The tactics deployed by residents in the hostels will be described in the present section. They include the ‘shared rooms’ system instituted by several hostel companies, sub-letting of rooms, and what I will call ‘letterbox solidarity’.<sup>16</sup> The origins of the shared rooms system lie in the fact that hostel companies, like their ageing clientele, also experience timetabling pressures from the social security agencies. The Family Benefits Fund (*Caisse d’allocations familiales*, hereafter CAF), which supervises payments of the APL housing benefit, requires hostel managers to report any absence of over 4 months (the minimum period of residence to be eligible for the APL being 8 months). Yet this is very difficult for managers, as residents do not always indicate they are leaving, and managers are not always present to witness such comings-and-goings. If the CAF finds that the residence conditions have not been observed, APL is suspended and processes are set in motion to recuperate the sum received in error. In practice, it is the hostel companies which are required to pay back the overpaid sums, as APL is paid directly to the accommodation provider, not the tenant. This implies a major financial loss for hostel companies. According to one Sonacotra-Adoma employee, the CAF is entitled to demand up to 2 years of arrears (which can easily be €2000).

Anxious to reduce the recuperations demanded by the CAF for housing benefit paid in error, several hostel companies (notably Sonacotra-Adoma) have instituted an innovative system known as the ‘shared rooms’ system. Put simply, a room is reserved for the use of two to four named individuals, who each occupy it in turn for a set period. They are no longer entitled to the APL (which requires at least 8 months’ residence in France), but the rent they pay is proportional to the duration of residence in the hostel. The system, in other words, enables residents to keep a room in a hostel without the constraint of paying for it all year round. Many people I spoke to had positive things to say about this initiative. Denis, a hostel manager, commented:

They get a letterbox, and they can continue to receive all their mail, their address is here. And so, they stay a certain amount of time in France but on the other hand they no longer get [housing] benefits. But anyway, it at least allows them to have proof of address, to have an address if there is a problem, or anything, then they can come back.

The great advantage in having a postal address in one’s name is that when away from France, one can ask a friend or relative to regularly check one’s letterbox for mail, and if a letter looks official, get them to open it. “It’s not so difficult, the

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<sup>16</sup>Mbodj-Pouye (2016) discusses the practice of maintaining a ‘care of’ postal address in West African hostels in Paris.

paperwork, it's not too difficult, if there is someone who can let you know, then you reply straightaway, no problem." (Issa, 70, Tambacounda, Senegal) According to Dr. Ismail, an Algerian doctor who volunteers as a medical advisor in several Parisian hostels, "This solidarity [among the residents] continues, even if it is diminished in other domains." I myself was asked during my time living in a hostel to look out for any mail which might end up in my letterbox addressed to the man who used to have my room: this individual was back in North Africa at the time. Family too can play a role here: residents can give their letterbox key to a relative – a nephew for example – who lives nearby. I also saw this in several hostels where I undertook participant observation: youngsters and other obvious 'outsiders' would come to the hostel and open absent residents' letterboxes. Thanks to 'letterbox solidarity', residents can be forewarned to return to France, in order to satisfy the requisite administrative task. This tactic has frequently frustrated benefit agencies in the past when they have attempted to do residence checks (Hamadache 2005).

Implementing the shared rooms scheme has not been without difficulty (Unafco 2002). The scheme requires that participating residents give 2–3 weeks' notice before they return to France. Hostel managers need at least two – if not more – rooms vacant and available at any one time, because people often come back to the hostel before they said they would, or the current incumbent falls ill and cannot give up his room as planned. Hostel manager Denis noted: "Sometimes there are snags, yes. All it takes is for one of them to be to here and then fall ill and the other arrives and then they find themselves together" (i.e., in the same room). According to Béatrice, a health advisor for a migrant welfare association, "They decide to leave when the plane ticket isn't so expensive, when there is a religious holiday, or a marriage or when there is someone at home who is ill. So they don't plan it in advance." Furthermore, the shared rooms scheme is not suitable for everyone. Some residents are used to their own rooms and get on well with their neighbours. Béatrice pursued this theme by stressing the importance of feeling at home in one's room and not wishing to give it up:

The room in the hostel is their house here in France, and old people, they have to have their bearings. And if we put them in a room which is not the one in which they have lived, where they have their things, it's a bit like ... not going back to one's house but rather like going back to a hotel. It's psychologically very difficult for these people. There are some places where it works (...) There are some hostels, I've been there, where it's four people who are from the same village, or from the same family. That is to say that it doesn't bother them, it doesn't trouble them to come there after a cousin has been before, or the neighbour who comes from the same village. When it is people you don't know, or people with whom you don't have a family or village tie, it's more difficult, it's like a hotel and that is difficult when you are old.

Giving up one's room is especially difficult if one is a long-term resident: I met several people who had been in the same room for 30 years or more. Of course, one can pay for one's room all year round, but this implies paying for something which one does not use and amounts to fraud if one is in receipt of housing benefit. One solution to this waste of resources is to sub-let the room, although this tactic is not permitted by the hostel management companies. Nonetheless, it occurs, at least to a

marginal extent, in most hostels (Sonacotra 2006). In fact, sub-letting was at the heart of a bitter episode in the hostel where I stayed: an anonymous letter alleging that some residents were profiting from sub-letting and claiming benefits illegally when in actual fact they were resident in North Africa most of the year was circulated at the end of 2008. Copies of this malicious letter were sent to the police, the local tax office, and the CAF. Its effect was to make many residents very anxious about the prospect of an imminent passport check by the authorities.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented concrete examples of the timetabling effect which welfare state agencies have on hostel residents' lives, influencing back-and-forth mobility at retirement. Through these mechanisms, it was shown that the state not only facilitates or impedes physical mobility across state borders, it may also *enforce* mobility, particularly upon the most precarious in society. Three contexts of timetabling were identified: the old-age pension regime, the condition of 'regular and effective residence' for non-contributory social security benefits, and the annual tax declaration. While the temporal and territorial 'rules of access' which pertain to these contexts are applicable to all citizens, migrants and non-migrants alike, it was argued in Sect. 3.2 that certain 'non-standard' elements of migrant workers' biographies lead to systemic disadvantage vis-à-vis non-migrant populations. Indeed, contrary to the narrative of 'welfare scroungers' which those hostile to immigrants invoke, research has shown that the net contributory effect of ageing migrants on social security systems is often positive. As Aguila and Vega (2017) show, older migrants (especially those who return or circulate back-and-forth) often pay into social security schemes without claiming all the benefits to which they are entitled.

The 'non-standard' biographies of the hostel residents are primarily manifested in administrative documentation, including mis-transcribed names, discarded proofs of entitlement, sharing of social security numbers, inaccurate or conflicting dates of birth, untraceable former employers, and later entry into the workforce. Critically these biographical features only become significant at retirement, lending credence to the idea that retirement is a critical juncture in hostel residents' lives. Retirement is a juncture secondly insofar as it heralds an end to the sedentary constraint of participation in the labour market, enabling residents to spend more time with their families back home. Yet this mobility at retirement is dubious in the eyes of French administrators, who suspect the residents of not observing the minimum durations of residence required to be eligible for social assistance (see also Mbodj-Pouye 2016). This, together with their suspect proofs of identity and unreliable personal documents, leads to renewed attention on hostel residents' administrative situation in France. The authorities seek to enforce timetabling and control residents' comings-and-goings. In response, residents devise tactics to counteract and resist such bureaucratic control of their movements.

With regard to the book's central research question, namely what explains the hostel residents' preference for back-and-forth trips over definitive return, the empirical phenomena presented in this chapter appear to be best accounted for by Niklas Luhmann's social systems approach. In Luhmann's conception of society, the rationale of the national welfare state is to act as the "central moderator of relations of inclusion by producing occasions and dispositions for inclusion and by processing and ordering the consequences of exclusion" (Amiriaux 2000: 246). Welfare states do this by striving to institutionalise the individual lifecourse – particularly during the formative years – in order to produce individuals with biographies which are relevant and expectable for organisations in society (especially employers in the economy). Immigrants, however, tend to diverge from the standard assumed lifecourse expected by organisations in society (Bommes 2000), in terms of administrative records, later entry to the labour market, educational qualifications, and so on. The repercussions of non-standard biographies among the older hostel residents have been presented at length above.

Additionally, Luhmann argues that the various social systems which constitute society (e.g., the systems of law, education, health, the economy, and so on) are increasingly unconcerned by demarcations of territory, with the sole but critical exception of the political system, the basic organisational unit of which is the national welfare state (Halfmann 2000). What this means in practice is that the inclusion (and exclusion) of individuals in the political system is territorially marked, through the comparatively modern institution of citizenship. In this schema, the cross-border mobility of migrants and mobile citizens has to be controlled:

From the point of view of the state, welfare policies are meant to impose a territorial criterion on the politics of inclusion in the political system and even of the moderation of inclusion in other function systems. This includes the attempts of the nation state to restrict the welfare state benefits to its citizens or to demand the consumption of the benefits on the state territory (Halfmann 2000: 41).

Thus the French authorities have actively sought to restrict consumption of welfare to French territory, leading to hostel residents' 'timetabled' back-and-forth trips at retirement. This stark logic of the welfare state, which prevents some hostel residents from fulfilling the wish to spend their old age with family members in places of origin, has in the last decade been condemned by a growing coalition of activists, policy advisers and legislators, who view the state's inflexible approach as a form of 'house arrest' which denies hostel residents' rights to family life. In Chap. 8 I will conclude by outlining a recent piece of legislation aimed specifically at facilitating the return of hostel residents to their families, and which appears to contradict the territorial and temporal logics of the welfare state described above. Before then, however, Chap. 4 continues the argument presented here about timetabled lives, by documenting similar trends in relation to healthcare. Like administrative paperwork, healthcare also leads to timetabling, with trips being scheduled to coincide with various medical appointments. Similarly, hostel residents' non-standard biographies result in certain systemic disadvantages in the domain of health.

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## Chapter 4

# Home/Sick: The Health–Migration Order



*AH: You were saying before [about being recruited for the French mines] that there was a medical at Ain Borja [near Casablanca], and that there were nine doctors?*

*Jawad: Oh yes, nine doctors, yes, we took all sorts of tests – weight, eyesight, teeth.*

*AH: Oh really, even teeth?*

*Jawad: Oh yes, blood tests, x-rays – for the lungs – oh yes a full physical examination, no mistake (...) They made you take five kilos – two and a half kilos in each hand – they put you on the scales, and they position you like this [Jawad stands up and stretches out his arms to the sides]. You see, the people are looking at the calibre of the applicant, to see whether he can take the strain (...) They don't take just anybody. They look at everything, everything (...) If you are in good health, they take you. And if there's something missing, they say "no, it's not worth it" and they don't take you. Oh yes, it's not like "On you go, worker, come to France!" We entered under the Service of Immigration, we did all the tests. In good health, no illnesses, nothing (...) a worker, a good one, you know.*

*AH: So they took the strongest ones?*

*Jawad: Oh yes, they didn't take idlers. Someone who's ill, he's going to come? – no no no.*

Interview with Jawad (69, Taroudant, Morocco)

Health has ordered hostel residents' migration trajectories in three key ways. As can be seen from the epigraph above, for Jawad and others, *good* health was a prerequisite for coming to France in the first place. Later in life, at retirement age, health again orders migration, but this time it is the fact of *poor* health which conditions their movements to France, in order to receive healthcare. Hostel residents do not differ markedly from the rest of the elderly population in France as regards health conditions (a higher incidence of type-2 diabetes excepted: see Hadjiat and Fevotte 2008). What does distinguish hostel residents however is their earlier onset of health problems. As a consequence many hostel residents have, over the years, developed strong relationships of trust in French medical services. Just as was seen in Chap. 3 regarding paperwork and access to social protection,



maintaining inclusion in the French healthcare system is an important priority for older hostel residents, and one which timetables their trips to France. The rationale for these back-and-forth trips constitutes the heart of this book’s analysis. However, back-and-forth mobility itself can have a negative impact on health: this is the third way in which health and migration interact, underlining the complex inter-relationship between migration and health (Findley 1988).

I term this inter-relationship the ‘health–migration order.’ With this term I wish to build on Sally Findley’s bi-directional concept of ‘health-migration relations’, namely whether declines in health status influence the propensity to migrate and, vice versa, whether the act of migration impacts negatively on health (Findley 1988). Findley shows that health-migration relations are particularly salient for older people, while young people’s patterns of poor health and migration do not seem to be correlated (*ibid*). However, Findley draws her findings from cross-sectional survey data mainly recording within-country moves rather than international moves, overlooking a key dynamic insofar as international migrants are widely thought to be selected by *better* health vis-à-vis their peers, giving rise to the ‘healthy migrant’ effect (Abraido-Lanza et al. 1999; Marmot et al. 1984; Moullan and Justot 2014; Razum et al. 2000).<sup>1</sup> While utilising cross-sectional survey data provides robust tests of different health-migration models in the studies cited here, the added value of a qualitative lifecourse approach – which this research adopts – is to highlight the influence of both *bad* and *good* health on decisions to emigrate, return and/or circulate across borders, in different historical periods and under different border control regimes (Montes de Oca et al. 2011). As Baykara-Krumme (2013) concludes, health status is a factor in the decision to return but its influence is not clear-cut. For some, poor health leads to a bi-residence strategy in order to benefit from better quality and/or subsidised healthcare in host countries, whereas for others poor health may force individuals to settle definitively either in the home country or the host country (Baykara-Krumme 2013). The findings of this book, in this chapter and Chap. 7, support this insight about the ambivalent effect of poor health.

Just as was found in Chap. 3, the men’s ‘non-standard’ biographies have a bearing on their interactions with welfare institutions, in this case healthcare professionals. As will be covered below, non-standard biographical features include premature ageing due to difficult working conditions and work accidents; language barriers in the patient-carer relationship; and lack of family entourage to provide informal care, meaning that an extra duty of care falls upon formal providers. Finally, the epigraph to the previous chapter showed how an identity based on papers can compensate for the loss of the identity of ‘worker’ which occurs at retirement. In the concluding pages to this chapter, I speculate as to whether an alternative identity based on illness can play a similar ‘compensatory’ role, functioning as a rationale for non-return, especially when justifying this decision to family members remaining back home.

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<sup>1</sup>Other scholars speak of a migrant mortality paradox: in many contexts, migrants have lower mortality rates than non-migrants, once socio-economic status is controlled for (Darmon and Khlat 2001; Deboosere and Gadenye 2005; Norredam et al. 2015; Wallace and Kulu 2015).

## 4.1 Health and Mobility in Later Life

Access to healthcare is a major factor in return decision-making for the older hostel residents. Very frequently hostel residents would justify their decision not to return definitively on health grounds. One Algerian hostel resident, when I told him that I was doing a study on retired people living in migrant worker hostels, hurriedly declared: “We are only here for healthcare.” Hamid (70, Taroudant, Morocco) was very firm about why the older North Africans are still here: “the only thing is healthcare”. If they could get healthcare free of charge back in Morocco, through social security, then they would be back there more often. Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco) had this to say:

There are people who are old, they need care, it is for this reason that each time the people do back-and-forth trips. They want to stay [back home], if there was the advantage of social security like there is in other countries there would be nobody who comes here to France – at any rate there are people who have serious illnesses, but they come here [to France] every three months or so.

That this coming-and-going at retirement is motivated at least in part by healthcare provision in France is a narrative upon which everyone I interviewed was in agreement – healthcare professionals, hostel managers, union delegates, immigration lawyers, civil servants, migrants’ associations, embassy officials, and of course residents themselves. I did not hear one dissenting voice during 2 years of fieldwork. The overarching narrative is that the men are in France when they are sick and in need of treatment, and then when they are well enough they return home to be with their families and to benefit from the emotional support that the family offers. This narrative can be summed up in the chapter’s title – ‘Home/Sick’ – a formulation which tries to encapsulate this back-and-forth health strategy.

Before continuing, two disclaimers are in order. Firstly, as noted, many hostel residents were very ready to talk about general healthcare needs as a rationale in their return and residence decisions. However, there was an overall reticence to discuss specific health problems in detail. This reticence means that the balance of testimony here is slightly weighted towards the voices of healthcare professionals. This applied to all health issues, but particularly mental health. Saleem, the leader of the Residents’ Committee in his hostel, put it in these words:

As for me, I’m going to try in the future to propose to the management that from time to time – and it’s not easy – to have someone who comes here, as a psychiatrist, to discuss things with people. But it’s not easy (...) everyone has a secret, for any person his problems are his secrets, he doesn’t want everyone to know that he ... he has problems (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco).

Given that mental health is less prominent in residents’ testimonies, I will not discuss this issue in detail in the main body of the chapter. Instead, the theme of mental health will be treated more speculatively in the concluding section (Sect. 4.5).

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that this *va-et-vient* for healthcare can continue only so long as the men are in a fit state to travel. Once a certain loss of

autonomy is experienced, necessitating assistance with everyday tasks, regular comings-and-goings must cease and the men are forced to make a choice about where they will see out the rest of their days. This decision clearly is related to their long-term care needs, but I will not discuss this in the current chapter, which focuses on more acute medical care (to treat illness), postponing discussion of long-term elderly care until Chap. 7. This distinction between acute medical care and long-term elder care may appear counterintuitive in the light of conventional models of health, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) definition: “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this definition has been incorporated by the hostel management companies, as this interview with a senior manager confirmed: “When one ages, one is not necessarily ill, but one can have difficulties with mobility, difficulties completing daily tasks.” However older hostel residents tended not to see it this way, often showing a clear disinclination to be helped in everyday tasks. Asked about this distinction between more acute medical care needs and long-term elderly care, Sonia (elder care coordinator, Val d’Oise) agreed. In terms of medical care, the residents “will get themselves cared for, they know the way to the doctor or the hospital, they know the steps to follow.” By contrast, “they hardly ever make use of [elder care services].”

For the older hostel residents, health means the sensation of physical pain and the presence of somatic symptoms. One older Moroccan remarked that while French pensioners are very well cared for, North Africans “don’t have the same culture” of going to the doctor at the first sign of a problem. Indeed, from my conversations with healthcare professionals, it became apparent that most older hostel residents tend to have recourse to medical care only in cases of acute ill health and pain. “They let the healthcare side of things slide, it’s rather marginal with them”, notes Abdou (outreach officer, migrant rights association). They wait until the last minute, when they are “really troubled” before getting checked out (Unafu 2002: 49). Béatrice (health advisor, migrant welfare association) concurred: “Why do they seek medical care at the very last moment? (...) They came for work, so as long as they were in a state to work, they worked. To be sick meant to be in one’s bed with a fever and not be able to move.”

**Residents’ State of Health** The first point to note regarding the health situation of the older men living in the migrant worker hostels is the lack of reliable national-level statistics (Hadjiat and Fevotte 2008: 331). This is compounded by the legal prohibition on ethnicity-based statistical data in France, including in healthcare statistics, making it impossible to infer epidemiological trends in the hostels from wider population data, although the correlations between ethnicity and certain health conditions are by now well-established (Bhopal 2014). A geriatric doctor at Sonacotra-Adoma admitted that there was very little data she could draw on with

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<sup>2</sup>Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York 19–22 June 1946. <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html> [accessed 25/3/2010].

confidence: “In France we are very behind when it comes to studies concerning more specific populations like this (...) There are many rumours which circulate (...) which are not based on any scientific study.” This was confirmed in a telling way by her counterpart at the second-largest hostel company Aftam-Coallia, revealing the primacy of financial and administrative aspects in the hostel manager’s vocation:

It’s more that we feel the tendencies (...) there is nothing on the medical aspects in the end because they are people who are at home [*chez eux*]. So we’re not supposed to enter into their private life, to meddle with the health aspects. The only thing that we can have, possibly, is if ever a report is sent back by the hospital, but it is very rare. So we have few elements to go on, concerning the residents themselves. *In fact, we’re more likely to have their tax file, to be honest!* (laughs) [emphasis added]

Despite the lack of data, observers on the ground tend to observe the same types of illness affecting older hostel residents. These include: problems relating to eyesight, hearing, dental health, rheumatology, arthritis, back pain, cardio-vascular disease, gastro-enterology, urinary infections, and respiratory disease (Adoma 2007; Aftam 2006; Migrations Santé 2003; Sonacotra 2005). The range of illnesses experienced by residents, therefore, is no different to the rest of the elderly population (Unafo 2002). Dr. Ismail (geriatric doctor) confirmed that “it’s more or less the same schema as everywhere else in the world”, listing (i) cardiovascular conditions (high blood pressure, heart attacks) and (ii) “disability” linked to work accidents (back and knee pain). However there are a few specificities in hostel residents’ health which are noteworthy. Firstly, health professionals observe a general degradation in health which afflicts hostel residents over the age of 55.<sup>3</sup> As Anne-Marie, a crisis social worker at a hospital in the northern Paris suburbs, put it, “[those in the hostels] have let a whole load of things slide (...) there is a whole list of factors which bring them to hospital, generally they don’t arrive for just one thing only.” Residents themselves are conscious of a certain decline in terms of health. The words of Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco) are characteristic in this regard:

It’s fine, I’m in good health, but each time I feel a negative side (...) I went to see the doctor, he gave me the treatment [for a prostate problem], but I don’t know – what it might become or if it is going to become another illness, you just don’t know. Because we – we’re beginning to deteriorate inside, even if you feel OK like this, you don’t know what life holds for you tomorrow.

A second factor to register is the prevalence of diabetes in the hostels. While there are no nationwide statistics for diabetes, in a study of residents over 60 years of age in Sonacotra-Adoma hostels in the Rhône region, the incidence of diabetes was at 15.5%, against 8% in the rest of the population over 60 (Hadjiat and Fevotte 2008). The role of ethnicity in the prevalence of type-2 diabetes is important and has been widely reported in the epidemiological literature (Agyemang et al. 2011; Carulli et al. 2005). Dr. Ismail confirmed that diabetes is a feature, especially for the

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<sup>3</sup>This situation is termed *altération d’état général* (AEG) in French elder care services.

older North Africans whom he sees. Its prevalence among the hostel population is linked to diet in particular, as well as lack of exercise following retirement.

The third key element to note is premature ageing. Vivianne (geriatric doctor) recounted that when she first joined Sonacotra-Adoma she was “surprised to see that [in the company] we started speaking of old people from the age of 55.” Many other professionals mentioned 55 years of age as a milestone, and numerous studies use 55 years and above as the basis for their sampling frame (e.g., Migrations Santé 2003). While not all are in agreement on the significance of the age of 55,<sup>4</sup> what is clear is that immigrants in general experience loss of autonomy at a significantly earlier age than native-born French elders. The average age of dependency among retired people originally from North Africa is 75.3 years, versus 82 years for people born in France. For the age bracket 60–69 years, the proportion of dependent people born in France is 1.3%, against 4.5% for those born in North Africa (Hadjiat and Fevotte 2008). These differences are attributed to migrant workers’ exposure to difficult working conditions and work accidents.

This said, the phenomenon of premature ageing is not necessarily a problem confronting all older migrants in the hostels, a point stressed by Jean, a union official:

Not all older migrant workers are confronted with a loss of autonomy at the age of 50 – I know people who are 90 and who are as fit as a fiddle, never been to the doctors. And there are people at 55, afflicted with a respiratory infection, who are in such a state that they look 70 instead of under 60.

What is critical for Jean is the particular sector of employment, not the fact of being an ‘old’ immigrant *per se*. “Some illnesses are quite common, notably everything which is linked to mobility, following work accidents, things like that. Also you find everything connected to respiratory illness for people who were exposed on the building sites.” Thus, as was seen in Chap. 3., specific biographical features – in this case sector of employment – have a bearing on the hostel residents’ situation. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge the prevalence of work accidents among the population of hostel elders. While foreigners make up 6.8% of the workforce in France, they account for 13.1% of work accidents (Alidra et al. 2003). More specifically in the construction industry, where around one in five workers is a foreigner, their work accident rate is 30.2% (*ibid*). At the regional level, a survey by Migrations Santé underlines the serious risk of work accidents among this population. This survey indicates that 39% have already had a work accident, of which 30% continue to feel the after-effects. 17% receive an invalidity pension, and 10.6% are recognised as disabled workers (Migrations Santé 2003).

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<sup>4</sup>Gerontologists have long recognised that measuring age on a chronological basis alone is problematic, insofar as this neglects biological, cognitive and social dimensions of ageing (Bradley 1996; Markides and Mindel 1987).

## 4.2 Inclusion in the French Healthcare System

Given the earlier-than-average incidence of health problems in their medical histories, it is not surprising that many hostel residents have built up strong relationships with their doctors over the years. Maintaining these relationships is one important rationale for hostel residents' back-and-forth trips at retirement. According to a study by the NGO Migrations Santé, an "immense majority" of residents are registered with a *médecin généraliste* (general practitioner<sup>5</sup>; hereafter GP) whom they see several times per year (El Moubaraki and Bitatsi Trachet 2006: 88). This was affirmed by a geriatric consultant at Sonacotra-Adoma: "the residents in general have a great confidence in the French healthcare system, be it their doctors, be it the hospital. They have a great confidence and a great respect." This is echoed in an article by Fanny Schaeffer on older Moroccans in France:

It is understood then that migrants, who have arrived at the age of retirement, have established a privileged relationship with their doctors, and more generally with the entire French health system. Indeed, to any elderly person who is used to certain care, certain medication, there is a risk that treatment will be rejected, if administered suddenly and under different forms and conditions. Moreover, the fear of not being correctly cared for in Morocco, linked to the generalised distrust towards the Moroccan health system and to a well-established medical relationship in France, is an equally important brake on definitive return (Schaeffer 2001: 170; author's translation).

Trust in GPs is evidenced also in residents' care preferences in case of illness. 64% consult their GP as soon as they feel ill, with only 11% opting for Accident and Emergency (A&E) care at hospital, and 10% making the local pharmacy their first port of call (El Moubaraki and Bitatsi Trachet 2006: 88). By contrast, Sandrine and Elvira from the crisis social work team strongly disputed these figures and were adamant that most patients they see from the hostels do not have a GP. The perspective of Sonia, an elder care coordinator in Val d'Oise, was more nuanced in this regard. She identified two broad groups: a majority who receive regular care and monitoring following detection of a chronic illness, and then a marginal minority who "let themselves go completely". It appears to be the latter group who are seen by the crisis social work team.

For those who do benefit from regular monitoring, appointments with doctors and consultants have a strong influence on the timing and duration of their back-and-forth movements. This is the first way in which healthcare has the potential to 'timetable' hostel residents' return trips. Lassana, a Dembanané man who works in Paris and is yet to retire, takes care of banking affairs (i.e. holds a proxy) for three retired former migrants who have returned to the village. They have not completely settled back in the village just yet and still do the *va-et-vient*, primarily for health reasons. They remain domiciled principally in France, they have their pensions paid in France, but they are

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<sup>5</sup> *General practitioner* is the term used in Britain, Ireland and some Commonwealth countries to describe a medical doctor who works in primary care as the first point of contact in the treatment of acute and chronic illnesses. In other countries this type of doctor may be referred to as a *family doctor*, *home doctor* or *family physician*.

often back in the village. In Lassana’s words, “they prefer to not break with their doctors and their medical appointments.”

Nasser, a retired hostel resident from Nador (Morocco), followed a similar strategy, spending on average 9 months of the year back in Morocco. When I spoke to him, he told me that he was due to go back to Morocco very soon, but would be returning to France for a doctor’s appointment on the 9th of October. Similarly, Tariq (66, Tlemcen, Algeria) explained that he was scheduling his next trip to Algeria around his next doctor’s appointment, when he hoped to get the all-clear for a prostate condition for which he had recently undergone surgery. The excerpt from my interview with Issa (70, Tambacounda, Senegal: see Box 4.1) touches upon many of the themes noted immediately above – preference for French medical provision; relationships of trust with staff; and the timetabling effect of medical appointments.

The second way in which healthcare has the potential to ‘timetable’ hostel residents’ return trips concerns eligibility for the state-subsidised health insurance scheme, CMU (*Couverture de maladie universelle*). Geriatrics specialist Dr. Ismail

#### **Box 4.1: Issa’s Views on Healthcare**

AH: Ok, you mentioned earlier the necessity to come to France, for healthcare. So you have had a few health worries recently?

Issa: Yes, because, health problems – we talked about this yesterday – when I’m ill there’s good healthcare in France, they care for you well, there’s no problem, the hospital is good, the drugs are good, there’s everything you need.

AH: Ok, and the quality of care is better here than in Senegal?

Issa: It’s better, it’s not the same, because [the doctors] have the means here, they know the job well, it’s not like in Africa.

AH: Oh really?

Issa: No, because they have the means here, the machines are good, the right drugs, all that, they have the capacity. I find that for care, here is better.

AH: So the clinics and hospitals in Senegal, it’s not very – it’s not a good quality?

Issa: Good quality establishments do exist, but they lack the resources. The only thing is that they lack the resources, the drugs aren’t the same, the equipment, the material isn’t the same.

AH: Ok, yes, it’s clear that in France, it’s a very good system.

Issa: Yes, it’s strong.

AH: (...) And so at this moment in time, you feel in good health?

Issa: Yes, but there’s something not quite right all the same. But tomorrow, even tomorrow, I have an appointment -

AH: Tomorrow? Ah I see.

Issa: – at the Hospital [in town.]



again was informative on this subject. On the medical level, if a person is away from France for more than 6 months, she forfeits the rights she has gained under the CMU to subsidised healthcare.<sup>6</sup> However, provided the individual returns to France within 3 years,<sup>7</sup> the person remains eligible for the CMU, but will need to request a “re-opening” of her rights to the CMU. If a health problem arises during the sometimes lengthy administrative processing of this request, “the person may find themselves without medical cover for two or three months, and as a result they are obliged to pay for everything”, according to Dr. Ismail. The calamitous situation which ensues for those foreigners who unwittingly no longer have rights to the CMU and end up in hospital<sup>8</sup> has prompted the staffing of crisis social workers in many hospitals in order to anticipate any potential financial problems from the outset of treatment, so that patients do not find themselves in massive debt unavoidably.

The availability of medicines prescribed for chronic conditions in places of origin also has a bearing on the frequency and regularity of residents’ back-and-forth trips. This is the third element of medical timetabling. The lack of medicines and drugs available back home was a particular feature of respondents’ accounts. Germain (outreach officer, social and legal rights charity) noted, “Some say that they have all they need back there, but a larger proportion say they are obliged to return, especially for more serious conditions.” When asked whether he would be returning home to his family, Mehdi, a building site foreman from Algeria who was due to retire at the end of the year, replied: “It’s better to head back home at retirement.” I asked him if that’s what he intended to do: “That depends. You never know. With health, you never know. There’s a worry about health. It’s better here, there’s a lack of medication over there. For the immigrants, it’s better to get care here.” Denis, a hostel manager, echoed the sentiments of the residents concerning lack of medication: “The major thing is medicines. Back home there isn’t very much to choose from. Here there’s everything they could need, and furthermore it’s taken care of by social security.”

Among my respondents, this issue was most crucial for those who are diabetic. Kader (70s, Mostaghanem, Algeria) is diabetic, and self-administers a treatment of insulin by injection every day. But he cannot find the type of insulin he needs in his home region in Algeria, which is why he comes back to France. In Dembanané (Senegal), I spoke to a retired former migrant, who showed me his diabetes kit and notebook for recording the four daily readings that he has to take to make sure he is within safe limits. He explained that his doctor in France had advised him to visit

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<sup>6</sup>The condition of “stable residence”, one of the eligibility criteria for the CMU, is fulfilled if the individual resides at least 6 months and 1 day in France per calendar year (see Decree n° 2007-354 of 14 March 2007; see also Grandguillot 2009).

<sup>7</sup>An absence from France exceeding 3 years automatically invalidates one’s residence permit. This document is essential for proving the “regularity” of one’s status in France, a second criteria for eligibility under the CMU. See Grandguillot 2009.

<sup>8</sup>The minimum price for a bed in an Ile-de-France hospital is €700 per day, and can rise to €2000 in specialist cardiology centres.

twice a year for a check-up, but he can only afford to go once a year as the plane tickets are expensive.

What appears crucial is the quantity of medication that an individual can take back home with him, dictating the length of time the individual can be absent (Barou 2007). This leads to the thorny issue of prescription renewals. I asked Hamid (70, Taroudant, Morocco) how often he returns to Morocco now that he is retired. He replied by saying that he continues to return once a year, just as when he was working, but that the duration of his absence from France has increased from his month-long paid holidays to 4 months. He does not go back more than 4 months in a year. The real problem is with his diabetes medication. He cannot get more than 3 months' medication at a time; the doctor cannot sign off the prescription for 6 months like in the past. The current maximum is 3 months. But it's a cruel irony – they have contributed to social security all their lives yet “at retirement, this is the time when you need the medication, but we can only get three months' worth!”

Dr. Ismail explained these changes to the system of renewing prescriptions. When the GP or specialist hands out a prescription, it is valid for 1 month, with the option to renew it for a period of up to 3 months. Before, with chronic illnesses, in order to limit the number of times the patient had to go to the pharmacy, a pharmacist could sign off on a treatment of up to 6 months. This permitted hostel residents to spend longer periods back home, but now the maximum duration is 3 months.

Intriguingly, Dr. Ismail outlined several ruses to bypass these administrative rules. In other words, just as with paperwork, there are various ‘tactics’ which are deployed by hostel residents to circumvent bureaucracy. Firstly, the patient can leave their *Carte vitale*<sup>9</sup> with a complicit pharmacist before going away, collect all the medication he needs prior to his trip, and then every month the pharmacist swipes the card and renews the prescription. This is of course very much in contravention of regulations. A similar ruse can be effected if the holidaying patient leaves his card with a family member or a close friend. They can then collect and send the medication to the patient's address in the place of origin. I should add that none of my respondents admitted to engaging in such practices, and one may assume that they are not particularly widespread. The men I spoke to felt constrained to observe the 3 month prescription renewal limit.

### 4.3 Non-standard Biographies Impede Healthcare

From the above, it is clear that maintaining access to healthcare has a timetabling effect on hostel residents, just as inclusion in administrative systems timetabled residents' presence in France in Chap. 3. The other principal point made in that

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<sup>9</sup>The *carte vitale* is the card which proves an individual's affiliation to one of the health insurance regimes in France. It is a chip-and-pin card, bearing the holder's name, and everyone over the age of 16 is required to present it when undertaking the administrative procedures required to get health costs refunded (see Grandguillot 2009: 40).

chapter was the divergence of hostel residents' biographies from the 'standard' life-course institutionalised by the welfare state, complicating their access to social protection. The same trend applies in the relationship between hostel residents and healthcare providers. Here I will underline three problematic biographical features common to many older hostel residents: premature ageing, absence of family in France to provide informal care, and difficulties of communication with French medical professionals.

**Premature Ageing and Lack of Family Entourage** In Sect. 4.1, premature ageing was identified as a key problem affecting hostel residents. In the hostels, residents are defined as 'older' from 55 years of age, whereas elder care services in France tend to be aimed at a quite different demographic segment, namely the 'oldest old' (85 years and over). Due to women's longer life expectancy, this segment of the population also tends to be disproportionately female. Put simply, elder care providers in France are not accustomed to treating men in their 60s and early 70s, and as a result may overlook the hostels as locales where their intervention is required (see Chap. 7 for further details).

A second way in which hostel residents differ from the customary clientele of elder care services pertains to informal care provided by family members. In France and other European countries there is an institutional assumption that much elder care is provided informally by relatives (Walker and Maltby 1997). Yet for hostel residents the family entourage is most often absent, given that their wives and children reside in countries of origin. By stressing the role of informal care provided by relatives I do not mean to reproduce the culturally-essentialist assumption that ethnic minority families are more involved in caring for elderly relatives (see Shaw 2004 for discussion). Rather I wish to stress that family entourage is a key foundation of care for *all* elderly citizens in France, as it is in other countries typified by demographic ageing and welfare state retrenchment. The absence of relatives able to provide informal care when the hostel residents are in France means that a heavier care burden falls upon the (often overstretched) formal care and health services, with negative consequences on overall care for the men. As Jean, a union official, observed, "the institutional mechanisms in place to deal with ageing are very weak in France, so it's often in this role of proximity and urgent attention where the close family is going to see the person, they are likely to alert the doctor." In a similar vein, when I asked Anne-Marie what distinguished hostel residents from other older patients who are seen by her crisis social work team at a hospital in Paris' northern suburbs, she remarked that—

It's isolation which counts because other old people be they immigrant or not, when they have family our work becomes less difficult because families are a big support for us, they can take steps to help, and especially in this case they are vigilant vis-à-vis the person, and they can warn of danger before it's too late. Whereas for the people who live in the Sonacotra hostels, generally they arrive (at hospital) when really they are not well at all (...) they have no wives or children who are going to tell them "look now, you're not ok, you better go and see the doctor." (Anne-Marie, crisis social work team)

Due to the lack of such *aidants naturels* – an expression signifying the family as the ‘natural’ caregivers – the burden of caring for hostel residents is delegated to state agencies and hostel managers. Yet the hostel management and outside partners do not have the resources to accommodate the residents in their needs to the same extent. The absence of family can create a problem for healthcare professionals who do not have knowledge of the patient’s prior medical- and life- history; more time is required on the part of these services to explain to the patient what their care entails (Sonacotra 2005). More will be said in Chap. 7 about the policies and mechanisms which hostel companies have put in place to compensate for this lack of family vigilance when residents suffer loss of autonomy.

An additional consequence of family separation is that hostel residents are often under an obligation to provide financially for dependents back home (see Chap. 5 for more details), and this obligation to continue sending remittances after retirement age can take precedence over paying one’s own medical bills. “Prevention measures (notably subscribing to health insurance) are considered to be an additional financial charge, acting as a brake on the amount of money sent back home” (Sonacotra 2005: 3; author’s translation). This point was raised by staff at an elder care coordination centre in the *département* of Val d’Oise to the north of Paris. Paying health expenses means sacrificing revenues which otherwise would have been sent to their family, according to Sonia (elder care coordinator, Val d’Oise). As a result, the men go without the care which is appropriate. Research by the Migrations Santé NGO shows the clear impact that reduced income has on the ability of older hostel residents to pay for care, with up to three-quarters of residents aged over 55 in certain hostels experiencing difficulties in paying for medical treatment (Migrations Santé 2003).

**III Communication** The final factor I would like to stress in this section is the potential for communication difficulties between hostel residents and health professionals. This is a significant issue for many hostel residents, with 54% of residents in a Migrations Santé survey unable to read and write French, and 73% judging their language abilities as poor (El Moubaraki and Bitatsi Trachet 2006: 83). Poor mastery of the host country language impacts health in two distinct ways: lack of claims-making due to ignorance of social rights; and mutual incomprehension between hostel residents and medical staff.

Firstly, linguistic difficulties complicate administrative procedures and produce a situation where there is a high degree of ignorance surrounding the services and rights to which the older men are entitled, as was intimated in the previous subsection. Saïd, who represents a migrant association in Paris, argued that the hostel residents do not know about the facilities and support available for elderly people, and so they do not know their rights. To this end, his association are in the process of making a guide for elderly North African immigrants in both French and Arabic. Sonia (elder care coordinator, Val d’Oise) was categorical when I asked about the take-up and use of services provided by the elder care coordination service she works for:

- AH: The hostel residents, do they come here [and make use of your services]?
- Sonia: No, because already there is a lack of awareness. They don't know. Because they are in their bubble, in their hostel, they don't know all the services which we can offer them. (...) So when they experience a loss of autonomy where an association could come and help them, they can't call them because they quite simply just don't know.

The second way in which poor language skills impact on residents' health is the mutual incomprehension which can arise during residents' interactions with care professionals. In a report for Unaf, the Union of Professionals in Accompanied Housing, Omar Hallouche notes:

Certain practitioners have made us aware of their difficulties of communication with this public. They recognise that they do not always have adapted responses in terms of reception, prevention and care. The first obstacle evoked is that of language. In fact, the North African population is in the majority illiterate and does not have good mastery of spoken French (Hallouche 2002: 16; author's translation).

Obviously, hostel residents are not unique in their poor mastery of the host country language and in the outcomes that this has for their healthcare. A large body of literature in public health and gerontology has noted the impact of communication breakdowns between older ethnic minority patients and healthcare professionals (Cook 2010; Ellins and Glasby 2016; Emami and Torres 2005). Two contexts will be examined here: the doctor's surgery, and the hospital.

In a Dutch study of GP interactions with ethnic minority patients, one of the principal findings was the lower incidence of 'solution-seeking' communication between GPs and their ethnic minority patients, with such patients often not seeking to be involved. The authors went on to note that "previous research suggests that patients from non-Western backgrounds seem to have less need for information and decision-making than more Western-oriented patients" (Schouten et al. 2008: 473). Dr. Ismail, who holds drop-in medical advice sessions in several Parisian hostels, would certainly dispute the finding that ethnic minority patients have less need for medical information. During our interview, he commented that if hostel residents do not understand a treatment or feel that it is not working, they come to him to get information in Arabic or Kabyle (the language of Kabylia region in Algeria from which many hostel residents originate: see Sect. 2.1). Most typically, they want to know which kind of specialist to see. In his opinion, poor mutual comprehension between patient and GP is a significant health risk.

Other respondents underlined mutual incomprehension in the hospital environment. Studies have shown that hospital can be a disconcerting environment for any older person since complex pathologies, medical histories and sensory impairments may fall outside a "one-size-fits-all" service delivery culture in hospitals (Parke and Chappell 2010: 115–6). Elderly people's lack of fit is likely only to be magnified when it comes to treating migrant pensioners. This was most evident in the hospital setting where older hostel residents may become disoriented (*dépaycé*) by their

#### **Box 4.2: Language Barriers to Care in the Hospital**

Elvira: When they arrive at hospital, there is all sorts of medical jargon which is, let's say, a little bit complicated even for a French person who is quite well off. So when one doesn't speak the language well and when the people speak to you about illnesses or examinations, similarly it is a moment where they don't understand the meaning.

Anne-Marie: They don't understand the meaning of the care, and furthermore the linguistic barrier means that already – well, when you see your GP, he has known you for a long time, he can take the time to chat with you (...) except that they're not going to get a GP, they're not going to get someone they know. They arrive at A&E, the doctors have fifteen patients all at the same time, they see a medical problem, they're not necessarily going to take the time to chat, and furthermore this immigrant, if he already has a few problems when it comes to speaking French, he is going to have a hard time explaining what is not right with him, and the doctor is not necessarily going to take the time to try and understand everything (...) So yes, I think that when they are – especially at A&E – there are “boxes” for the people who are most serious, and then there is a room where all the stretchers are. So you are in the room, everyone is lying on their side like this, and there are carers who are going in all directions. Staff are moving in all directions, so it's definitely a bit scary as well, and then you have the impression as well that you are being abandoned because you are there to be cared for and (...) they keep you waiting until the results are ready, and then return three hours later to see how you are.

experiences in such a highly medicalised context, “parachuted into a care system which operates at high speed”, as Elvira and Anne-Marie, crisis social workers at a hospital frequented by some of my respondents, discussed in some detail (Box 4.2).

Nonetheless, one must be careful not to interpret such findings in a culturally-essentialist perspective, as the ‘cultural competence’ model of elder care too often reproduces (Emami and Torres 2005). The cultural competence model especially prioritises difficulties in ‘host’ country language acquisition as the principal source of exclusion in healthcare, identifying the patient as “‘deviant’ for not being able to adapt to Western culture and language” (Brotman 2003:225). As a growing body of research shows, mis-communications and conflicts between ethnic minority patients’ explanations of illness and the bio-medical view of the dominant Western healthcare model can be better understood by focusing on other underlying factors or commonalities which elderly ethnic minority patients experience (Emami and Torres 2005; Torres 2015). One important factor to consider is migration history, with late-in-life migrants being at risk of a number of disruptive stresses (Emami and Torres 2005). For more established migrant populations who moved to host countries in early adulthood, the great diversity of ageing migrants points in favour of an intersectional approach combining multiple axes of social differentiation

(Torres 2015), such as socio-economic status, gender, the presence or otherwise of family support, as well as country-of-origin factors such as rural or urban milieu. It is to these country-of-origin factors which I now turn.

#### 4.4 Healthcare Provision in Countries of Origin

The literature on ageing migrants has primarily analysed how such individuals engage with health systems in countries of immigration: by contrast, very little is known about their recourse to healthcare provision in countries of origin, with the work of Sun (2014) being one notable exception. Nonetheless, for the hostel residents, places of origin in North and West Africa do offer certain advantages when it comes to healthcare. Dental care, eyesight and hearing are three health needs where the country of origin is the preferred place of treatment. Data made available to me by the Migrations Santé NGO show that in general residents prefer to return home for dental care, where it is cheaper. A study by Paul and Berrat found that hostel residents perceived dental, visual and hearing problems as of minimal importance and would only take recourse to specialist care if the trouble became really handicapping, preferably in the country of origin (Paul and Berrat 2005). This excerpt from an interview with Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania), is indicative of the financial logic behind this choice:

In Africa it is less expensive, and they say that here [in France] there are guarantees etc, but over there also it's still very good, you know. (...) Because I heard that in Dakar, for the dentist, my friend he went to see the dentist, it cost €150. €150, but here [in France] another guy I know went to the dentist, and he paid almost €1000 (...) Yes, €1000, but it's over there where [the care is] more solid, where it is better.

Another aspect which merits attention is the possibility of recourse to more traditional remedies in places of origin when 'Western' medicine is not able to deliver a cure. Dr. Slimane, a Paris-based psychiatrist, remarked upon the "need to go and see the repairers of disorder, the wise men, the healers back home." Although healthcare professionals in France may view such practices with incomprehension, traditional medicine nonetheless exercises an attraction for some hostel residents. Once again, Ibrahima's comments are insightful, when he alludes to 'African' treatments:

Last year I fell ill too, but it was because of fatigue, bad fatigue. Well it was [my GP] who sent me to hospital, at the hospital they did x-rays, other [tests]. All that, for a year, but there was nothing, they found nothing. But I knew already – I've been around, I know what life's about – it was simply fatigue. So I returned to Africa, and took treatments in Africa, medicine – African treatments, you know, it's very good (...) I'm much better now (Ibrahima, 59, Gorgol, Mauritania).

A further advantage of a return home is the more propitious climate which is found on the other side of the Mediterranean. This tallies with studies on amenity migration which show that the attraction of climate is the primary factor in the



decision to spend all or part of the year in destinations such as the Mediterranean for Northern European retirees and the ‘sunbelt’ of the southern United States for North American pensioners (see Hogan 1987; King et al. 2000; Smith and House 2006). As regards return at retirement, research by Martin Klinthäll in Sweden has found a correlation between temperate climate in the place of origin and propensity to return at retirement, with relatively high return rates for retired labour migrants going back to Greece and Italy (Klinthäll 2006: 168). In the context of return migration to Jamaica, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope notes that:

Return migrants of all types expect to obtain standards of living which are equal to, or higher than, those experienced abroad. This is usually achievable in Jamaica, and one of the more positive aspects of the migrants’ experiences relate[s] to the pleasant lifestyles which they enjoy on return. Likewise, conditions are generally conducive to good health, primarily on account of favourable climatic conditions (1999: 195).

I had expected to hear similar stories from my respondents, but the evidence was not so straightforward. In France I asked retirees in the hostels about whether climate was a factor in their return practices. Rather than being a positive reason for return, this generally entered into their planning insofar as certain very warm or wet periods should be avoided. As Amadi (65, Matam, Senegal) commented, it is difficult to adapt to the very hot climate which is experienced in Senegal between March and August – “you’re going to suffer”. A Moroccan resident I spoke to intended to return to Morocco in September, avoiding August when it is too hot for him: he had recently undergone an operation for an intestinal problem and reasoned that the heat would not be good for his health. West African hostel residents tended to avoid the very hot and humid rainy season, preferring to return when it is cooler, starting in October. To the question ‘Did you use to leave in winter or in summer, or did it vary?’ Djimé, speaking from Dembanané (Senegal), replied:

No, always in winter, the climate is really agreeable at that time – well, as you see, when you’re used to Europe, and when you come here during the heat it’s very difficult and complicated. But in winter we are at ease.

For a small selection of health needs – dental care, eyesight, and hearing – the place of origin is perceived as being a preferential source of care. In general however, for most conditions, French healthcare is preferred and in some cases obligatory, since treatment for some conditions is not – or only rarely – available in the place of origin. Such illnesses include diabetes, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s (Unaf0 2006), as well as conditions requiring kidney dialysis. All older hostel residents who return home periodically “live in fear of not being able to get cared for in the country of origin in case of chronic illness” (Hallouche 2002: 19; author’s translation). This is especially the case for those whose families live in rural regions back home. As Jacques Barou notes, “there are problems in finding medication, a GP and in particular specialists, in rural areas essentially” (Barou 2007: 1; author’s translation). This was further stressed by Anne-Marie (crisis social worker):

If they have for example diabetes, and what is more with their old age, and the pathologies associated with it – how are they going to get cared for at home? Everything depends on where you live. But if you’re not in a big city, if you find yourself in some village in the

countryside, to have access to a doctor, to insulin, anything, it's complicated. This they are well aware of, you know.

Furthermore, as noted in Chap. 3, in many North and West African countries national social security systems are restricted to employees in the formal wage-earning sector. As a result, few rural inhabitants are covered and healthcare expenses incurred back home are usually not reimbursed, a point forcefully made by Djimé (Dembancané, Senegal) when I asked how his health was:

Yes I'm still in good health, yes there are some who return to France to get cared for, for health problems, yes, because (...) if you fall ill here, well, the prescription, you pay the prescription and you pay it all, because there are no reimbursements. [AH: So it's not like in France, with social security?] It's not like in France, so people if they fall ill they prefer to go and get cared for in France, with social security. Even if they pay, they pay less, they pay the balance after insurance (...) Fortunately I haven't reached that stage, for the time being I look after my health. But death will come one day! (laughs)

In summary, then, the cost of care back home and the impossibility of being reimbursed for one's health expenses when away from France are two major motivations for doing the *va-et-vient*. A third motivation stems from residents' concerns over the quality of treatment for chronic, non-emergency care back home, and the availability of medicines.

Nonetheless, this raises a key question: what are the impacts on health of the *va-et-vient* itself? Can it be considered a sound healthcare strategy? I asked this of all the healthcare professionals I interviewed, and opinions were mixed. Conflicting messages also emerge from the literature on the subject. A minority answered in the affirmative: "The regular return trip is the best way to care for oneself." (Barou 2007: 1; author's translation). Similarly, in response to my question whether the *va-et-vient* could be considered as a healthcare strategy, Béatrice (health advisor, migrant welfare association), answered:

Yes [emphatic], for two reasons. Some treatments cost less back home. Teeth and glasses. That costs a lot here, it costs much less back home. So they go home for these treatments. There's also the fact that they need to return home, to see the country, to see their wife, to see the children and grandchildren – that helps their morale. And then also when they go, they can see their traditional doctors. So, yes, it's easier – they return home, they can see their traditional doctor, the *marabout*, etc, so it is part of a healthcare strategy, yes, both medical and psychological.

Sonia (elder care coordinator, Val d'Oise) was less optimistic however. The fact that treatments are supposed to be rigorously adhered to over the long term, and yet patients can only take with them a month's (or maximum 3 months') worth of prescribed medication, means that the mobile hostel residents "return in an even more deteriorated state than before". She continued:

It's not really a healthcare strategy; I would say that for some it might be a healthcare strategy because it is true that the Mediterranean climate is much more favourable than here. Of course, there are some doctors who say "go to the Mediterranean, you'll feel much better", for their rheumatism, and things like that, OK. But when they take just one month of treatment and then afterwards they have no more drugs, and they stay there two or three months. So they're going to go without treatment for two or three months, and they then return in an even more catastrophic state. It's not at all a good strategy, no.

## 4.5 Conclusion

As was shown at the start of this chapter, for some respondents being in *good* health was a prerequisite for entry into France, given the rigorous recruitment procedures which selected migrants on the basis of physical strength and conditioning. Health *orders* migration, then, but the relationship works in the reverse direction too: the long-term consequences of being a migrant worker also impact (negatively) upon health. What is particular about older hostel residents is not the range of conditions from which they suffer. Rather, they diverge from the wider elderly population insofar as their health problems manifest themselves earlier. The absence of family members able to provide informal care also constitutes a particular element of their biographies which complicates care arrangements. As in the previous chapter, two particular aspects which lead to a timetabled presence in France deserve underlining, namely hostel residents' non-standard biographies, and the temporal and territorial demands of inclusion in social systems – in this case the healthcare system. As was argued in the previous chapter, social systems theory appears best placed to account for these phenomena.

Hostel residents' long-term health needs lead to strong relationships of trust with medical professionals, and explain their confidence in the superiority of the services available in France, both of which are powerful rationales for doing the *va-et-vient*. Various factors have the result of 'timetabling' this back-and-forth mobility, including doctors' appointments; minimum residence periods to be eligible for state-subsidised medical insurance (CMU); and the limited amount of medication which GPs can prescribe. Thus, at retirement, health again *orders* migration to France, but this time it is the fact of *poor* health and the availability of subsidised – and, importantly, better quality – treatment in France which motivates these movements. Finally, in the section immediately above, it was noted that the *va-et-vient* for healthcare reasons may also have a problematic bearing on the men's health.

This chapter has focused primarily on physical health, but to conclude some words need to be said about mental health. As Leavey and Eliacin (2013) note, the topic of mental health has been largely neglected in the literature on return migration (see also Barrett and Mosca 2013). While physical ill health tends to be a gradually emerging consequence of the hard working conditions that the men have known throughout their careers, the issue of mental health is more commonly associated with the abrupt and sudden switch to retirement.<sup>10</sup> As was discussed in Chap. 3, the transition to retirement is a critical juncture when the men need to find a replacement for what previously constituted their principal identity and reason for being in France, namely work. In the epigraph to that chapter, it was suggested that an identity based on 'papers', and the entitlements to social protection which they prove, can compensate for the loss of the identity of 'worker' which occurs at retirement. More

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<sup>10</sup>As Ben Jelloun (1977) records, mental health issues were also a feature of the lives of younger migrant workers in France.

problematically, however, an alternative identity based on ill-health is discerned here whereby illness plays this compensatory role, functioning as a justification to ‘left behind’ relatives for non-return. As Jacques Barou comments, “the medical argument [to stay in France] often hides other forms of reticence to return” (Barou 2007: 1; author’s translation).

Thus, over the long run, the health-migration *order* may become a health-migration *disorder*, a mental health issue. For some residents, physical pain – from a work accident, for example – may not (or no longer) be severe, but there is a tendency on the part of the individual to focus on the trauma of the injury, which is experienced as a rupture: “an initial stage in the process of marginalisation and exclusion” in society (Ballain 1992: 23; author’s translation). In this way, the long term consequences of physical injury are mental and social. Although respondents, as noted, were wary of discussing mental health issues directly, the constant justifications I heard for remaining in or returning to France on health grounds can be interpreted in this way. For those individuals, their self-image has shifted from the ideal of the young, active worker to the old, worn-out ‘*malade*’ [sick person, invalid], who is ‘paralysed’ in France.

Some of my respondents used the debated term ‘sinistrosis’ to describe this shift in identity. This term, which has not translated into anglophone medical terminology, was initially developed by the French academic psychiatrist Edouard Brissaud in the early-twentieth century to describe the symptoms of fatigue, nightmares and diffuse pain (with no neurological basis) among employees who refused to return to work after a work accident (Brissaud 1908). However, in the context of new financial products such as employer liability insurance, sinistrosis soon came to be used by forensic psychiatrists as a pejorative diagnosis to undermine workers’ claims of compensation for such accidents, by implying that a worker’s psychological distress was in fact simulated (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). By the 1950s and 1960s, this use of the term had come to be applied uniquely to migrant workers (Sayad 1999), a manifestation of racism which was soon condemned within the psychiatric profession, effectively consigning the term to history (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Nonetheless, Sayad’s writings on sinistrosis<sup>11</sup> have ensured its place in critical scholarship on French immigration history, and it was in this context that a number of my respondents mentioned it. From these discussions, it seems that the term is being adapted in nuanced ways – no longer a justification for financial compensation or refusal to return to work, but rather a justification not to return to one’s family and one’s place of origin, or what I would label ‘exile sinistrosis’. In our interview, Jean, a union official, elaborated on his understanding of the term:

A form of withdrawal into illness, and into the symptoms of illness, in the sense that – and this is a hypothesis which would greatly benefit from discussion – that perhaps illness becomes for some of these people the justification for the presence here, and notably in relation to their family; so, as a result there is a form of withdrawal, of brooding, which – to objective elements of problematic health – are added psychological elements which mean that the person can have a tendency to withdraw into a situation of ‘sick person’ or to con-

<sup>11</sup> See Sayad (1999) ‘La maladie, la souffrance et le corps’, in *La Double Absence*. Paris: Seuil.

sider themselves above all as a sick person and with this label to construct a health of adversity [*une santé de malheur*] (...) I have observed this quite strongly and have always referred it to this problem of identity for these people. Who am I? – I am a sick person. I was a worker, so I was justified to be here; I am a sick person so I'm justified to be here.

That this justification is directed first and foremost at family members remaining behind in places of origin speaks volumes for the complex family relations which have crystallised over the long years of prolonged absence. For some respondents, the family is a source of moral support; for others the family is a source of conflicts from which they take refuge in the hostel. These ideas will be explored in the following chapter.

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## Chapter 5

# Return to Sender: Remittances, Communication and Family Conflict



*When I have my family on the telephone, they ask for money. What money? Am I supposed to steal it? [Interviewer: Your children, do they understand the difficulties you have, or are they not aware of the situation?] They know, they know. But they are demanding (...) I have to send them cash, buy them things, look after my own health. I don't know which way to turn.*

Excerpt from the film, *Un jour, je repartirai...*, a documentary film about older hostel residents directed by Chantal Richard 2002 [author's translation]

Chapters 3 and 4 focused on the French context of the hostel residents' lives. The current chapter and the one which follows it will connect to the context of origin. In this present chapter I will discuss the relationships which these 'geographically single' men have with their 'left behind' families, before proceeding in Chap. 6 to the question of hometown development initiatives which some hostel residents engage in.

Turning to family first, I have already noted the extent to which the biographical particularity of being geographically single is implicated in hostel residents' difficult passage to retirement and the dilemma they face regarding return, notably as regards their reduced access to sources of informal care within their families. The present chapter shows how certain unexpected developments in transnational family relationships also influence the mobility of the older hostel residents and their return decision-making after retirement. These developments are grouped under three themes:

- Continued dependency on remittances after the retirement of the male breadwinner in France;
- Departures from normative family roles which give rise to gendered and generational conflicts;
- Advances in communication technologies which amplify this dependency and conflict.

In what follows, I will show that while a culture of male emigration emerged in places of origin which initially reinforced gendered family structures, for some hostel residents the spectre of continued family separation beyond retirement ends

up disrupting such patriarchal norms, leading to greater autonomy for left behind wives. Thus, the term 'left behind' describes a heterogenous range of situations and is not necessarily always connoted with negative outcomes for non-migrant kin, as other authors have also found (Jónsson 2011; Lenoël 2017; Mondain and Diagne 2013). However, before analysing these developments further, it will be helpful to clarify the importance of remittances for hostel residents and their left behind relatives, and to provide information on how they are sent and spent.

## 5.1 Breadwinner Migrants: Remittance Sending as a Way of Life

As noted in Chap. 2, the hostel residents emigrated to France to financially support their parents and/or young families as male providers, or what Kitiarsa (2009) labels 'breadwinner' migrants. Remittance sending has thus constituted a way of life since the hostel residents first arrived in France (Barou 2001; Gallou 2005). From the early 1970s, surveys of remittance sending showed that migrant workers in France were poorly paid but saved hard, with hostel residents of all nationalities remitting around a quarter of their income (Les Echos 1971; Ginesy-Galano 1984). A culture of breadwinner migration developed readily in North and West African sending regions where society is structured according to patriarchal norms, and in which men achieve social status by accumulating wealth and taking sole responsibility for household material needs (Bourdieu 1965; Manchuelle 1997; Mondain and Diagne 2013).

It is important to acknowledge that those left behind are not necessarily equal in their access to remittances and that one may distinguish a certain hierarchy of entitlement, which is in part religiously mandated in Muslim North and West Africa. In Islamic family law, husbands are enjoined to provide financially for their wives (*nafaqa*) but, especially in the early years of emigration, wives rarely receive or make decisions concerning remittances. Instead remittances are directed first and foremost to fathers or mothers, or if they are deceased, to brothers or sisters (Bourqia et al. 2007). Such filial devotion is particularly commended in Islam. However over time, as Audrey Lenoël (2017) has found, left behind wives may gain in authority and responsibility, particularly if they no longer have to care for their husbands' (now-deceased) parents, enabling them to establish a separate nuclear household with their children. Nonetheless, such family dynamics are complex and left behind parents or siblings may strongly resist a wife's autonomous tendencies (Lenoël 2017).

In interviews, my respondents highlighted the 'pressures' they faced to provide for the needs of these different constituencies. Waly (75, from Kayès in Mali) was quick to highlight the differences between his simple solo lifestyle in France and the broad responsibilities he shouldered as household head vis-à-vis his family in Mali.

The role of breadwinner was so fundamental to my respondents' self-understanding that they continued to identify with it despite having retired, as Waly notes:

We live in this solitude, but over there [Mali], there's more responsibility. Here [in France] we just have to take care of ourselves, our health etc, but over there, you're the dad, you're the head of the family who must look after everyone, who must take care of all sorts of problems. (Waly, 75, Kayès, Mali)

While initially a means to support left behind relatives in material and economic terms, remittances have also served a social and psychological function for those earning and sending this money. This echoes an insight from Jørgen Carling (2014) who urges researchers to view remittances holistically as *compound* transactions, bound up both with material concerns and the emotional content of social relations. Studies of hostel residents have depicted remittance sending as a form of atonement for absence (Aggoun 2006; Hmed 2006), and this is amply demonstrated by the asceticism of the hostel residents' lives. An ascetic existence was worn as a badge of honour by some whom I spoke to, and other scholars have noted the social status and respect associated with remittance sending, fostering psychological well-being (Riak Akuei 2005). Lindley (2009: 1327) writes that 'remitting can be a source of familial and cultural reaffirmation... being able to support relatives can make a painful separation seem more worthwhile.' One respondent, Hamid (70, Taroudant, Morocco), described how he is responsible financially for his whole family, even the oldest children. Indeed he reported – with some pride – giving money to his sisters and brothers, for weddings, feast days and festivities. "It does good. It's important to give to one's relatives." Anne-Marie, a crisis social worker, noted:

the only thing which they still have is the pride of being able to send something to their families over there and to be autonomous here in France (...) They are always very happy when we go to see them in their rooms, they are always happy to say how many children they have, how much they send each month.

Importantly, the system of hostel accommodation has facilitated and institutionalised these remittance sending practices. As was argued in Chap. 2, one of the state's primary aims in building low-rent hostels was to limit family reunification by facilitating high levels of remittances. This would benefit workers' families more than would have been the case had the latter come to live in France, where the cost of living was far more expensive (Viet 1999). Of course, it was never envisaged that the hostels would continue to provide housing for the same migrants half a century later, and indeed a large proportion long ago left the hostels – either to return home or to reunify in France with their families (see Chap. 1). Nonetheless the current long-term residents, now retired or approaching retirement, have internalised this founding logic of the hostels, by continuing to send remittances. The ones who remain, "the people who haven't abandoned the concept of the hostel" as one senior civil servant put it to me, "are those who have had no personal project other than to remain in a situation of sending money back home." In other words, the older hostel residents are institutionalised in this remittance-sending logic, bearing out Hmed's (2006) contention that the hostels represent a form of 'total institution' (see Sect. 2.4).

**Contemporary Remittance Sending Practices** A comparison with the above-mentioned remittance surveys from the 1970s shows a similar proportion of income remitted by current hostel residents (Bitatsi Trachet and El Moubaraki 2006). My own observations support this. In most of my interviews I asked respondents if they would mind telling me how much they remitted each month. To be sure, not everyone felt comfortable disclosing this type of information given its sensitive nature.<sup>1</sup> However, for those willing to divulge such details, the sums ranged from 25 to 40% of monthly income, depending on the particular outgoings incurred each month. Such proportions are in line with the findings of a study conducted by the Moroccan Government in 2005, which showed that less educated Moroccans aged 40–65 are likely to remit larger sums (Berrada 2009). As the monthly income for most of my respondents was in the range of €600–€1000, typical sums remitted are €150–€250 per month, but this could rise to €400 in auspicious or urgent circumstances.

While the proportion of income remitted today is comparable with the sums sent in the 1970s, the means of sending money have evolved over time. Initially, the standard method in the past was via postal order (*mandat*). In certain cases the ubiquity of this method prompted the construction of post offices in migrants' home villages. However, costly transfer fees and lengthy delays in delivery led to the progressive abandonment of postal methods during the 1980s in favour of much faster transfer services such as Moneygram and Western Union (Tall 2004). While quicker, these services also charge substantial fees and commissions (Hamel 2009). As a result, even in this age of electronic transfers, one should not ignore the continued significance of informal practices, such as carrying cash in hand luggage when travelling home, or entrusting money to relatives or friends who are travelling, with instructions as to who should receive it. I observed such informal practices on several occasions, and indeed was asked to carry money for one of my respondents during my trip to Senegal. This vital cash-handling function is of course a further impetus for the back-and-forth visits which the older hostel residents undertake.

**How Remittances Are Spent** As mentioned, many residents felt uncomfortable disclosing their family finances. Among those who were less reluctant, however, the case of Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania) was typical. A kitchen porter at a restaurant near Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris, he readily supplied a very detailed breakdown of his monthly expenses, both in France and Mauritania. He works 35 hours per week, and earns the minimum wage, giving an income of just under €1050 a month (net) in 2009 when I interviewed him. His monthly expenses in France are detailed in Table 5.1.

Taking his monthly outgoings of €564 away from his net income of €1050, what remains is a sum of €486. This tallies with what he remits every month: a minimum of €250, occasionally rising to €400. Ibrahima insisted that “€250 is good in Mauritania.” He has sixteen family members in his charge, including his mother- and father-in-law. Every month, his family's grocery bill in Mauritania amounts to

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<sup>1</sup> During my fieldwork in Dembanané (Senegal), I was formally requested by the town's deputy-mayor not to ask my respondents this question.

**Table 5.1** Ibrahima's average monthly outgoings in France

ITEM OF EXPENDITURE	COST(€)
Rent (net of APL housing benefit)	216
Groceries	150
Public transport: travel pass	90
Private health insurance	50
Telephone: landline rental	20
Hometown association: dues	30
Trades union: dues	8
Total expenses	€ 564

over €100, purchased from the local co-operative in his village. On top of this, there are regular expenses which he must cover, such as medical bills, (grand)children's schooling, property upkeep, and agricultural equipment.

Providing for the subsistence needs of the extended family is the bare minimum which is expected. The aspiration is that migrant earnings will also permit the accumulation of sufficient capital to bring about a change in the social status of the family in the country of origin. The purchase, construction or improvement of the family home is one such opportunity for visibly improved status, and was identified as one of the benefits of emigration by almost all respondents (see also Sect. 6.2). Only one of my respondents mentioned that his family lived in rented accommodation: the others were all home owners. Home ownership and/or improvement is not just a means of demonstrating social mobility to one's neighbours: for some respondents, it was a motivational aid to inspire their children to work hard in the future, a visible manifestation of "what *papa* has been able to do, what his work has achieved, he worked hard" (Ibrahima, 59, Gorgol, Mauritania).

There is nothing particularly novel about these resource allocation decisions: the aspiration to buy or build a home in the community of origin has been recorded in many studies across different historical periods (for examples, see King 1986; Obeng-Odoom 2010; Parreñas 2005; Wyman 1993). What is perhaps "innovative" (Cerese 1974: 261) is that migrants are investing in property not only for their families' needs, but also for rental purposes, thereby diversifying once again the family's income streams. This explains in part the rapid growth of regional urban centres in prominent migrant sending areas of North and West Africa, as documented by other authors (Berriane and Hopfinger 1992; Lacroix 2005; Quiminal 2002). Rental investment was also mentioned in my own data. Abdoulaye (44, Tambacounda, Senegal) has built a large house for his family in Bakel, Senegal, but he has also started building a second house of three storeys in Dakar, which he plans to rent out. This rent will bolster his French pension when he comes to retire. According to Abdoulaye, many Senegalese emigrants have adopted this real-estate strategy for their retirement. Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania) likewise has built two houses in his home village, as well as a house in Dakar, which he currently rents to tenants. He also has ambitions to build a second rental property in Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital.

While house-building was identified as important by almost all respondents – North African and West African alike – other uses of remittances seem to be favoured

by one group but not by the other. For example, many West Africans with whom I spoke gave considerable priority to agriculture. Idrissa (Dembancané, Senegal) explained that since farming helps to feed the family, much remittance money is spent in this domain. Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania), for example, had imminent plans to travel to Belgium to complete the purchase of a tractor, which he will then ship to Mauritania. Issa's goals were more modest:

Before, I used to work but I didn't save much, because back home there is the big household, but only me to provide for them, for food, for medicine if someone is ill. When I was able to save, I invested in livestock. (Issa, 70, Tambacounda, Senegal)

By contrast, very few North African respondents reported devoting remittances to agriculture, consistent with other literature on migration and development in Morocco (see de Haas 2006 for discussion). What was far more important to Moroccan and Algerian respondents was the education of children, especially a university education. Interestingly, the respondents who stressed education in their accounts were committed to a higher education both for their daughters and their sons, whereas other studies of remittance use in North Africa have found that due to cultural reasons sons are more likely to benefit from remittances for post-primary education (Bensaïd and Ibourk 2008). Given the purposive rather than representative nature of the respondent sample, my findings here may not be indicative of wider trends. Be that as it may, what emerged repeatedly in several of my interviews was the idea that hostel residents had been 'working for the next generation', a finding also underlined in a report about the impact of remittances in Morocco (Bensaïd and Ibourk 2008):

We didn't get to go to school. We mustn't leave our children like that, without education. (Hamid, 70, Taroudant, Morocco)

I have children. They study – because I didn't have the chance to pursue my studies. It was a question of poverty or bad luck, because my parents died when I was young. (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco)

For Saleem and Hamid, giving their children the gift of a good education is important precisely because it was something which had been denied them in their youth. It is also important insofar as it may determine the capacity of children to take on the responsibility of providing for the household once the father retires in France, with consequences for return decision-making as will be shown below. Conversely, for my West African respondents, education was not highlighted as a goal for individual families, but rather as a communal endeavour, hence the substantial collective remittances devoted to school-building projects in the villages of several of my respondents. The same applies to health clinics and other types of infrastructure benefiting local communities (see Chap. 6 for details). While collective approaches to such provision also exist in Morocco – the efforts of the NGO *Migrations et Développement* are one example (Lacroix 2005) – amongst my respondents the tendency was for the onus to lie with individual migrants (see Sect. 6.3).

In summary, remittances sustain the lives of those remaining back home, and satisfy their basic subsistence needs. Be it on an individual family basis, as in North Africa, or on a wider community basis, as in West Africa, these remittances constitute a social safety net (*protection sociale*) ensuring stability and minimising risk to family income. This analogy with the welfare state was made time and again by respondents. However, in addition to the subsistence aspect, remittances also function to bolster esteem and status. This can be seen in the houses which migrant families build and improve, as well as investments in agriculture and education for children. What is perhaps less clear is the relevance of the above to the central issue interrogated in this book, namely return migration decision-making at retirement. It was argued in this first section that the hostel has in fact institutionalised remittance sending practices. It was also hinted that education and the readiness of children to take on household responsibilities may have a bearing on whether hostel residents are able to return. Following retirement, a certain dependency on the remittances sent by these ageing breadwinners may persist, as will be discussed in the next section.

## 5.2 Continued Dependency on Remittances Past Retirement

Chapter 1 outlined economic theories of migration which predict return at retirement for North and West African hostel residents whose families have remained behind in the country of origin. Neo-classical economists argue that at retirement wage differentials between home and host countries no longer influence migration decision-making: instead what is important is the purchasing power of the migrant's pension, which in most cases is fully transferable thanks to the bilateral social security agreements which operate between many labour-exporting and importing countries (de Coulon and Wolff 2006; Klinthäll 2006). The calculation in most instances is a 'no-brainer', since costs of living tend to be far lower in migrants' home countries, offsetting any potential losses in currency exchange fees which may accrue if the pension is transferred home. Return home is the rational choice.

For some respondents the neo-classical logic remains valid. Dr. Ismail, an Algerian geriatrics specialist who runs a free health advice service in several Parisian hostels, argued that a monthly pension of €200 or €300 was sufficient for an older couple living in Algeria. Issa (70, Tambacounda, Senegal) felt that with €500 each month one could live very comfortably in Senegal. Djimé (Dembancané, Senegal) agreed:

When you are a pensioner [here in Senegal], you live comfortably, you're not the same as those who don't have any resources, who don't have a pension. It's not the same life. Really, when you are a pensioner, you can live better here.

However, the lack of definitive return at retirement by hostel residents calls into question these neo-classical tenets. Perceptions of individual wealth must be tempered by the size of the family in the pensioner's charge. For these respondents, it



does not make sense to talk of individual economic decision-making. Rather, it is the new economics of labour migration (NELM) approach which has primacy. In this theoretical paradigm pioneered by Oded Stark and colleagues, retirement implies the end of the migration project and subsequent return home to rejoin children, who take on the responsibility for the household (Stark 1991). For some hostel residents, retirement means that there is less of an obligation to send remittances:

Now it's up to them to get by. (Fouad, 60s, Constantine, Algeria)

The other children can manage for themselves. It's normal. (Mehdi, 64, Chlef, Algeria)

I'm going to rest and enjoy my retirement: my kids will do the work. (Habib, 65, Oran, Algeria)

These three testimonies support the NELM assertion that an inter-generational transfer of responsibility in providing for the needs of the family occurs when the migrant breadwinner retires. Yet this transfer of responsibility does not necessarily lead to definitive return. In these three cases, the men have remained in France, but their non-return is not presented as an economic issue. Instead, it is justified on health grounds, as was elaborated in Chap. 4.

For other respondents, however, the NELM logic becomes distorted and the assumption of transferring household responsibility to adult children is called into question. In these cases, the duty to provide for a significant number of dependents after retirement weighs heavily. Respondents often enumerated the many family members remaining in their financial charge past retirement. 70-year-old Issa (Tambacounda, Senegal) for example still has seven children living at home, some of whom are still at school. Hadyatou (Dembancané, Senegal), although in his 70s, has several children still at school, some at primary level. Further financial difficulties arise when respondents' children start their own families, but without the income from regular employment to satisfy the new needs which result, due to the difficult job market for young adults in many parts of North and West Africa. As a consequence, new additions to the family were not always perceived as an unqualified source of joy for grandfathers in France. This was captured very well by Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco):

90% of us are trapped in this situation (...) So we – excuse my language – but we become slaves, of ourselves. Because when you have a child and that child gets married, you have to work for the grandchildren too (...) we have to provide for the grandchild, and for me the grandchild ... well, it's a bit much.

The education of children was identified as key, in particular by North African respondents. Dr. Ismail, a geriatrics specialist working with hostel residents in Paris, was adamant that continued family dependency was inversely related to the education level of the children: "Those who have invested in their children's education reap the benefits". By 'benefits' uppermost in my respondents' eyes was finding well-paid employment. However, it is important to note that investing in children's education has not always paid off, as the high graduate unemployment rate in countries like Morocco attests (de Haas and Fokkema 2010). Some of my respondents mentioned these dashed hopes. However Mehdi (64, Chlef, Algeria) had a more positive story to tell. Of his eight children (aged 26–45), five passed the *Baccalauréat*

school leaving certificate: his eldest son is an engineer, and two other children are high school teachers (Mehdi, 64, Chlef, Algeria). All of them speak French very well. He never forced them to study, but he always encouraged them. “If they passed the *Baccalauréat*, I would buy them a present.” Yet he remarked that if they had come to France they would not have been able to get a job: in Mehdi’s view there are no jobs for the children of immigrants, because of job market discrimination. This rationale for not undertaking family reunification also emerges in other research (e.g. de Haas and Fokkema 2010).

Not all emigrant fathers have been as diligent as Mehdi, according to Lahcen who works for a rural development NGO in Taroudant Province, Morocco: ‘one of the major sins committed by the retired hostel residents [is that] they haven’t pushed their kids to work. The son is 40 years old but does nothing ... he stays at home all day watching television, and asks for some pocket money to go buy a coffee.’ Of course, this is not to say that that children’s academic success is solely down to fatherly influence: regardless of the migrant breadwinner’s preferences, education may not be prioritised by adult relatives left behind. Furthermore, those expecting to join their father in France at some point may see no point in applying themselves academically. The steady income of remittances may act as a disincentive, leading to freeloading behaviour (*comportements de rente*; see Bourqia et al. 2007).<sup>2</sup> Moussa (55, Mali) viewed such attitudes as part of a broader materialism among left behind relatives, evidenced by the requests for goods such as mobile phones, televisions and home entertainment systems which hostel residents are expected to bring as presents when they return. Moussa labelled this an “inculcated mentality of dependence-assistance (...) The traditional type of society is in the course of being destroyed, transformed into a society of assistance and dependence... a parachuted comfort” (Moussa, Mali).

In sum, the passage to retirement does not always reduce the burden of financial dependency of left behind family members. Hostel residents in this situation have not reckoned on continued dependency past retirement. Most crucially, because of this persistent family dependency on their earnings, some of my respondents chose to remain in France to receive social security benefits, which helped to finance their families’ outgoings. As was noted in Chap. 3, hostel residents over the age of 65 in receipt of modest pensions are eligible for the *Allocation de solidarité aux personnes âgées* (ASPA), colloquially known as the *minimum vieillesse*, a means-tested non-contributory benefit which tops up the state-administered pension to a minimum old-age income, set at €708.95 per month in 2010 when this research was completed. Receiving this benefit enables the family to attain solvency, but only at the cost of the hostel resident residing in France for at least 6 months per year in order to satisfy the residential conditions of eligibility. It is to be underlined that in no way is recourse to the *minimum vieillesse* a manifestation of individualistic neo-classical behaviour: the extra money is channelled to family dependents, not retained by the

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<sup>2</sup>Against this view, de Haas (2006: 571) found that international migrant households in the Todgha Valley (south-eastern Morocco) were not “passively relying” on remittances and did not withdraw from local economic activities.

migrants for personal consumption. It is also to be underlined that receiving the *minimum vieillesse* was more a feature of North African narratives. However, a few West Africans admitted claiming it:

Now I am old, I'm not able to work. At retirement what I earn isn't enough for me to live with my children, with my wife (...) So I requested the *minimum vieillesse*, it helps a bit. It's better now. (Issa, 70, Tambacounda, Senegal)

Other researchers have also documented these financial constraints on return migration, prolonging the geographical separation of families after the retirement of the principal wage earner in France. Because of the minimum residence conditions associated with welfare entitlements, "these migrants become hostages to France, although their state of health or age would point in favour of an extended return to their family back home" (Bitatsi Trachet and El Moubaraki 2006: 104). Choukri Hmed likewise describes this situation as a form of "house arrest" in France (2006: 122). Notwithstanding these points, for some hostel residents non-return at retirement was not just a function of financial viability for households in places of origin, but also a response to a perceived loss of control over their families, leading to conflict and resentment. This theme will be discussed in the next section.

### 5.3 Gender, Generation and Conflict in Transnational Families

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated a central feature of life for some older hostel residents, namely the retention beyond retirement of the dominant social role of breadwinner. In this regard, their experience of old age differs from the norm in European host countries. The social gerontology literature holds that older people in (post-) industrialised countries undergo a process of 'role loss' as they advance in years, and the passage to retirement is a critical juncture in this process (Gordon 1972). To the extent that this literature has distinguished the gendered aspects of ageing, elderly men in particular are singled out as experiencing loss of roles and resources (Thompson 2001). For the hostel residents, the transition to old age is more complex. On the one hand, hostel residents paradoxically have been able to retain some roles that normally they might be expected to shed upon retiring in France. A case in point, in addition to the breadwinner role, is that some elderly respondents were fathers to school age children. On the other hand, however, hostel residents also risk losing roles which typically would be ascribed to them at their stage of seniority in the place of origin, particularly roles based on patriarchal family norms. The normative obligation to fulfil the gendered role of breadwinner prolongs absence and may spark family conflicts, which in turn may call into question the patriarchal family values which structure social relations in communities of origin (Mernissi 2003; Sharabi 1988). As will be described below, wives, children and siblings who have stayed behind may gain in autonomy at the expense of older hostel residents (cf. de Haas and Fokkema 2010). This applied less to West African

respondents however: while there are some West African testimonies on this theme, most of the voices below are North African.

There was sometimes resentment from hostel residents at the authority which wives have been able to gain over time, particularly following residential and household independence from parents-in-law, as Lenoël (2017) describes. “A woman is like a wallet” said one North African resident, “she keeps your money.” Indeed, there is potential for the wives of hostel residents to overturn the patriarchal model of family roles, by assuming control over the household budget, children’s education and discipline, and so on. As Idrissa (Dembancané, Senegal) sees it, after years of living apart the wives have their own habits and the men have theirs, and it can be very difficult to reconcile these two lifestyles following the husband’s return. The result is “a clash of personalities”, occasionally resulting in divorces at retirement. After a certain time away from the village -

One loses one’s bearings as the head of the household. Likewise the wife has lost the habit of living together. (Souleymane, 50s, Mauritania).

As a result, some men only stay for a few months back home, because they get annoyed with their families. “We get fed up, and decide to come back” (Kemal, 63, Algeria). Although family problems may not always be openly admitted, such bitterness and grudges can lead to return trips being postponed or cut short, as the following quote suggests:

It is like I was telling you last time, people here stay in France because of their health. But actually it’s probably a problem of stress with their families. They hold out, hold out, and then – bam – they crack, an illness (...) They don’t talk about this sort of thing, these are things which are not talked about. They hide the real roots of the problem. (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco)

A similar loss of control may arise in inter-generational relationships with grown-up children. One of the principal difficulties of migrating alone and not reunifying one’s family in France is that “you risk losing your children” (Hamid, 70, Taroudant, Morocco). Being away from home for long periods during working life means that as a father one does not see one’s children growing up: “they end up not knowing their kids” (Idrissa, Dembancané, Senegal). This is particularly the case for West Africans of working age, who often spend 2 or 3 years in France at a stretch between return visits (see Sect. 1.2). During my fieldwork in West Africa I was privileged indeed to witness several family reunions. While full of joy, the expressions on the faces of the children sometimes betrayed a sentiment of uncertainty and anxiety, especially among younger children: it appeared that their fathers were to some extent ‘strangers’ to them. Over time, this enforced estrangement can lead to less than respectful relations between fathers and children, as work by Jacques Barou has comprehensively revealed (Barou 2001). De Haas and Fokkema (2010) documented the resentments which adult children harbour towards their migrant fathers, particularly regarding the decision not to reunify the family in Europe, where the children imagine a brighter future. Denis, a hostel manager, noted that, “They slave away here for their children, but their children aren’t grateful.” Even harder for some fathers to bear is the perception that their children behave in the

same way as young people in France, in other words like ‘delinquents’ (*voyou*s) as several respondents put it. Kader (70s, Mostaghanem, Algeria) noted this “moral degeneration” of youth in his home country, as did Ferouah: “The new generation of children fall easily into delinquency. They get bad habits. They steal, they take drugs, they don’t respect their parents” (Ferouah, 60s, Morocco). Hadyatou (Dembancané, Senegal) had this to say:

It doesn’t give me pleasure to say this but the youths of today are very difficult. In our day, when our parents told us to stay here-or-there, or do this-or-that, we listened. Whereas nowadays the young ones don’t listen to their parents.

It might be tempting to interpret the preceding quotations as merely the disgruntled grumbles of husbands complaining about their ‘nagging’ wives and ‘ungrateful’ children. At times there was an element of this which crept into my discussions with older hostel residents, but their remarks cannot be passed off as mere moaning. There was a considerably heightened level of emotion when some men talked about their “enslavement”, “exploitation”, “pressures”, “burdens” and “responsibilities” which went beyond everyday complaints about nagging relatives. The gravity of such words is sufficient to make that clear.

In summary, the result of these accumulated conflicts is that the hostel becomes a ‘refuge’ from family problems. They come to France for paperwork or healthcare, and upon their return to Morocco there will be a family row – “a banal conflict” – and they will be off to France again. “When he returns [to France], it’s true he returns for healthcare, but when he is back he is relieved (...) It’s a refuge for him”, as Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco) put it. As noted, one of the sources of tension in these transnational family relationships is the increased materialism of children and other ‘left behind’ relatives, eager to enjoy the “parachuted comfort” of consumer goods and modern communication technologies such as mobile phones. Ironically, such technologies may serve only to further amplify remittance dependency and family tensions, as will be described below.

## 5.4 Communication Technologies: Impeding Not Empowering Return<sup>3</sup>

In the overview of theories presented in Chap. 2, the literature on transnationalism emerged as a key body of work for understanding return migration and back-and-forth trips. It was shown that this literature sets great store in technological advances which facilitate social, economic, political and cultural connections between migrants and their homelands. Developing this insight, I will now discuss the question of whether using information and communication technologies (ICT) can

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<sup>3</sup>The following section is largely reproduced from my open-access article: Hunter (2015a) Empowering or Impeding Return Migration: ICT, mobile phones and older migrants’ communications with home, in *Global Networks* 15: 4, pp. 485–502

empower migrants to return. In the last two decades, transnational migrants' communications with their left behind families have been transformed by advances in technology, particularly mobile phones and cheaper landline calls. A growing literature on the use of ICT in transnational social fields, has noted the empowering and uniting effects of these technological advances, both for migrants and their left behind relatives and friends (Horst 2006; Madianou 2012; Panagakos and Horst 2006; Tall 2004; Thompson 2009; Vertovec 2004; Wilding 2006). Drawing on the concept of return preparedness (Cassarino 2004), it follows that transnational ICT use should also empower prospective returnees, enabling them to be better informed about conditions in their homelands and therefore better prepared for a sustainable definitive return. However, as will be discussed here, ICT use among hostel residents may actually serve to impede return, by exacerbating the pressures to remit and amplifying the family tensions noted above.

Advances in transport and communications technologies are held to be central drivers of transnationalism (Faist 2000; Portes et al. 1999). The wider availability of these technologies has transformed transnational activities: no longer the prerogative of business elites, transnational practices are part of everyday life for a growing share of migrants (Portes et al. 1999). Much attention has been focused on web technologies in the globalisation literature and migrants are often perceived at the "cutting edge" when it comes to adoption of such technologies (Panagakos and Horst 2006: 111). While some migrants do indeed have the potential at their fingertips to play this pioneering role, such a generalization should be qualified by acknowledging that not all migrants possess the financial and human capital needed to exploit these opportunities to the full. A point on which there appears to be scholarly agreement is that older people are not easily able to manipulate ICT (Hamel 2009; Panagakos and Horst 2006; Tall 2004). Internet-based technologies continue to inspire the lion's share of scholarly enquiry in the field of migrants' ICT use (for example, Oiarzabal and Reips 2012). Less attention has been given to how developments associated with the 'seemingly pedestrian' technology of long-distance telephony link with international migration (Panagakos and Horst 2006: 111–12). Yet Steven Vertovec insists that "nothing has facilitated processes of global linkage more than the boom in ordinary, cheap international telephone calls. This is especially the case among non-elite social groups such as migrants" (Vertovec 2004: 219). Within this non-elite group, ageing migrants experiencing literacy problems may be especially receptive to advances in this technology. This is the case for the less-skilled migrants who formed Europe's post-WWII 'guestworker' cohort.

**Dialling to Dembanané: The All-Conquering Mobile Phone** Given the importance of international telephony to migrant communities, rather than speaking of the 'rupture' that new communication technologies are commonly held to represent (Appadurai 1996), Mattelart (2009) argues it is more accurate to describe today's long-distance communication technologies as forming a continuity with the past, encompassing letters, phone calls, tape recordings, and video messages. Certainly, among my respondents, letters and tape-recorded messages were the most popular means of communicating with family up until the 1990s. One or two public call

boxes were often installed in hostels, but home villages were generally not equipped with telephone facilities. In this regard Dembanané – where I conducted fieldwork for one month – was somewhat exceptional compared with Senegalese villages of a similar size: a post office with fixed-line phone connection existed as early as 1975.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, international calling tariffs remained prohibitively expensive until the 1990s. Preferring the low-cost postal alternative, the Dembanané men living in France were obliged to go long periods without contact:

You could go two months without contact, because when you write and you send a letter to your wife or your mother, well it takes a long time for it to arrive, and then again for the response. Personally I didn't have any problems with writing, but when the letter arrived in the village, it took time for my mother to find someone who writes, because there weren't many 'intellectuals' in the village back then [laughs] (...) To be able to write a letter you had to be something special! (...) Communication was difficult, very difficult, at that time. There weren't any telephones, there weren't any mobiles at that time. (Djimé, Dembanané, Senegal)

It was only in the 1990s that the price barriers to international telecommunications fell, thanks to deregulation and the improved carrying capacity of new fibre optic lines (Warf 2013). These developments heralded a sudden and quite startling exponential growth in international call volumes.<sup>5</sup> Vertovec (2004) cites research which shows that the use of low-cost phone cards doubled between 2000 and 2002, and that over half of all calling card traffic was international. Moving to the specifics of the French case, a study by Pasquier (2001) noted the availability of pre-paid phone cards for North and West African migrants in France from the second half of the 1990s. These considerably reduced the costs of calls, which up until then had been a major worry for migrants and their families (Mattelart 2009). These evolutions at the global level are also mirrored at the local level in the village of Dembanané. There we see a boom in the use of fixed-line phones to communicate with loved ones living abroad and elsewhere in Senegal, and the opening of commercially-operated telephone cabins (*téléboutiques*) to serve this demand.

The Dembanané *téléboutique* opened in the late-1990s. Yet a mere decade after opening, it lies empty and obsolete, eclipsed by the all-conquering mobile phone. This change has been extremely rapid, occurring in the last 10 years. In 2004–2005, less than a third of the surveyed hostel residents in the Paris region affirmed having personal access to either a landline or a mobile (Bitatsi Trachet and El Moubaraki 2006). Yet, by 2008–2009, when this research was conducted, almost all my respondents owned a mobile handset, and some owned quite advanced models. However, such technology is best able to exploit its potential for cheap international communication purposes only if one's interlocutors back home also possess such devices. The comparative advantage of mobile networks over fixed line infrastructure, in terms of cost and ease of installation, has heralded a recent boom in mobile phone

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<sup>4</sup>For example, the landline telephone was "just becoming known" in the village of M'Benguène when Mansour Tall undertook research there in the early 2000s (Tall 2004: 31).

<sup>5</sup>In 1982, international call minutes stood at 12.7 billion. By 1992 this figure had risen to 42.7 billion, and by 2001 to 154 billion minutes (Vertovec 2004).



use in many developing countries (Warf 2013). Morocco and Senegal are no exceptions to this trend. Wherever I went in both countries, mobile phones were much in evidence and I was often invited to swap numbers with friends and relatives of my hosts. Furthermore, it was easy to find kiosks where top-up call-time could be purchased, even in small villages and at road-side stalls. These developments were summed up well by Souleymane:

Until recently, no one had mobile phones, there were just fixed lines in France in the hostel, and maybe one or two fixed lines in the village in West Africa. But now everyone's got a mobile, both in the hostel but more importantly also in the country of origin. Every wife has a phone, so the men are constantly in communication with their families back home. (Souleymane, 50s, Mauritania)

For hostel residents, the consequence of this boom in communications infrastructure is that use of international telecommunications technology, be it fixed-line or mobile, has become a daily part of life in a very short space of time. Many of my respondents, when asked, affirmed to engaging in daily or near-daily telephone calls with family. Furthermore, my interviews were often punctuated by incoming phone calls from home. The everyday banality which the mobile phone represents for hostel residents has also been documented by other authors in different migration contexts (Tazanu 2012; Thompson 2009).

**ICT and Return Preparedness: Mobilizing Influence and Managing Expectations** Although not without nuance, much of the literature on mobile phone use among transnational migrants has tended to celebrate the mobile phone, positively evaluating the benefits of better quality, cheaper and more regular communication. This literature tends to attribute an empowering role to information and communication technologies when taken up by marginal or precarious populations. Heather Horst describes how “[f]or many Jamaicans without access to a regular or reliable phone service prior to 2001, the mobile phone is viewed as an unadulterated blessing, transforming the role of transnational communication from an intermittent event to a part of daily life” (Horst 2006: 143). Similarly, as Tall enthuses in a study of mobile and fixed line phone use among Senegalese émigrés and their left behind families, “ICTs are a factor in achieving progress, a source of power that encourages people to access that power, a powerful element of social innovation” (Tall 2004: 47). Other positive appraisals of the technology abound. In Wilding’s study, some of her respondents depicted this new technology as a “miracle” (Wilding 2006: 131). Similarly, although Horst rightly notes certain disadvantages of transnational mobile phone use such as the cost of handsets and the phone’s potential as a tool of unwelcome surveillance, she concludes that “it was difficult to ignore the blessings of the mobile phone” (Horst 2006: 154). Other commentators speak of mobile phones in the developing world as a ‘pro-poor’ technology (Mallalieu 2006). Much has been made of ICTs’ potential to contribute to human development (Hamel 2009): a much-cited study from 2005 calculated that an increase of ten mobile phones per 100 people in developing countries in Africa increases GDP growth by 0.6% (Waverman et al. 2005). Finally, Steven Vertovec describes how the unprecedented

volumes of “cheap telephone calls serve as a kind of social glue” for migrants and their home communities (Vertovec 2004: 220), a finding echoed by Benítez (2012).

Beyond ICT’s well-documented empowering effects on immigrants and their stay-at-home families, an emerging literature has charted its influence in facilitating migration flows. Appadurai (1996) argued that the globally-diffused images and sound bites of electronic media that generate ‘diasporic public spheres’ are instrumental in precipitating all sorts of migration flows. Perkins and Neumayer (2013) suggest that chain migration may be stimulated by ICTs through exchanges between potential migrants and those who have already emigrated. Furthermore, mobile phones and other communication technologies are central in facilitating not only the flights of imagination that inspire would-be migrants, but also in facilitating the logistics of travel that some subsequently undertake. Qualitative fieldwork with sub-Saharan ‘transit’ migrants in North Africa has demonstrated how critical a mobile phone can be during the dangerous and ‘fragmented’ journey to Europe (Collyer 2007; Schaub 2012).

Innovations in return migration theory also point to an important role for mobile phones and other forms of ICT in empowering return migration. The concept of ‘return preparedness’, proposed by Jean-Pierre Cassarino (2004), builds on earlier ‘structuralist’ accounts of return migration which contended that for return to be sustainable, migrants must readapt to social norms and economic and political structures in the place to which they return (see Chap. 2 for a discussion). Authors working from this perspective tended to be pessimistic about the sustainability of return as they assumed that most prospective returnees become too detached from such norms and institutions in places of origin and are therefore ‘ill prepared for their return’ (Gmelch 1980: 143). Cassarino builds on this earlier focus on preparing for return by drawing on insights from the literature on transnationalism and social networks as drivers of migration. He contends that some migrants are better prepared for return thanks to the efforts and time they invest in mobilizing financial, human and social capital in both sending and receiving countries (Cassarino 2004). Clearly, the transnational exchange of information is crucial to boosting return preparedness. Hence, different types of ICT (internet, email, telephone) may be of great utility in preparing for return.

One aspect of return preparedness in the existing literature is how mobile phones facilitate new (or renewed) influence over close relatives (and extended kin members) who were previously out of reach. This potentially can cement a prospective returnee’s place in the family and home community, for example through household budgeting and remittance sending. In her study of mobile phone use in Jamaican transnational fields, Horst (2006) notes that in the past sending money by post was unreliable and very time-consuming. Mail was problematic because it could be intercepted or lost or “simply did not reach the recipient in time for them to make effective use of the sum sent” (Hamel 2009: 20). Since the widespread adoption of mobile telephony in many developing countries and migrant sending regions, studies have found that phones can be used for the ‘micro-coordination’ of remittance transfers and to specify how the money sent is to be used (Horst 2006: 153; Perkins and Neumayer 2013; Tazanu 2012). As with household budgets, fixed and mobile

phone technologies can be harnessed to coordinate and manage household activities (Hamel 2009; Thompson 2009; Wilding 2006), potentially giving migrants more influence over family members previously out of reach. Critically for this discussion, researchers have also found that such technology can be used by emigrants to better manage the expectations of their loved ones back home. Horst argues that “the increased communication enabled through the presence of house phones and especially the ownership of mobile phones has led [left behind] Jamaicans to more realistic expectations of the migration experience” (Horst 2006: 155).

**The ‘Pressure of Communicability’** On first inspection, these positive evaluations of mobile phone use and other information technologies as facilitating transnational communication and managing expectations are hardly surprising: what could be problematic about cheaper, more regular and better quality communications between migrants and their loved ones in countries of origin? However, a different picture emerged during the fieldwork for this book. While intuitively one would expect cheaper and better quality communications between hostel residents and their families to empower return by boosting return preparedness, this was far from always the case.

For some respondents, these new technologies were positively viewed. As Hamid (70, Taroudant, Morocco) pointed out, before the coming of the mobile phone, the only way to maintain contact was by letter. As described above, communication by letter was a painfully long and intermittent process. By contrast, when we met in 2009, Hamid spoke of daily phone calls to his wife and children. He also talked about sending text and photo messages, and about his family calling him over the internet using VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) applications such as Skype. These technological developments are changes for the better in his opinion. The same applied to money transfers: before it would take 15 or 20 days for the postal *mandat* to arrive in his Moroccan hometown. Nowadays, money wired by Western Union would arrive in an instant.

The speed of money transfer services such as Western Union was seen as a notable advance, and the mobile phone was essential in requesting these transfers and coordinating their timing.

When they need food, or anything else, they call me, then I send immediately what is required. [So you are often in contact?] Oh yes, always in contact, to see if they have everything they need at home, so when they lack something, they get the money straight away. (Hadyatou, Dembanané, Senegal)

The money arrives immediately, but they call to check you’ve sent it too! (Issa, 70, Tambacounda, Senegal)

While the instantaneous nature of money transfers was applauded, Issa’s quote here does hint at a less welcome feature of mobile phone use for hostel residents, namely that hostel residents are now more ‘available and reachable’ to left behind kin (Tazanu 2012). The potential of mobile phones to generate more measured expectations of the migrant from those remaining behind was not a feature of hostel residents’ narratives. Quite the opposite, as the epigraph at the start of this chapter showed. Their exchanges with family members back home were not always affec-

tionate or attentive, but instead revolved around the apparently ever-increasing financial needs of the household. In interviews, hostel residents complained of the ‘pressure’ they felt to attend to these needs. With the advent of the mobile phone it had become less and less possible to ignore these expectations emanating from home. Mobile phones were identified by my respondents as a key factor in exacerbating this sense of responsibility. Souleymane (50s, Mauritania), a member of his hostel’s Residents’ Committee, aptly described this as “the pressure of communicability” (*la pression de la communicabilité*):

Every wife has a phone, so the men are constantly in communication with their families back home. And this creates a certain pressure; you are much more aware of everything going on in the village, and your responsibilities weigh more heavily. (Souleymane, 50s, Mauritania)

Intriguingly, few scholars of migration and ICTs have written about these pressures. This inattention to the remittance ‘burden’ generated by ICTs may be related in part to the fact that the remittance literature tends to focus on recipients in the country of origin, not the senders abroad, as Anna Lindley (2009) has critiqued. Although not addressing the topic directly, Vertovec hints at such pressures when he comments that “[f]or migrants and their kin in distant parts of the world, telephone calls can only provide a kind of punctuated sociality that can heighten emotional strain as well as alleviate it” (Vertovec 2004: 223). Primus Tazanu’s monograph about the use of ICT in Cameroonian transnational social fields goes further by explicitly highlighting the potential of new technologies to foment grudges between Cameroonians living in Europe and their left behind relatives and friends, particularly when it comes to coordinating remittances (Tazanu 2012). This same phenomenon is touched on by Raelene Wilding, who notes that “in some cases the availability of contact created its own anxieties – particularly when kin used ICTs to demand remittances from the refugees” (Wilding 2006: 135). Likewise, Stephanie Riak Akuei (2005) describes similar dynamics among Dinka refugees from southern Sudan living in San Diego: some of her respondents went so far as to change their phone numbers to avoid such demands, without informing family members, something also reported by Lindley (2009) in her study of Somalis in London.

While none of my own respondents admitted changing their phone number for this reason, several made a link between the increasing burden of their responsibilities and the advent of improved telecommunications. Amadou (64, Tambacounda, Senegal) talked about being in regular contact with home via his mobile phone, concluding that “all in all there are many responsibilities: you have to give to almost everyone.” For others, the dissonance created by being simultaneously far away (in body) but within earshot was an unwelcome break with the ‘easy life’ of the past, when intensive transnational communication was rare:

Before, life was easy, there was no difficulty. Because we weren’t sending money like nowadays, like all the time. We used to send money at the end of the month. Now, all the time, they ask you for money, one person’s ill, the other one needs this, the other that, it’s not like before (...) These days, there’s Western Union, there’s Moneygram, there’s the fax, there’s all that. (...) Nowadays, if they have a problem back home, it comes straight back to you. (Issa, 70, Tambacounda, Senegal)

Given that the literature on ICTs tends to stress both the developmental and empowering virtues of this technology, and the lower take-up of such technology among older people, one would be forgiven for thinking that older hostel residents who use this technology would figure among the most empowered of all senior citizens. In fact, the findings show that ICTs may serve to exacerbate or amplify the men's burdens, calling into question the empowerment thesis. The new communications technology, while a blessing in some ways, makes it easier for left behind relatives to 'exploit' family connections for money and other forms of remittance. Saleem, in particular, returned again and again during our discussions to the motif of exploitation, both in France and back home.

I don't feel at ease, because I feel that – I feel I am alone, and I am still exploited – exploited by those who are here [in France] and those who are there [back home] (...) It's true that it's my family, but I'm exploited all the same, because I don't have a choice. Well, if they have bills to pay, it's me who pays, because they don't have anyone else. (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco)

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described how remittances have long been a way of life for the hostel residents and their families, sustaining the existence of both recipients and senders, be that materially or socially. The French government's migrant worker hostel policy itself was designed to facilitate such transfers: by keeping rents low, the men were able to send as much money as possible back home, thereby discouraging family reunification (Viet 1999). The men who remain in the hostels past retirement have internalised this logic, to the point that remittance sending has become an institutionalised practice. Subsistence needs are the first item of expenditure, but beyond this minimum expectation, remittances are also deployed to boost the social standing of families and to diversify household income streams. Such strategies include investments in property for rental purposes; investments in agricultural technology leading to greater productivity; and investments in children's education. The latter was identified as particularly important following the retirement of hostel residents in France, since children who have good jobs are able to fulfil the expectation of support for their parents in old age.

In relating these themes back to my main interest in late-in-life return, the importance of remittances would appear to lend strong support to the explanatory power of the new economics of labour migration (NELM), as presented in Chap. 2. However in some cases the NELM logic appears to be distorted. Although the theory predicts that the passage to retirement of geographically single migrant workers heralds the end of the migration project and subsequent return to rejoin family in the place of origin, in some cases children and grandchildren remain dependent on the reduced income of the pensioner. This prompts some older men to remain in France after retirement, in order to satisfy eligibility rules for welfare entitlements which boost their pension income. As a result they become trapped in France.

In turn, remittance dependency has contributed to conflicts with spouses, children and siblings, as was described in Sect. 5.3. Role loss was identified as a pertinent process here. Role loss is commonly identified as an outcome for older people in (post-) industrialised countries, especially for men following the passage to retirement (Gordon 1972). On the one hand, the men have not lost their role of principal breadwinner, despite the transition to retirement and exit from the labour market: on the other hand, years of separation have led to loss of patriarchal authority within the family. It appears that the gendered and generation-specific role of ‘migrant breadwinner’ is a dominant social and economic role which some older hostel residents are expected to maintain, but this norm becomes a constraint to return at retirement age (see Hunter 2015b for further discussion). The insights about family conflict in this chapter thus support the contention that family connections are not only a factor in encouraging return migration at retirement, but may also impede it, when family members have clashing expectations or priorities (Percival 2013). De Haas and Fokkema (2010) argue that the NELM approach tends to ‘reify’ the household, ascribing to it common goals, equal power relations and unanimous decision-making, and ignoring the potential for conflict between more and less powerful members, frequently along the dividing lines of gender and generation. These divisions may come to the fore especially over the question of return. As de Haas and Fokkema argue, “family reunification can empower women and children, who generally oppose return, and it seems to have pushed many men into strategies of pendulum migration” (de Haas and Fokkema 2010: 558). The research presented in this chapter suggests that *not* reunifying may also sometimes empower left behind wives and children,<sup>6</sup> leading to family tensions during the return visits of the hostel residents and precipitating their early departure back to the ‘refuge’ of the hostel in France.

Remittance dependency and family conflicts are amplified by advances in telecommunications technology. Transnational communications between family members used to be slow and intermittent. While the enforced separation and prolonged silence were painful to bear, one silver lining for hostel residents was that there were fewer responsibilities weighing on them. With the advent of new communication technologies this situation has been reversed: low-cost fixed and mobile telephony has resulted in greater “pressure of communicability”. Theories of transnationalism consider such technology as an explanatory variable: easier and more regular communication should facilitate return migration, since prospective returnees will be better prepared for their return, a factor stressed by structuralist accounts. However, the opposite may ensue: in contrast to literature which ascribes to ICT a pro-poor and developmental role which empowers people, these new technologies sometimes make it easier for relatives to ‘exploit’ family connections for remittances, thereby impeding return.

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<sup>6</sup>See also Lenoël 2017 for a nuanced treatment of this topic.



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## Chapter 6

# Getting One's Bearings: Re-integration in the Home Community



*When they return there, they may feel that they are not entirely integrated. They lose their bearings.*

Interview with Dr. Slimane, psychiatrist.

The preceding chapter discussed the sending of remittances and recorded the different uses to which remittances are put (see Sect. 5.1). Remittances are primarily private financial transfers within families, but their effects are also felt outwith the family, in localities and communities of origin. This is seen in many different ways: in the building of new houses and the adoption of new architectural styles and modern conveniences; in the changing consumption habits of remittance-receiving families, leading to new jobs in local economies but also to new inequalities between remittance-receiving households and those with no members abroad (De Haas 2006). Remittances may also be collective, channelled by hometown associations into development projects in migrants' regions of origin (Mercer et al. 2008). Such projects often seek to provide basic infrastructure and services such as clean drinking water, electricity, schools and medical clinics. The present chapter will detail such changes affecting the home communities of my respondents, and analyse in particular how such effects impact on the process of re-integration which prospective returnees must negotiate. As noted in Chap. 2, processes of re-integration are often ignored in the literature on return, particularly within the neo-classical and NELM paradigms which view return as being conditional on an individual's experiences only in the host country (and specifically its labour market). Yet, as Cassarino stresses, "return is also a question of context" (Cassarino 2004: 257, 260). The perspective of structuralist theory, as was summarised in Chap. 2, is invaluable here as it sheds light on the socio-structural mechanisms in home countries which have a bearing on re-integration, defined as the "process of adaptation (...) between those who have returned and those who remained behind during their absence" (Arowolo 2000: 62). This process unfolds in domains as diverse as physical environment and climate, but especially social, economic and normative structures (Arowolo 2000; Athukorala 1990; Dumon 1986; Gmelch 1980).

In Chap. 5, several respondents complained that they had 'lost their bearings' within their families. In this chapter, I will unpack the notion of 'bearings' and explore its relevance to the issue of re-integration in communities of origin following retirement. Dictionaries attribute several meanings to the term, but there are two aspects which I would highlight as relevant in the context of migration studies. Initially this chapter will explore bearings in the *physical* sense of the word: "the direction or position of something relative to a fixed point; awareness of one's position relative to one's surroundings" (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1999). It will be demonstrated how retired hostel residents' degree of influence over their physical surroundings in places of origin – notably through house construction and involvement in hometown development projects – in turn has an influence on the second *social* meaning of bearings, namely "a person's way of standing, moving or behaving" (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1999). Above all, it is hostel residents' standing and behaviour in places of origin that will be discussed in the latter half of the chapter.

Before turning to hostel residents' physical relationship to their home places, it will be useful for the reader to have an idea of the physical environment in the two localities where I conducted fieldwork: Dembanané in Senegal and Tiznit in Morocco. These case studies describe the re-integration prospects of a necessarily limited number of respondents in two unique local contexts, but it is noteworthy that the divergent trends observed in Dembanané and Tiznit were reproduced in the contrasting testimonies of North and West African respondents originating from all corners of these two sending regions. Many North African men had lost their physical and social bearings back home, whereas West Africans, being the drivers of physical and social change thanks to their contributions to development projects, were less disoriented by their return trips and found it far easier to re-integrate, hence the central significance to the question considered here regarding late-in-life return.

## 6.1 Sketches of Dembanané (Senegal) and Tiznit (Morocco)

**Dembané** The village of Dembanané (population 5293<sup>1</sup>) is situated on the left bank of the Senegal River, 40 km downstream from the departmental capital of Bakel. Geographically, historically and linguistically, Dembanané has always been a frontier town. The river itself constitutes the frontier between Senegal and Mauritania, and in terms of administrative boundaries, Dembanané separates the regions of Matam to the north and Tambacounda to the south (see Fig. 2.2). Furthermore, the village marks the start of Senegal's 'fertile crescent', a floodplain extending 450 km to the north-west forming a region known historically as Fuuta Toro (Dilley 2004). This region is distinguished demographically by the preponder-

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the 2013 Senegal Census (RGPHAE). Consult [http://sigstat.ansd.sn/sig\\_png/](http://sigstat.ansd.sn/sig_png/) for further details.

ance of the Haalpulaar ethnic group, whereas to the south and east of the village in the regions of Ngalam and Guidimaxa, the majority of the population belong to the Soninke ethnic group.

The village was founded by a Haalpulaar fisherman named Demba, hence the name Dembanané (literally, ‘the houses of Demba’). The date of its founding is not known, but there is documented evidence of its existence in the late-seventeenth century. Over time, Soninkes have displaced Haalpulaar as the principal ethnic group in the village. The Soninke are reputed to be primarily a sedentary farming group: in terms of economic production, given the village’s situation on this fertile floodplain, agriculture has long been the principal economic activity (M’Bow 1954).

The principal documentary source of information on Dembanané is Amadou Mahtar M’bow who made a survey of the village in 1954 during his time as a junior field officer for the national education board. M’bow later went on to become director-general of UNESCO from 1974 to 1987, the first African to hold this post. M’Bow estimated that the population in 1954 was 95% Soninke. However, this ethnic homogeneity “masks rigid social distinctions” (M’Bow 1954: 6), the most notable of which is ‘caste’<sup>2</sup> – an element of social structure which, on the African continent, is somewhat unique to West Africa, especially Senegal and Mali. Since M’Bow’s time, the caste system has lost some of its significance, at least in terms of its economic basis, and it did not appear to be a major factor with regard to my research question.<sup>3</sup> A second axis of stratification in the village is age: Soninke society is traditionally gerontocratic (Manchuelle 1997). However, through emigration, the preponderance of power concentrated in the hands of the elders from the noble families has diminished as Soninke émigré associations become influenced by demands for more democratic functioning, notably from younger community members (Timera 1996: 68).

As regards the village’s built environment, households are organised on the basis of patrilineage (*fabanka*), centred on the residential, productive and consumption unit (*ka*, house). The *fabanka* can regroup several monogamous or polygynous households (Timera 1996). In the course of his 1954 survey, M’Bow was particularly struck by the spatial concentration of the residential areas:

What essentially characterises the habitat is its extremely concentrated form. One would be astonished to see during the dry season large empty spaces around the village while the houses press up against each other only leaving between them very small alleyways. This

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<sup>2</sup>Among the Soninke of Dembanané, four social ranks were traditionally consequential: free men or nobles; *vanakouko*, also free men but designated as latecomers to the village (insofar as the noble families settled in Dembanané first); next come the various vocational castes such as praise singers (*gassarou*), metalworkers (*tego*), leatherworkers (*garanko*), and weavers (*mabo*); at the bottom of the social hierarchy are the *komo*, the servile class, who are descendants of slaves. The *komo* cannot own land or property (M’Bow 1954). In terms of choice of marriage partner, castes were – and remain – restrictive, with endogamy the norm (Diouf 1994).

<sup>3</sup>However, Timera (1996) cautions that the significance of caste is often overlooked – if not denied – by external observers when they rely on the responses of community members, who, knowing that such caste relations and power structures are understood to be retrograde in Western society, tend to downplay the reality.

**Fig. 6.1** Traditional building style



concentration has been imposed less by the social structure than by nature. The houses have been established there where they were able to escape from the flooding of the river during the rainy season (M'bow 1954).

Since M'Bow's time, while the central village still retains this highly concentrated form, the growth in population has led to expansion to the west. At the time of M'Bow's study, the population was 1400; today it is over 5200. Instead of the traditional adobe-walled one-storey houses separated by narrow alleyways (Fig. 6.1), concrete is the preferred building material of the new, more spacious dwellings (Fig. 6.2). In large part, these new dwellings have been financed by migrant remittances.

**Tiznit** Tiznit (population 74,699), the capital of Tiznit province in the Souss-Massa-Draa region of Morocco, is situated 100 km south of Agadir and 10 km inland from the Atlantic coast (see Fig. 2.1).

The town is of quite recent settlement, dating to the fortress built by Sultan Hassan I in the 1880s which was used to subjugate the unruly Berber tribes who inhabited the surrounding area (Baladiya Tiznit 2009). Since then, the town has enjoyed strategic importance as a major regional transport hub, being at the inter-



**Fig. 6.2** New building style



section of the north-south N1 highway and an east-west route linking the mountainous interior of the Anti-Atlas with the Atlantic coast towards Sidi Ifni.

The Souss region historically has been populated predominantly by Berber tribes of the Tachelhit-speaking Chleuh ethnic group, as distinct to the Arabised peoples living on the northern and central coastal plains. As noted in Chap. 2, the Souss region was historically a source of seasonal migration to other parts of Morocco as well as neighbouring Algeria. In the twentieth century, as Morocco came under growing French influence, emigration from the Souss became increasingly international, firstly to France and then to the Netherlands and Belgium (de Haas 2006). Migration to Europe has been fundamental to Tiznit's subsequent growth. On first impressions, Tiznit appears to be a large, prosperous, and well maintained town, visibly better off than towns elsewhere in Morocco of comparable size (Fig. 6.3). According to a local civil servant, Tiznit exemplifies the contribution of emigrants to local development, since it is affluent and expanding yet there are no local "wealth-generating resources." Instead, prosperity is imported from abroad, by the emigrants.

Prosperity driven by emigration is clearly something which Tiznit and Dembanané have in common. In other aspects, however, they differ. One obvious difference is their respective sizes, with Tiznit's population more than ten times that





**Fig. 6.3** Downtown Tiznit (the hotel on the left was built by a returning emigrant)

of Dembanané. Another crucial difference is Tiznit's strategic importance as a transport hub, whereas Dembanané has suffered from its geographic marginality. A third intriguing element to note is the evolution of the social structure in the larger town and its hinterland: whereas in Dembanané the persistence (albeit attenuated) of a quite rigid social hierarchy was underlined, in Tiznit emigration "has contributed to the break-up of traditional villages and the introduction of new (...) consumption habits" (Tiznit.org 2011).

These new trends have been driven largely by returning migrants from France. This pattern began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when vacationing emigrants transformed Tiznit during the summer months, thanks to the homewares and electrical goods purchased in Tiznit and destined to furnish their homes in the villages (*douars*) of the surrounding region. From the 1980s, some emigrant villagers began to install their families in the town, in order to benefit from the modern amenities and services available there, as will be described shortly. The town has long since expanded beyond the ramparts constructed by Sultan Hassan I a little over a century ago. Indeed, Tiznit is a veritable boomtown with many new housing developments springing up on its outskirts (Fig. 6.4). In the last 10 years the population of the town has increased by almost 40%, from 53,441 in the 2004 census to 74,699 in the 2014 census. Several of my respondents bemoaned the exorbitant real estate prices, amongst the highest in the country. Some locals blame the acquisitiveness of emigrants and their left behind relatives for this inflation in house prices.



**Fig. 6.4** A new housing development under construction on the outskirts of Tiznit

## 6.2 Physical Bearings: Constructing a Place to Return to

Family housing was identified as a significant theme by almost all respondents, in both North and West African communities of origin. Building or renovating a house is clearly one means of altering one's surroundings and physical environment, as well as very visibly augmenting one's social status, hence the primary importance it is accorded here in relation to the conceptual framework of 'bearings' outlined above. The situation in Tiznit and its surrounding hinterland will be treated first.

**Tiznit: Boomtown or Ghost Town?** Many current migrants or retired migrants have purchased property in Tiznit, where their families now live, in preference to their ancestral villages in the surrounding countryside. A similar trend was noted by Hein de Haas in the Todgha Valley, a mountainous area of Morocco about 450 km to the north-east of Tiznit where a high proportion of households are involved in international migration (de Haas 2006). According to an employee responsible for international banking in the Tiznit branch of a major Moroccan bank, some 7,400 retired migrants own property in Tiznit. They are attracted by the infrastructure and modern conveniences which are not available in their villages of origin: schools, health clinics, banking, administrative services, as well as electricity and water supply. One consequence of this is that the people who live in Tiznit are more "westernised... here it's every man for himself," according to my host in the town, Saleem

(60, Tiznit, Morocco). Saleem is originally from the province of Goulmime, further south, but now his family is installed in Tiznit. One advantage of living in Tiznit for Saleem's family is that it is within commuting distance of the university in Agadir (his three children are all aged in their late teens and early twenties). The town is also convenient for Agadir airport.

Saleem has clearly done well for himself, owning a large three-storey family home in a central neighbourhood of Tiznit. Similarly, the family of Badr (63, Tiznit, Morocco) lives in an upmarket neighbourhood, in a spacious and luxuriously fitted house, to which I was invited one afternoon for tea. Nonetheless, the house lies empty for much of the year. Badr, the head of the household, used to reside in hostels in the northern Paris suburbs, but subsequently was able to move out into normal private housing when his wife and children came to France. Thus he is well-settled in France, and only comes to his Tiznit home during the summer months. His nephew explained to me that many of the homes in their neighbourhood likewise remain empty most of the year, because the owners and their families are all living in France, or in the bigger Moroccan cities. Outside the summer season, parts of Tiznit resemble a ghost town more than a boomtown.

Scholars of migration have long acknowledged the substantial allocation of resources which emigrants direct towards family housing in places of origin (see Sect. 5.1). The different purposes to which remittances are put have sustained a long-running debate within the migration-development literature between 'migration optimists' who argue that remittances contribute to sustainable economic development in countries of origin, and 'migration pessimists' who argue that remittances lead to more inequality in places of origin, as well as the breakdown of traditional economic structures, and economic inactivity due to dependency on remittances (see de Haas 2006 for discussion). As regards housing specifically, the debate centres on whether such investments constitute a 'productive' use of remittances or are merely signs of ostentatious consumption.

In Morocco, the dominant view of scholars used to be that using remittances for housing investment was ostentatious and non-productive. Yet as Hein de Haas notes, "there seems to be ample reason to criticise this attitude as rather patronising, for blaming migrants' 'irrational' mentality a priori rather than trying to comprehend their motives" (de Haas 2006: 575). This rebuttal certainly applies in Saleem's case: investing in property in Tiznit, the regional urban centre, has enabled his children to attend good schools and have a chance of attending university in nearby Agadir. Although his grand house in central Tiznit is certainly indicative of his status, it also attests to a desire for space, privacy and better health. Furthermore, investment in housing also marks a crucial juncture in Moroccan wives' empowerment insofar as this heralds family nuclearisation and independence from the migrants' parents-in-law (Lenoël 2017). As for Badr's house, standing empty most of the year, this is less obviously a case of productive investment. Nonetheless, investments in housing create important indirect multiplier effects in local economies, for example in creating construction jobs (Taylor 2004).

**Fig. 6.5** From building blocks...



**The Dream Homes of Dembanané** Like Tiznit, Dembanané has undergone rapid expansion in recent years (although on a smaller scale), thanks in large part to the construction of houses by emigrants. As in the North African case, my West African respondents have been expected to construct their own houses. Like in Tiznit, a common feature of West African respondents' testimony was equipping one's family dwelling with the modern conveniences and comforts to which the hostel residents have become accustomed during their time in France. Electricity was installed in most parts of Dembanané around 2005.

My host in Dembanané, Jaabé, explained that the *émigrés* were abandoning the traditional architectural style, consisting of thick adobe walls (see Fig. 6.1), in preference for larger modern houses made from concrete. Jaabé himself was actively engaged in such a construction project during my time in Dembanané: every day he would visit a plot of land at the western edge of the village to supervise the fabrication of the cement bricks with which the new house would be built (Fig. 6.5). Jaabé himself acknowledged that the new architectural trend is not without certain disadvantages, since the concrete constructions are notably less cool during the extremely hot summer months compared with the thick-walled adobe dwellings. This said, the concrete houses are quickly constructed, spacious and solid, hence the popularity of this architectural style.



**Fig. 6.6** ... to finished product



Just as in Tiznit, however, some houses lie vacant, such as the one shown in Fig. 6.6, owned by a migrant who has reunified with his wife and children in France. This man has not come back to the village at retirement definitively. Such migrants are “trapped” (*coincé*) in France, according to their peers to whom I spoke in the village, because their families do not want to leave France. The implication is that those who have stuck to the old model of ‘solo emigration’, leaving wives and children behind, have made the better decision. They have resisted the ‘temptation’ of family reunification, and as a result they have a better retirement, enjoying the physical comforts and visibly improved social status which their grand dwellings in Dembanané confer. Similar stories were recounted to me by respondents from other parts of Senegal and Mauritania. Abdoulaye (44, Tambacounda, Senegal) remarked that the men in this situation – the family reunifiers in France who are retired but cannot return to the large house they have built – are “losers” (*perdants*). Such grand dwellings are ‘dream’ homes, both literally and figuratively, as they are mostly inhabited only in the men’s imagination. These judgements are not confined to the hostel residents. As other studies have shown, not returning may be portrayed as a sign of failure, particularly in male narratives (e.g. Zontini 2015).

### 6.3 Re-integration and the Role of Hometown Associations

The expansion and modernisation of Dembanané is not just a result of migrants' investments in housing. Just as important have been the alterations to the built environment effected by migrants through the construction of communal, collectively-financed infrastructure. This is coordinated through the Dembanané hometown association, which has its 'headquarters' in a hostel in Boulogne-Billancourt, just to the west of Paris. The hostel is home to around 200 Dembanané expatriates, and their number is augmented considerably one Sunday per month when fellow villagers living elsewhere in France come from far and wide to attend the association's monthly meeting. The Boulogne-Billancourt hostel is not unusual in this respect. In fact, many hostels across France fulfil a crucial role as the meeting place and organisational hub of hometown diaspora communities. In addition to their development activities back home, hometown associations may also play a key role in facilitating the integration of recently arrived migrants at the destination, by facilitating the exchange of information and advice about employment opportunities, housing and welfare (Lacroix 2013).

Hometown associations or networks are not unique to the context of West African migration, being a feature of transnational communities from sending regions as diverse as Central and South America (Goldring 1999; Portes et al. 2007), the Caribbean (Levitt 2001), the Maghreb (Lacroix 2009), Central and East Africa (Mercer et al. 2008) and South Asia (Lacroix 2013), to cite only a handful of case studies in what is a burgeoning literature. Indeed, since the mid-2000s the role of collective remittances and hometown associations in the so-called 'migration-development' nexus has garnered increasing attention from academics and development policymakers in the Global North (Maimbo and Ratha 2005). Policymakers are excited by collective remittances because they are channelled towards what are perceived as 'productive' uses such as the provision of public goods or infrastructure, as opposed to the everyday subsistence needs financed by private remittances within families (Mercer et al. 2008). Furthermore, hometown associations are of interest to development actors in the Global North because of their local knowledge and embeddedness, enabling such actors to sidestep inefficient state bureaucracies in migrants' home countries (ibid).

**Laying the Foundations for Return to West Africa** A prominent critique of contemporary literature on African hometown associations is that this work puts disproportionate emphasis on international migrants' contributions, at the expense of the 'domestic diaspora' who have migrated within African countries (Mercer et al. 2008). In so doing, contemporary scholars have also ignored the historical origins of hometown associations. As Mercer et al. (2008: 65) note: "the focus on transnational associations in current research obscures a widespread collective amnesia about their emergence in Africa."

The history of migration from the Senegal River Valley is in fact especially instructive here. For example, Soninke hometown associations have been in existence in one form or another for decades, beginning with the establishment in the

early-twentieth century of 'communal houses' in West African cities such as Dakar when rural-urban migration first gained momentum. The initial function of the communal funds in Dakar was not 'developmental' in the narrow contemporary sense, but rather one of welfare and mutual aid to members in case of unemployment, occupational injury, sickness, or death when away from the village. In Soninke migration culture, the communal houses for émigré village kinsmen are known as *kompe xoore* (literally 'big room'), and were first documented in Dakar in the 1930s (see Manchuelle 1997: 123–128 for more details). Schmitz (1994) refers to similar communal arrangements in Dakar in the 1950s among migrants from the other main ethnic group inhabiting the Senegal Valley, the Haalpulaar. With the growth of international migration to France during and after WWII, such institutions were transplanted internationally, to the hostels (Manchuelle 1997; Schmitz 1994). Djimé, now in his 70s, noted his close involvement with the Dembanané hometown association and its development projects since the time of his first voyage to France, in 1961:

I could spend hours talking about the development projects! It doesn't stop with the projects because the immigrants, since our day, have been contributing without pause to the development of this village. We started with the post office; it was us who constructed our own post office [Fig. 6.7]. It was us who built the primary school. There are loads of projects. The secondary school, we financed it, with the pensioners too – we number more than 90, the pensioners here. Each one contributes to the development of this village. (Djimé, Dembanané, Senegal).

The fruits of these communal remittances were immediately visible in Dembanané: a very wide array of infrastructure and collective goods has been facilitated there thanks to pooled migrant contributions. This infrastructure includes: post and telecommunications facilities (Fig. 6.7); a health clinic and maternity facilities (Fig. 6.8); drinking water borehole and water storage (*forage*) (Fig. 6.9); schools (both at college and primary level); electricity; water pumps and other irrigation equipment; as well as a covered market hall. The next project is to build a *complexe sanitaire* (small hospital), costing in the region of €150,000. The website of the local municipal authority leaves no room for doubt: "The quasi-totality of these structures has been financed and realised by the migrant sons of Dembanané" (Dembancane.net 2011).

The work of the Dembanané hometown association is far from exceptional when judged with migrants' development projects in other towns and villages in the Senegal River valley. Several authors have analysed this aspect of the 'culture of migration' which pertains the length and breadth of the famous valley (Daum 1998; Dia 2008; Quiminal 2002). I was struck by the similarity of the infrastructure projects embarked upon by different hometown associations I encountered. For example, I was privileged to observe a meeting of the hometown association to which Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania) belongs. This event took place at a hostel in Paris' 19th arrondissement. The leaders of the association listed the range of infrastructure which they have funded, an almost identical set of projects to that undertaken in Dembanané. Dia (2008) records a similar range of initiatives in the town of Agnam Thiodaye, in the Middle Senegal Valley.





**Fig. 6.7** The Dembanané post office

In terms of contributions, every member of the Dembanané hometown association is obliged to transfer a minimum of €10 to the fund per month, and with 1300 members in France, this soon adds up to a significant sum.<sup>4</sup> This individual contribution is an “*ob-li-ga-tion*” according to Idrissa (Dembanané, Senegal), stressing each syllable. Even the unemployed and those on the minimum wage are expected to contribute. As Djimé’s quote above indicates, elders from the village with French pensions are also expected to contribute, with typical sums ranging between 50,000 and 100,000 francs CFA<sup>5</sup> per year (€75 to €150) depending on the projects undertaken in a given year. It is not a fixed regular sum, unlike the monthly levies imposed on villagers of working age living in France.

Through their involvement in development projects funded by communal remittances, the elders of Dembanané, and other hometowns in West Africa whose émigrés I interviewed, have been able to keep their place in the home community despite prolonged absence. The normative expectation weighing on respondents was to be of service to the community of origin at retirement, as Waly (75, Kayès,

<sup>4</sup>€10 is the minimum contribution. By way of comparison, the monthly contribution made by Ibrahima (Gorgol, Mauritania) to his hometown association is €30 (see Sect. 5.1).

<sup>5</sup>The West African franc CFA is the unit of currency used in many former colonies of France in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. It is also used in Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony.

**Fig. 6.8** The maternity clinic



Mali) noted: ‘When you are retired, you should be of service over there [Mali]; you return to better serve your village and your family.’ For those who live at least some of the year in hostels in France, such service takes place via the hometown associations headquartered in hostels. Through these institutions a great number of development and infrastructure projects – coordinated by the emigrants in conjunction with the villagers remaining behind – come to fruition.

The physical transformation of place thanks to the collective efforts of the Dembanané hometown association has led to a concurrent transformation in the political status of Dembanané. In fact, as Mercer and colleagues underline, “it is impossible to sever the current development work that these associations do from their political work” (Mercer et al. 2008: xi). It should be acknowledged that it is not just international migrants who are at the heart of such transformations: rural-urban migrants in cities like Dakar may bring crucial assistance, and the success of projects also relies on supervision ‘on the ground’ from those villagers remaining behind (Dia 2008). But in all cases, infrastructure and development projects have a political dimension insofar as these efforts are a substitute for absent state intervention. State funding for development and infrastructure projects in the hometowns of my respondents has been very rare, if not non-existent. By substituting for the state,

**Fig. 6.9** The *forage* (water borehole and storage tank)



migrants and non-migrants alike are able to boost the political importance of their towns in several ways.

Firstly, insofar as migrant development associations play a ‘gap-filling’ role in the absence of state provision, their villages and towns of origin are regarded favourably by state actors for being self-sufficient. Ibrahima (59, Gorgol, Mauritania) feels that it should be the government who provides these things and finds it “shameful” that they do not. But his village is self-sufficient thanks to the emigrants. There is a justified pride in this self-reliance and the state in effect gives legitimacy to these developmental actions. In Dembanané, the gap-filling rationale has led to a new development strategy: rather than wait for distant state agencies to undertake lengthy approval procedures for proposed infrastructure, the villagers do *not* inform the authorities until *after* a project is completed. This creative approach greatly expedites projects which might otherwise get bogged down in bureaucracy and bribes.

The political status of hometowns is enhanced secondly through the ability of hometown association members to mobilise the human and social capital they have accumulated in France in order to forge partnerships with French NGOs and civil servants in the Ministry charged with international development. Such collaborations are prestigious, as are initiatives aimed at twinning hometowns with municipalities in France. At the time I met Idrissa, a prominent (younger) member of the

**Fig. 6.10** Column and plaque erected in central Dembanané to commemorate the visit of a delegation from Villeneuve-Le-Roi in 2008 bringing donated equipment to Dembanané's secondary school



Dembanané community in France, he was in talks about twinning with several municipalities. Another example of transnational partnership was the donation of classroom equipment such as desktop computers, school desks and chairs which the secondary school in Dembanané received from the commune of Villeneuve-Le-Roi, a southern suburb of Paris, in 2008 (see Fig. 6.10). Crucial in this trend towards more concerted cooperation on development has been the policy of ‘co-development’ pioneered initially by the French government, later gaining credence in EU policy-making (Lacroix 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2011). The notion of co-development, which is premised on “the instrumentalisation of migrants to develop areas of significant emigration in order to reduce migration pressure” (Lacroix 2009: 1683), has led to the formalisation and professionalisation of migrant development activities. Yet it has also been criticised for promoting a dubious logic of immigration control and a reductionist view of migration motives whereby return to one’s roots is assumed to be the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ aspiration of all emigrants (Sinatti and Horst 2015).

Thirdly, as a consequence of the improved infrastructure and wealth in the town, Dembanané has become a focal point for people in the surrounding hinterland. The proliferation of public goods and services – water, electricity, post and communications, a new covered market hall, primary and secondary schools – means that the

village has become a magnet for neighbouring populations, thereby boosting its importance politically. This encourages the villagers to break with the past history of *enclavement* (geographical separation), identified as a continuing blight on the village by Siyaka, a municipal official. The most glaring symptom of this is the poor quality of the access track linking Dembanané with the N2 highway. In the rainy season the villagers are sometimes totally cut off by the flood waters – the track becomes submerged and the village resembles an “island.” These are “primordial and vital questions... for economic life in the village, for life full stop” in Siyaka’s opinion. Indeed, one of the motivations for local officials to assist me in my research was to counteract this isolation – “put us on the map!” they implored.<sup>6</sup>

It was this same desire to put an end to isolation and *enclavement* which saw the Dembanané elders apply to get the administrative status of the town changed to that of a *commune*, with a town hall (*mairie*) and an elected municipal council headed by a mayor. Until recently, Dembanané was part of a lowly *communauté rurale* comprising 15 villages, with the headquarters in nearby Bokhiladji. My respondents maintained that Dembanané is the biggest and most important of these 15 villages, hence the application for commune status (incorporating the smaller village of Yerma which adjoins Dembanané). The main advantages of having commune status are (i) autonomy in how government money is spent, and (ii) better local services and administration, saving villagers the trouble of having to travel for routine administrative tasks. This application was approved in 2008 by the then-President of Senegal Abdoulaye Wade: as a result Dembanané is no longer a village, but a fully-fledged town of over 5200 inhabitants. An essential ingredient in the success of this transformation has been the dynamism and experience of the expatriate community in France.

**Difficulties of Collective Construction in North Africa** The same collective dynamism was not a feature of the testimony of my North African respondents. Thomas Lacroix has written extensively on the contributions of North African migrants living in Europe to the development of regions of origin (Lacroix 2005, 2009, 2013), and his findings point to some interesting similarities and differences between North African initiatives and those centring on the Senegal River Valley. As in the Soninke case, contemporary communal remittances in Morocco have historical precedents, specifically in collective obligations to till common lands and maintain communal infrastructure such as irrigation systems, mosques and cemeteries, overseen by village assemblies (*jemaa*) (Lacroix 2005). With emigration, absent villagers were still expected to fulfil their communal obligations, but by different means: rather than through physical labour, contributions would henceforth be financial (Lacroix 2009). A similar evolution in collective labour practices occurred in Kabylia, Algeria once large-scale emigration to France became established, with emigrants in France reproducing the forms and customs of the *tajmaat* or village

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<sup>6</sup>For this reason I have deliberately identified the village by name. To protect the anonymity of respondents from Dembanané, I have therefore omitted identifying features such as age, number of children, and occupation in France (see also Sect. 3.2). In addition I have attributed a pseudonym to all respondents from Dembanané who are cited in the text.



assembly. As with the early Soninke institutions, a key function of the *tajmaat* in France was to collect funds to assure repatriation for burial when members died abroad (Lacroix 2013).

A number of my North African respondents noted the importance of these institutions in the early years of their presence in France. Yet, as Paris-based psychiatrist Dr. Slimane observed, the faltering bonds of cohesion between emigrants have weakened these institutions over time, following family reunifications. In their place, Lacroix (2009) has documented the emergence of village development associations in Morocco, since the 1990s. These emerged in a context of the failure of the IMF-imposed decentralisation of governance in Morocco and legal changes making it easier to create associations. Under decentralisation, municipal authorities (*communes*) gained new responsibilities in providing local infrastructure and services, but without the resources from central government to fund this. Thus, village development associations sprang up to fill the gap left by the state, for example with initiatives to tarmac roads and bring electricity to remote villages. In need of funds for such activities, these associations looked firstly to their fellow villagers residing abroad for financial support (Lacroix 2009). Nonetheless, very few of my North African respondents mentioned contributing to these associations, in marked contrast to the example set by West African respondents, as noted above.

This disparity between narratives of hometown development among North and West African hostel residents is puzzling. One hypothesis, which certainly would merit further investigation, centres on the skills and financial resources required to deliver development projects in places of origin. This line of argument is suggested by Lacroix's research on collective remittances to Morocco and Algeria (Lacroix 2009, 2013). In Morocco, it became apparent that the financial contributions provided by the migrants alone were not sufficient, leading to a search for new sources of funding, primarily international donors and French government agencies keen to promote co-development (Lacroix 2009). One key consequence of this shift to new sources of finance has been the professionalization of the Moroccan transnational development field, requiring new skillsets in project management and grant writing and significant levels of social capital to develop working relationships with a range of actors both in Morocco and in Europe. In Algeria, by contrast, migrants have been much less involved in development projects. Lacroix argues that "the inscription of Moroccans into civil society networks in the sending and receiving societies have secured different sources of funding. Conversely, Algerian Kabyles suffer from their low socio-professional incorporation [in France] which is not compensated for by their civic activism" (Lacroix 2013: 1021). Lacroix's argument suggests that in the North African context, diaspora development projects require significant human and social capital to succeed (see also Portes et al. 2007). In the West African context, by contrast, my research indicates that the bar to successful implementation of hometown projects is lower.

If this is the case, then the non-participation of older North African hostel residents in hometown development becomes less puzzling, as they do not have the requisite capacities. Indeed, among my respondents, even the most dynamic North African residents felt themselves to be blocked in their efforts to pursue collective

development projects back home, despite a clear willingness to act. The following testimony from Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco) – the president of the Residents’ Committee in his hostel – captures this frustration well. Saleem has been very keen to contribute to the development of his father’s village in Goulmime Province, indeed his resolve –what he calls his “association mentality” – appears to growing firmer as he approaches retirement. In his view it is at retirement that people have the time and expertise to devote to development questions. Such activities can furthermore assist the psychological transition from employment to retirement:

The problem which we immigrants have, especially the retirees, is that we don’t prepare what we’re going to do afterwards. When the person quits his job, all of a sudden he sits down, doesn’t move, the guy doesn’t have any plans, he hasn’t prepared something. Even just an association: the simplest thing is to create an association. (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco)

Thus Saleem founded an association in 2003, with the aim of assisting “children at risk of poverty, women, widows, people who have need of our help.” At present, there are around 50 members, all of whom have kinship ties to the village and have paid €100 to join the association. The association’s next project is to create a large hall, accommodating up to 60 people, to be used for public meetings and festivities.

Each year – it’s our tradition – we have a festival, there are people who come from abroad, and from the countryside (...) It’s so that the traditions remain alive for the next generation, because we have children who don’t even know their place of origin, so the festival allows people to get to know each other (...) We are going to build a hall, a big one, because with the small room which we have at the moment, the space isn’t big enough. So we have bought the land, we’re going to enlarge the hall, there’s going to be a separation between the men and the women, with toilet facilities etc. That’s the project that we’re currently working on, we’ve already begun it. (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco)

Yet, even with a project which is not in any way innovative or challenging of the traditional ways of doing things back home (cf. Cerase 1974), Saleem meets resistance:

We have things to do but it’s a shame because we don’t live in the country, we live here [in France], so we’re not given help from over there. And when from time to time we go on holiday there, we can’t do everything. [AH: So there isn’t anyone over there who keeps an eye on the construction work?] No, we even asked to create an association over there which would be linked to ours, but currently there is still no progress (...) We have guys who are retired but they aren’t interested enough in the association, that’s the problem.

Interestingly in Saleem’s example, the local government (*commune*) has shown its support for this venture by tarmacking the road which will lead to the new meeting hall. In part this is motivated by the fact that local officials will be able to use the space for meetings. Just as in Dembanané, therefore, the state has an interest in this project because of its ‘gap-filling’ potential. However, other respondents in different circumstances mentioned that the Moroccan state was not at all supportive. As the daughter of my respondent Lhoussaine (63, Tiznit, Morocco) put it, “if it is an economic issue, bringing money into Morocco, there is never any problem, but if there’s a legal, administrative, or human dimension, then there are always barriers [erected by the state].”



## 6.4 Social Bearings: Negotiations of Status and 'Mentality'

For North African respondents, the difficulties encountered in constructing a physical space to return to lead to a situation whereby they also lack 'social bearings', in other words a situation whereby their social standing and behaviour in places of origin is put in question. West African respondents, on the other hand, find it easier to re-integrate socially thanks to their role in coordinating improvements to the physical environment and infrastructure in places of origin.

**Retirement in West Africa: The "Start of Another Life", Not a Social Death** The influence of retired returnees in Dembanané is greatly facilitated by transplanting power structures to France from the village, via the hometown association. The economic resources which hostel residents marshal collectively via these institutions enable them to wield power in their local communities, despite their physical absence. As Catherine Quiminal notes, these associations have 'transformed the absence of each migrant into a prominent political presence in the home village' (2002: 40; author's translation). Upon retirement, West Africans are able to draw on the political, social and economic capital that they were able to retain through their involvement in the hometown associations, in order to facilitate their re-integration to the home village. Many such hometown associations are headquartered in hostels in France. Simply by living in a hostel, residents are constantly informed of events in the village. The contributions they make via their hometown associations enable older hostel residents to be key agents of change in their home communities. The power they wield enables them not only to keep tabs on developments back home, but also to direct change in the village as they see fit. They are therefore not at all disoriented upon their return. This eases their re-integration and gives them a sense of ownership in the community.

The second element to consider is the gerontocratic norms which operate in the West African villages of my respondents. In terms of political decision-making at the village level, older people have the most important role. As Idrissa (Dembané, Senegal) put it, "social power belongs to them". In Dembanané, the pensioners' contribution is political firstly because it is often the elders who take the lead on development projects. Inspiration for collective projects in Dembanané comes from the expatriates in France, as well as from the elders in the village, who necessarily include a good number of return migrants. For example, the covered market was an initiative from France, whereas the new college and 'Ecole 2' (one of two primary schools) were initiatives emanating from the village elders. Indeed, the funds for this latter project were almost entirely sourced by the returned retirees, who supplied 8 million francs CFA (over €12,000) of the 9 million francs CFA total.

The men become more active socially at retirement. Contrary to representations of retirement as a 'social death' in (post-) industrialised countries (Guillemard 1972), retirement back in West Africa for hostel residents is portrayed as a new lease of life. As a senior figure in Dembanané's municipal administration described, 'it's at retirement that they lead an active life, socially... They become more present socially at retirement.' For an example of the active social life of retirees in

Dembancané, one needs look no further than Samba, the father of Jaabé with whom I stayed during my time in Dembancané. Samba is undoubtedly an important man in the village: people constantly seek him out for advice. He is often away from morning to afternoon, visiting local politicians and mediating family tensions. By midday Samba was sometimes visibly fatigued by his morning exertions and visits.

It is not just in the field of village affairs that older returnees exert themselves, but also in the fields of millet, rice and sorghum which surround the village. The elders are strongly implicated in the economic and productive life of the village. Idrissa and Lassana stressed that those who have not emigrated from Dembancané often die young due to the very hard work they do in the fields. Generally, however, the role of the former emigrant elders is not to provide physical labour: it is more about supervision and strategy, according to Amadou (64, Tambacounda, Senegal), who at the time of our meeting in France was about to return home in order to supervise the coming season's groundnut planting. The actual manual labour involved in planting is more for young people: the older ones direct proceedings and purchase materials. Idrissa (Dembancané, Senegal) was adamant that old age in Soninke society is not like in the West, where it is considered as a ceasing of activity, as the beginning of the end of life. Instead, in Dembancané, it is the "start of another life, an *active* life... a return to the soil, for farming and rearing livestock" (Idrissa, Dembancané, Senegal; emphasis added). Djimé also laid a stress on retirement as the start of a new stage of activity:

Here it's not the same life as the pensioners in Europe, because here, when you return to the village, it's a time of new activity, a new condition. Because here you're always working, going to the fields, farming, administrative errands, construction. We're out there: we're not resting, unemployed! [laughter] In France, [at retirement] they said to us, "off you go, go and relax, take a rest – we'll pay you!" But on the contrary, we come here and we work! [more laughter] (Djimé, Dembancané, Senegal)

**"We Have a Different Mentality to Them": Social Bearings in North Africa** This sentiment of being active and socially valued by the home community was not shared by most of my North African respondents. Instead of keeping active and taking control, North African respondents were more passive. Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco) stressed that during his holidays he usually has very little time to himself – "everything is programmed" – and often he has very little say in how the programme is planned. "I am like a passenger" is his way of expressing this passiveness in the face of family commitments. In response to the administrative and social re-integration problems which many older Moroccans returning from Europe experience, 'Migrations et Développement', an important development NGO in Southern Morocco (Lacroix 2005), launched an 'orientation service' for retired migrants in 2007. In our interview, the coordinator of the service, Lahcen, complained: "These people are treated like they are redundant. The Moroccan state should take care of them once they are retired." He elaborated by suggesting that it might be necessary for the Moroccan authorities to create special services for these elders because they are neglected within the family and local community. Indeed, the questionnaire

which he completes with every new user of the orientation service asks whether the Moroccan state should build care homes in Morocco exclusively for return migrants. The very fact that this question is asked illustrates the disparity between how these older returnees are viewed in Morocco and how they are viewed in Senegal. Such a question would frankly be unthinkable in Dembanané: on several occasions, my respondents there voiced to me their horror of being admitted to a retirement home in France (see Sect. 7.4). For them, it is out of the question that such facilities could exist in villages on the banks of the Senegal River!

Another respondent highlighted the North African men's sense of isolation. Many older hostel residents have "cut their ties with the country of origin" to some extent. They are "isolated socially here and there... When they are back home, they stay indoors, they don't leave the house often" (Dr Ismail, medical advisor, migrant welfare association, Paris). That they do not go out but instead prefer to be house-bound brings to mind the work of Pierre Bourdieu in Algeria, who early in his career wrote about the 'Kabyle House' and the gender-based dualism inscribed in this domestic space:

[T]he house being the domain of women, the men are to some degree excluded from it. The place of the man is out of doors, in the fields or in the assembly, among other men. This is something taught very early to the young boy. Men who remain too much in the house during the day are suspect. The respectable man must allow himself to be seen, to show himself and place himself continually under the gaze of others, to face up to them (*qabal*). (Bourdieu 1965: 222)

When North African respondents did attempt to 'face up' to their peers who have remained in the community of origin, their honour – identified by Bourdieu (1965) as a fundamental value in North African society – was put in question. One respondent described this situation very eloquently:

It's true, I have friends back home who have done well for themselves, and sometimes when I go home, when I sit with them, I feel that I am embarrassed. Because those guys have reached a level which I should have reached. Because for me – in my file it's written 'factory worker in France' – whereas they are doctors, lawyers, so we don't speak the same language. That's psychologically embarrassing. For me it's a regret. (Saleem, 60, Tiznit, Morocco).<sup>7</sup>

My North African respondents were often unsettled by being out of step with the society of origin during their return visits, further complicating the process of re-integration. They would complain that life in their hometowns was "not like it used to be" and that they no longer shared the same "mentality" and "character" of friends and acquaintances who had not emigrated. This could manifest itself in seemingly minor but nonetheless troubling ways, such as time-keeping, bureaucratic frustrations and pace of life, an issue discussed by other scholars of return

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<sup>7</sup>Immediately after this quote, Saleem went on to relativise his situation, following my prompt that "all the same, you have had the opportunity to travel, you've seen many things" [NB. Before coming to France, Saleem had lived and worked in West Africa.] Comparing his situation with his well-placed friends, he replied: "Yes, to travel, yes perhaps I've seen a world that they haven't seen, perhaps I can analyse things which they don't know about."

migration (de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Gmelch 1980; Gualda and Escriva 2014). For example, one of my neighbours in the hostel where I resided laid a particular stress on time-keeping: having been a factory shift worker, he was quite a stickler for punctuality. He had invited me to share a meal with him one evening, and we had agreed to meet in the communal kitchen on his floor. I was three (at the most, four) minutes late, but he was evidently quite annoyed to begin with: “when I say eight o’clock, I mean eight o’clock!” On another occasion, he told me:

When we [immigrants] arrived in these countries in Europe, we followed the European system, a meeting at 3pm, it’s at 3pm on the dot. Back home, a guy might say at 4pm but doesn’t show up, even if you go looking for him, he’ll say ‘yes, but I forgot’ – so we have a different mentality from them.

More existentially troubling for some men was their adoption of a ‘French’ lifestyle at odds with the established moral and religious order back home. This was a feature not only of North African respondents’ testimony, but also of West Africans’ talk. Hadyatou, who regularly travels back-and-forth between France and Dembanané, noted that when he returns from France it takes him a while to adjust, to feel at ease. It is a question of adjusting one’s “mentality (...) The first time, I didn’t have the same mentality as here [Senegal], you know. I had the mentality of a European guy... saying my prayers five times a day?! – I wasn’t used to that. Now that I have returned I do my prayers every day.” Indeed, his comments were revealing of the ‘French’ lifestyle and social life which he used to enjoy when I asked him whether there were aspects of life in France which he missed: “Yes, many in fact. Because I have many friends there; also, I miss a glass of the good stuff from time to time, a Ricard, a glass of Beaujolais [laughs].” Likewise in Morocco, those who have taken to drinking during their time in Europe are not able to indulge this pastime back in their villages. “They have to do all the prayers, they can’t go drinking. And they soon get tired of the strict regime, so they go back to France to continue with their libertine lifestyle” (Younes, 60s, Tizinit).

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to unpack the processes of re-integration which retired hostel residents confront during their periods of residence in communities of origin, necessitating adaptations between those who return and those left behind (Arowolo 2000). As the chapter has shown, this occurs above all in economic, political and normative terms. In order to capture these re-integration processes, I proposed a conceptual framework based on the notion of ‘bearings’. The concept of bearings did useful analytical work by highlighting two spheres in which re-integration takes place. Firstly, bearings may be physical in the sense of having influence over one’s physical surroundings in places of origin, as was discussed in Sects. 6.2 and 6.3. Secondly, there is a social aspect to bearings, and in Sect. 6.4 I explored hostels residents’ social standing and behaviour in places of origin. As was shown, physical and

social bearings are mutually reinforcing: the lack of social capital evinced by North African hostel residents was one reason for the difficulties they encountered in constructing a place back home after retirement, whereas my respondents in Dembanané were able to contribute to the town's infrastructural development because of their social embeddedness, cemented by their years of participation in the Dembanané hometown association. Indeed, their social status increased with the growing regional significance of the town which their development work has brought about: improvements to infrastructure there have seen it emerge as a local administrative centre and gain in prominence politically.

One puzzling question raised by my findings was why many West Africans engaged in hometown development whereas most of my North African respondents did not. Much of the literature on transnationalism and diaspora engagement explains migrants' motivations to assist their places of origin on the basis of supposedly fundamental obligations stemming from common ethnicity and kinship ties (see Sect. 2.3 for discussion). As Carolin Fischer notes, "People's agency and motivation to engage with the country of origin seem to be taken as a given" (Fischer 2013: 56). This chapter has shown that these assumptions about the determinism of ethnic and kinship ties are mis-placed. While many West African hostel residents were strongly motivated to engage in development, and often spectacularly successful, I encountered less enthusiasm among Moroccans and Algerians. Furthermore, those North Africans who were motivated were often frustrated in their efforts. This indicates that a comparison of the potential for agency in the two regions of origin is warranted.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that social action should be conceived as resulting from the conjuncture of the temporal and structural contexts or environments of action, and the dynamic individual element of agency. Applying this to the discussion of bearings above, it is clear that 'getting one's bearings' is also about the way people navigate different social and structural environments over time. As the chapter showed, such environments can be constraining, notably in relation to the level of resources and skills needed to implement development projects. But at the same time navigation also involves people's conscious and sometimes creative and transformative responses to such constraints. For example, the strategy adopted in Dembanané to *not* apply for planning approval and only inform state agencies once infrastructure projects are completed: this calculated gamble rests on the assumption that distant bureaucrats could not possibly overrule or dismantle projects once they are up and running, due to the valuable 'gap-filling' function they fulfil for central government.

My final remarks address the theories of return migration presented in Chap. 2. Given the chapter's focus on re-integration, the explanatory model provided by scholars in the structuralist tradition like George Gmelch and Francesco Cerase is of considerable relevance. North Africans found it difficult to physically construct a place to return to because of a perceived lack of insider contacts among the local power holders, whereas in West Africa, it is the emigrants themselves who have become the power holders. These findings also speak to theoretical paradigms in the transnationalism literature, given the long-distance channels of communication

which exist between hometown associations – often headquartered in hostels – and the community back home. Thanks to their hometown association, the Dembanané men in France have reliable information about their hometown, which means they are better prepared for return. Although new communication technologies can be a barrier to return at the family level (see Sect. 5.4), at the village level rapid and regular communications relayed by the hometown associations help members in France maintain a political, economic and symbolic presence in the village, facilitating return if so desired.

Contrary to representations of retirement as a ‘social death’ in (post-) industrial societies (Guillemard 1972), retirement back in West Africa for hostel residents is portrayed as a new lease of life. By contrast, North Africans tended to feel redundant and passive, to the extent that there were demands for the Moroccan state to build care homes for retired returning migrants, a scenario which would be completely unthinkable in Dembanané where institutionalised elder care outside the family is anathema. The issue of care homes and what happens as the hostel residents approach and prepare for the end of life will now be taken up in Chap. 7. While the foregoing chapter was, at least for my West African respondents, imbued with the hope and pride which flowed from their contributions to hometown development, the issues of death and dependency are unsurprisingly marked by less sanguine attitudes.

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## Chapter 7

# Loss of Autonomy, Dying and the Penultimate Voyage



*The people whom we are talking about are very fragile – three deaths are recorded each day in our hostels, and this figure will not cease to rise.*

Testimony of Bruno Arbouet, Chief Executive of Adoma, to the Parliamentary Mission on Older Migrants (Bachelay 2013; author's translation).

Chapter 4, which looked at healthcare as a rationale for hostel residents' mobility, showed that the *va-et-vient* can continue for a long time, even in situations of advanced frailty. Sooner or later, however, ageing hostel residents begin to experience loss of autonomy. This term refers to those individuals "who, in addition to the medical care which they are susceptible to receive, require help to accomplish essential daily tasks, or whose situation necessitates regular monitoring" (Bachelay 2013: 66). Once loss of autonomy intervenes, a decision about where to live out the rest of one's days has to be made. In this final chapter before the Conclusion, the focus will be on hostel residents' mobility and residential strategies to manage their impending frailty, loss of autonomy, and ultimately, the end of life.

That older hostel residents show their determination to continue in the *va-et-vient* for as long as possible should come as no surprise given how engrained it has become in their lives. This is elucidated in a 2007 report from Sonacotra-Adoma, which shows that 10% of all externally-contracted care services in Sonacotra-Adoma hostels are suspended due to return trips home (Adoma 2007). The report continues: "The non-negligible number of suspended care actions shows clearly that the migrants continue with the system of back-and-forth trips as long as possible, despite illness or a certain dependency" (Adoma 2007: 13). The same tendency is seen in the records of certain 'at risk' residents (experiencing more advanced loss of autonomy) that I was able to consult in Marseille at Adoma-Sonacotra's South-East regional headquarters.<sup>1</sup> I have reproduced some of the casefiles here in

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<sup>1</sup> I should stress that at the time of the research such records were not kept for all Sonacotra-Adoma residents. Rather, the aim of the *fonction de veille socio-sanitaire* scheme was to monitor the health and social situation of certain residents who gave hostel managers (or fellow residents) cause for concern. At the time of my fieldwork, the scheme had not been rolled out on a national basis, being

**Table 7.1** Casefile n° FVA 2006-04

Employment status:	Not working
Marital status:	Married
Entourage:	His brother
Residence:	-----
Age:	62
N° of years resident :	10
Difficulties observed:	–
Willingness to be helped:	Refuses
Medical costs:	–
Current aid:	–
Aid pending:	–
Other actions:	Doctor at work, GP
Other partners:	–
Remarks:	<i>Return trips</i> between hospital and country of origin.
Return trips:	Yes. Two months per year.
Case notes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sept 2005. Had a short stay in hospital and since then has had a long illness. Returned to country of origin.</li> <li>– March 2007. Came back for a few days then returned to country of origin.</li> <li>– August 2007. Is still back home.</li> <li>– Nov 2007. Has been back since 15.11 to undergo hospital treatment in Marseille. Has difficulties walking due to diabetes.</li> </ul>

tabular form, taking care to anonymise the records as completely as possible. The case shown in Table 7.1 is indicative of the phenomenon of *va-et-vient* in a situation of ill-health and loss of autonomy.

The incorporation of mobile methods in my research design (see Sect. 2.4) also helped me appreciate the sometimes precarious nature of the *va-et-vient*. In the course of a gruelling three-day journey by bus and ferry from Paris to Tiznit in Southern Morocco, I gained an insight into the fragile state in which some older hostel residents are prepared to travel. Between the cramped coach seating which made sleep difficult, the infrequent stops for meals and comfort breaks, and the steep gangways and stairs on board the ferry, I could only empathise with my travelling companions. A health advisor at Sonacotra-Adoma recounted similar experiences:

If you go to the airports, it's quite funny to see – they do the *va-et-vient* as long as possible. They leave in conditions sometimes which neither you nor I would accept our parents travelling in: one would think they wouldn't survive the journey (...) They continue to do the *va-et-vient* as long as possible even in states of health or mobility which are really degraded, that's for sure.

most comprehensively piloted in the company's hostels in the south-east of France. Hence my trip to Sonacotra-Adoma's South-East regional headquarters in Marseille, to find out more about the scheme.

Nonetheless there comes a point when the *va-et-vient* becomes unsustainable due to loss of autonomy. While the timing varies according to each individual's circumstances, in general hostel companies observe this juncture around the age of 75. According to a Sonacotra-Adoma study of 2005, "The more the residents advance in age, the more they are engaged in the *back-and-forth trips*, up until the age of 75. The percentage of people going back-and-forth falls after 75" (Sonacotra 2005b: 6).

Several options are open to hostel residents regarding place of residence once loss of autonomy intervenes, as Vivianne (geriatric doctor) elaborated: "Afterwards it's very variable: there are those who stay over there [with their families]; there are those who come back here [to stay in France]; and then there are those who remain here but go back home, but really at the very last minute, those who return to die. It's what we observe, but we don't know too much about it: there haven't been many studies which have appeared on that topic." One study by the association *Migrations Santé* does give some indications at least: at the ADEF hostel in L'Hay-les-Roses, only 15% of residents envisaged moving to a French care home in a situation of reduced autonomy, against 60% who foresaw a return home to their families (Migrations Santé 2007).

The mobility options outlined by Vivianne in the preceding paragraph structure the remainder of this chapter. I will firstly consider the possibility of returning home (Sect. 7.1). While some returns in a situation of reduced autonomy are voluntary, it will be shown that others are occasioned by elements of constraint. I will then turn to the various options available for those who would remain in France: receiving care and assistance for everyday tasks in the hostel itself (Sect 7.2); arrival in France of a relative (usually the spouse) to care for an individual with reduced autonomy (Sect. 7.3); or the possibility of moving to a nursing home (Sect. 7.4). Finally, I will consider return mobility at the very end of life, encompassing not only the 'last-minute' returns alluded to by Vivianne, but also the widespread practice of posthumous repatriation (Sect. 7.5).

## 7.1 Returning Home: The Penultimate Voyage

Previous scholarship has highlighted that reaching retirement age is a key moment when the question of a possible return is posed (see Chap. 1). However my research shows that this question also becomes pertinent once older migrants start to require more intensive support (see also Karl et al. 2017). Many residents envisage returning home definitively when loss of autonomy becomes unmanageable in the hostel. Such a move enables ailing hostel residents to receive care from family members back home, which, as noted in Chap. 1, is a strong rationale behind late-in-life migration in other contexts (Findley 1988; Longino 1992).

By way of example, Walid (72, Oujda, Morocco) mentioned that he was hoping to quit the hostel soon, to go back to Oujda to "live out his days." Brahim (60s, Agadir, Morocco) spoke of his serious gastric and mental health problems several

years previously. By his own admission he had returned to Morocco “to die” but following a three year-long recovery he has come back to France. Most residents however remain in their countries of origin, according to healthcare professionals who intervene regularly in hostels. Béatrice (health advisor, migrant welfare association) commented: “When they are too ill, too old, they return home, and they never come back here. That’s for sure.” Hadyatou in Dembanané put it this way:

When I’m too beat-up, when I can no longer move, well I’ll stay here [in the village] and re-direct my pension money here. But for the time being, I’m in good health, I can move just fine. (Hadyatou, Dembanané, Senegal)

I use the term ‘penultimate voyage’ as a shorthand for this option of returning definitively once loss of autonomy intervenes. This choice of words is sensitive to the religiosity which hostel residents evinced when discussing their own mortality and their wishes at the end of life. Indeed, nowhere did this religious identity express itself more than when discussing death and dying. Being Muslim, my respondents in the hostels drew a very clear distinction between the world of the living on one hand, and, on the other the afterlife, during which one will undergo bodily resurrection, final judgement and assignation either to heaven or hell. In such a cosmology, the final journey can only ever be the journey which the resurrected body takes after judgement to its assigned destination (Rauf 2014), a journey which according to Islamic traditions involves traversing or falling from the bridge or *sirat* which spans hell (Smith and Haddad 2002). Hence the phrase ‘penultimate voyage’ to distinguish the final terrestrial journey of the hostel residents.

**Constrained Returns** The penultimate voyage may be willingly undertaken in order to benefit from the care of one’s relatives, provided family ties have not been irreparably weakened through prolonged absence. “We know that [those] who still have ties with their family in the country of origin go back if at all possible in order to end their days around their relatives” (Bitatsi Trachet and El Moubaraki 2006: 109). Sometimes, however, there is a degree of constraint to these penultimate voyages. It is important to recognise that sometimes the ‘choice’ to return is more or less imposed by institutional actors, such as hostel managers or healthcare professionals. In other cases, they are ‘encouraged’ to return by friends and neighbours in the hostel.

In terms of institutional constraints, these may operate when individuals start to be perceived as a burden on resources. Some men become indebted, and can no longer pay for their hospital care, their medication, or their home care services. Martine (elder care coordinator, Val d’Oise) remarked that occasionally hospital personnel become “exasperated to the point where they say, ‘right, out you go, you’re no longer ill and you’re using up a bed’. But where to go?” Alternating between the local hospital and the hostel becomes impossible, since they cannot afford the hospital, and the hostel is not adapted to their health needs. In some cases, they are forcibly returned to the country of origin, or placed in a retirement home. Martine described this as “a form of institutional violence” when there are no family members to liaise with. An interview with Anne-Marie, who works in a major hospital as a crisis social worker, also broached this issue:

Sometimes, they arrive too late, that is to say the patients arrive too late at the hospital and they no longer have a choice, they can't be returned to the hostels – they might have problems walking and there's no lift – so either they have to be hospitalised for months, or a place in a nursing home has to be found, which is a bit complicated. So it's good to work with them beforehand on a potential return home. (...) But frankly, I've never seen a single person accept this willingly (...) Really the ones who accept to return, it's when they know they are going to die soon, because they are so completely dependent, that is to say, instead of going into a retirement home all alone when you have family back home, they reflect all the same on the possibility of returning to the family home, and having their wife or children look after them.

In other situations, left-behind family members are alerted by hostel management to the fact that their husband/father is sick in France and can no longer look after themselves in the hostel. In my discussions with Denis, a hostel manager, he mentioned that in the past managers were not required to ask residents for next-of-kin contact details. It is only recently, as head office began to grasp the extent of ageing and its consequences in the hostels, that recording such information has proved necessary. Thus relatives can be summoned from overseas to escort home a resident struggling with loss of autonomy – provided a visa can be secured, which is not always straightforward as some respondents mentioned (see Table 7.3).

The final instance where returns may be constrained pertains to the individual's social circle within the hostel itself. Instead of seeing their ailing compatriot sent to a retirement home – which is seen as shameful and even as reflecting badly on the hostel residents collectively (Sonacotra 2005a) – neighbours prefer to donate money to a collection fund in order to purchase a ticket to enable the man to return. “Very often, the fellow residents say to the elderly person, ‘listen, you go home now; if it turns out OK you can come back, if not then you stay there’” (Béatrice, health advisor, migrant welfare association). An example of such a situation is found in the casefile in Table 7.2.

The sparseness and gravity of language by which the suffering of the individual in Table 7.2 is conveyed gives some insight, I think, into the institutional violence which is endemic and latent in hostel living. Such violence occurs, indeed seems inexorable, despite the good intentions of a number of actors. One can only speculate at the fate of this man. His example, anonymous though it is, underlines some of the limits of the hostel as a venue for ‘home care’, to which I now will turn.

## 7.2 Staying in the Hostel: Home Care

As in other European countries, the guiding principle of elder care policy in France is the notion of *maintien à domicile*, henceforth translated as ‘home care’ (Jamieson 1991; Walker and Maltby 1997). The objective of home care is to enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. This is seen as important firstly because surveys indicate it is what older individuals themselves prefer, and secondly because care in institutional-residential settings is perceived as more costly by European governments (Walker and Maltby 1997). Surveying the

**Table 7.2** Casefile n° FVA 2006-2

Employment status:	Retired
Marital status:	Married
Entourage:	Neighbours, mates
Residence:	-----
Age:	70
N° of years resident :	More than 10
Difficulties observed:	Hygiene, memory loss, depression, delirium
Willingness to be helped:	Agrees
Medical costs:	CMU-C <sup>a</sup>
Current aid:	–
Aid pending:	–
Other actions:	–
Other partners:	Doctor, CLIC, <sup>b</sup> Psychiatrist at hospital
Remarks:	Return home organised by friends.
Return trips:	Yes

## Case notes:

There are no complaints but rather calls for help on the part of residents who know him.

Feb. 2006: The residents on his floor came to alert us about the worrying state of health of the resident. Monsieur was wandering aimlessly, talking in an alarming manner and had lost an enormous amount of weight.

We contacted his GP who, after having visited, said that it would be preferable for him to go back to his country of origin in order to speak with a psychiatrist and to take stock of his mental state.

All the same, he prescribed a brain scan but the resident was in such a state of disorder that he didn't want to be treated.

We got back in contact with the GP in order to proceed to a compulsory hospitalisation (i.e. committed involuntarily to a psychiatric hospital), as the CLIC had advised.

The next day the resident came spontaneously to the office of the hostel manager and we then contacted the CLIC again in order to find a rapid solution so that he wouldn't be left to his own devices at the weekend. Made calls to almost all the external partners, and alerted the Emergency Services to find someone who would agree to accompany the resident to hospital.

Via the social services who took charge of the transportation, we called upon the [Xxxxx] Association, who came very quickly.

After a diagnosis made by the Emergency Services, the resident was referred to the psychiatric hospital and spent the weekend there.

On the Monday, his friends went to collect him and made him go back to his country of origin.

<sup>a</sup>CMU-C refers to *Couverture de maladie universelle complémentaire*, a state-subsidised health insurance scheme in France which covers 100% of the beneficiary's medical costs. Please see Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2 for further information.

<sup>b</sup>A CLIC (*Centre local d'information et de coordination gérontologique*) is a care coordination service for older people. Most municipal areas (*communes*) in France are endowed with a CLIC. The role of CLIC personnel is to liaise between the different local stakeholders involved in elderly care: the individuals concerned and their entourage, private care providers, hospitals, nursing homes, and so on.



diverse range of home care provision in Europe, Jamieson (1991) draws three principal categories: nursing care, undertaken by nursing professionals (giving injections, measuring blood pressure and so on); personal care (daily tasks such as washing and dressing); and home-making (tasks such as cleaning and cooking). In France, elderly care services provide all three types of assistance: home care provided by formal service providers is usually supplemented by informal care provided by family members and neighbours (Paraponaris et al. 2012).

Central to the successful deployment of formal home care in France is a financial aid known as the Personalised Aid for Autonomy (*aide personnalisée à l'autonomie*: APA). This means-tested non-contributory benefit makes formal home care more affordable for individuals with difficulties in accomplishing daily tasks, especially for those on low incomes such as hostel residents. An important legal change occurred in 2000 enabling hostel residents to benefit from this aid: henceforth a hostel room could be considered in law as a 'principal residence'<sup>2</sup> and thus home care services should be deployed there if needed.

Nonetheless, the layout of hostels often impedes the work of home care professionals. In many hostels "the very environment ... is not adequate for [the residents'] situation, for someone who is old, sick etc, who should be nowhere near a hostel, in a room of 7 square metres, with external toilets and a collective kitchen" (Abdou, migrant rights association). Such physical constraints were seen in Chap. 1 in the photographs of the living spaces in the hostel where I was resident (see Figs. 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9 and 1.10). In order to facilitate home care and generally improve the situation of older residents, a large-scale programme of architectural renovation has been underway since 1997, part of the wider statutory transformation of migrant worker hostels (*foyers de travailleurs migrant*) into *résidence sociales*, as noted in Sect. 2.2. Examples of architectural improvements include enlarging and ergonomically adapting residents' rooms, widening corridors and other collective spaces so that wheelchairs can be turned around, installing lifts to all floors, and placing hand rails in corridors and shower facilities (Adoma 2008). However it remains the case that in many hostels the programme of renovations has barely begun (see Sect. 2.2).

**Retirement Homes?** The foregoing legal and architectural changes have led some commentators to ask whether hostels – originally created for young workers – now constitute de facto retirement homes 'on the cheap', reserved for migrants only (Serafini 1999; Vidalie 2008). The evidence gathered for this book suggests not. Overall, hostels cannot be considered as sites of dedicated elder care. Indeed, a very low proportion of older hostel residents are in receipt of the APA benefit. A Sonacotra-Adoma report showed that in 2005, "5% of [residents] over 60 are identified as having difficulties accomplishing everyday tasks (...) Only 12% of these people benefit from the aid which they could claim" (Adoma 2007: 4), in other words only 0.5% of all residents over 60. This compares with a take-up rate of 8% for all over 60s nationwide, rising to 17% for those aged over 75 (Debout 2010).

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<sup>2</sup>Article 194 of the law of *Solidarité et renouvellement urbain* (SRU), December 2000.

Since the Sonacotra-Adoma report of 2005, slow progress has been made. A follow-up study in 2007 showed that the take-up rate had risen somewhat, with “2.06% of people over 60 receiving nursing care and 1.09% benefiting from home care” (Adoma 2007: 2). Nonetheless the discrepancies with the national take-up rates remain considerable: what is blocking the deployment of these services?

Firstly, the cost of the available services is highlighted as a principal factor explaining the men’s wariness to benefit from home care (Dherbey and Jurdan 2002). Home care is often viewed by migrants living in hostels or other low-cost housing as a luxury they cannot afford (Alidra et al. 2003), especially for those who are still burdened with the expectation of sending remittances home every month. The biographical particularity of this latter situation has been noted at several points in this book. As Béatrice (health advisor, migrant welfare association) put it, “even if it doesn’t cost a lot of money, it costs a bit, and many migrants want to keep this money to send home, they don’t want to have to pay someone for nursing, they prefer to ask a neighbour for help, or just muddle through themselves.”

A second, and related, biographical particularity is the hostel residents’ lack of family entourage, this being the customary source of support and information for senior citizens in France (Paraponaris et al. 2012). “Normally it’s older people who apply for help, or their families, but with us [i.e., at Sonacotra-Adoma] that doesn’t happen. [The residents] are all alone, they have no family, they don’t know the mechanisms, they don’t know the services” (health advisor, Sonacotra-Adoma). While some commentators argue that the absence of family members is partially assuaged by help from neighbours and friends in the hostel, other sources are not so optimistic. A Sonacotra-Adoma internal document notes that “[c]ommunity solidarity (...) is not sufficient to ensure an efficient early warning: in fact, this is often unsystematic, often late, and it is often not done as it should be” (Sonacotra n.d.: 4). Similarly, a Unaf document points out that “solidarity among residents exists, but it is neither intense nor durable. It reaches its limits when problems of dependency appear” (Unaf 2002: 47).

The reticence of hostel managers to communicate problems to the relevant care professionals also appears to be a barrier to residents’ wellbeing. A report by consultancy firm Icares regarding hostels in the Rhône-Alpes region declares that “it is not so much the functioning of the early-warning system which causes problems. In fact, when the [management] team has enough time (...) the observation and identification of problematic situations proceeds quite naturally. Where there are more problems is in the alerting of professionals about a given situation, and in the follow-up to this” (Sonacotra-Icares 2003: 15). Furthermore, care professionals may also show reticence to intervene in hostels. This can be attributed first of all to an ignorance of these places and people: if hostel managers do not contact them, care professionals are not necessarily going to know that there are vulnerable older people in the hostels. “Older immigrants [in hostels] live in an unusual habitat for gerontological actors” (Dherbey and Jurdan 2002 : 13). Typically, such actors are accustomed to dealing with people aged 75 and over, especially older women, living alone in private housing. As was mentioned earlier, the family entourage is often at hand to keep a watchful eye over an elderly relative. The population in the hostels is

quite the contrary: male, prematurely showing loss of autonomy after 55 years of age, and living in communal accommodation yet where neighbourly solidarity cannot always be taken for granted.

Once this initial barrier of ignorance is overcome, there remain difficulties for professionals in actually gaining entry to hostels. This was one of the principal factors given when I asked care providers what impeded their work in the hostels. Dr Ismail, a geriatric specialist who volunteers in several Paris hostels, replied firstly that, “it’s a difficult terrain, there are difficulties of access.” But eventually, with the cooperation of hostel managers, an agreement can be reached for gaining entry. Sonia and Martine, elder care coordinators in Val d’Oise, bemoaned the mass of keys which is required to see a patient; first of all, a swipe card for the hostel entrance, then a key for the stairwell or lift, then a key for the corridor, then a key for the room itself. However, it was only when I accompanied home care auxiliary Dimitri, on his weekly visits to see his client Mr R, that I came to fully appreciate these problems of access. As my field notes record:

Unfortunately it was difficult getting into the hostel in the first place – we had to call up to Mr R’s room twice, and each time we had no reply. Finally we got in thanks to some other residents who were entering the building and left the door open for us. But clearly, if it wasn’t a busy time of day – mid-morning – then it would have been a real pain. Dimitri doesn’t have any keys as it costs €15 per set and Mr R doesn’t want to pay.

For other professionals I spoke to, the supposed ambiance of the hostels is not conducive to doing their work. This is the case especially in the former Sonacotra hostels, despite the name change to Adoma in 2007. “The reputation and image of Sonacotra also gets in the way” (Martine, elder care coordinator, Val d’Oise). This reputation is grounded in the ‘alterity’ which the hostels represent – a wariness of the ‘other’, fed by the negative local press coverage which hostels sometimes receive due to being associated with criminality or other *faits divers* (public interest stories). One fear concerns the violent or sexual proclivities which the men in this highly masculine environment are said to harbour. Martine observed a “fear of the male, in the corridors, all alone” among many of the (generally female) care professionals who are called to intervene in the hostels, closely related to “racist phantasms ...the foreign man is more violent... these ‘other’ men, polygamous”. Her colleague, Sonia, talked about the prevalent stereotype of the *foyer* as a dangerous place:

The nurses aren’t very keen – because of the hostels’ reputation... these cut-throat hostels, hostels where there are problems, where you can get attacked, where your tyres get slashed, where your windows get broken. All in all a whole host of reasons why [female care providers] say ‘no, especially not there.’

Gendered anxieties resurface – but in mirror-image – in the discourse of the residents, who are reticent to be helped. Yet here it is the men’s modesty rather than their allegedly predatory nature which is at issue. The gender and age gap between themselves and their would-be carers is erected as a supposedly ‘cultural’ barrier to assistance. A Unafop report of 2002 argues that “in their culture, it is the wife who manages, alone, the domestic tasks, laundry, meals: support for elderly relatives is incumbent on the family members” (Unafop 2002: 47; also Alidra et al. 2003).

Similarly, Vivianne (geriatric doctor) had this to say on the matter: “Home help – the person who comes to do your housework, the person who comes to help you get dressed, if you can no longer lift your arms – is something which they have problems accepting, since culturally it is the role of the wife or the daughter.”

Others I talked to had a more nuanced view and I feel it is important to step back from essentialising narratives in which everything is explicated through ‘cultural’ incompatibilities alone. Accepting outside aid to accomplish daily tasks is not easy for anyone, regardless of their age, gender or ethnicity. Equally, surveys in France and elsewhere show that in general older people experiencing loss of autonomy are much more likely to receive care from informal family sources than from outside professional services (Paraponaris et al. 2012). Furthermore, in France the probability of receiving informal care from one’s spouse is higher for men than for women; and regardless of the care receiver’s gender, receiving informal care from one’s children is also higher if one has daughters rather than sons (ibid). Such findings indicate that gendered care norms are also at work in the wider French population.

Clearly the family is a significant source of care for older people in France. In the next section I turn to an aspiration that a good number of my respondents shared, namely to be able to benefit from family care like the rest of the French population. Rather than returning to places of origin for care, this aspiration involves another migration pathway, that of late family reunification in France with their spouse or children.

### 7.3 Late-in-life Family Reunification

Conscious of their increased care needs, a number of the hostel residents I met were hoping to bring their wives or children to France to care for them. Demographic analysis confirms the salience of late-in-life family reunification (Rallu 2016). Immigration to France of females aged 50–69 years is significant for sub-Saharan Africans; for North African older females, immigration rates are lower but still well above the rates for males at the same ages (ibid). However for hostel residents, the aspiration to bring wives to France is often foiled due to the ever-hardening legal conditions which have been imposed by successive French governments anxious to reduce family reunification’s share in the immigration statistics. The men’s difficulties in acceding to normal social housing highlight the vicious circle in which they are trapped as regards family reunification. On one hand, their current accommodation in hostels is a barrier since hostel rooms do not meet the standards required by the reunification regulations, in terms of surface area and layout (see Lo 2015). On the other hand, their lack of family dependents in France means they are not a priority population for in-demand social housing aimed at families. Another legal condition which impedes late-in-life family reunification is that wives and children are now subject to French language testing prior to departure: put crudely, family immigration decisions are now predicated on the assumed integration outcomes (Joppke 2007). Thus it is only getting more difficult to accomplish reunifications since for the immigration authorities the arrival of non-French speaking family dependents is

**Table 7.3** Casefile n° FVA 2005-1

Employment status:	Retired
Marital status:	Married
Entourage:	–
Residence:	– – – – –
Age:	82
N° of years resident :	–
Difficulties observed:	Eyesight
Willingness to be helped:	–
Medical costs:	–
Current aid:	–
Aid pending:	–
Other actions:	–
Other partners:	CLIC
Remarks:	Returned home for good in March 2005 with his wife
Return trips:	–

## Case notes:

- 5-1-05. Request for intervention from the CLIC. Monsieur came back from country of origin in bad health (hemiplegia, i.e., paralysis of one side of the body, most often due to a stroke.)
- 17-1-05. Wife of Monsieur has come in order to look after her husband whose health is declining.
- 8-2-05. Monsieur is hospitalised. Upon leaving hospital, a wheelchair is prescribed for him. Use of which is impossible in the residence [due to the cramped nature of hostel accommodation and the lack of lifts and ramps mentioned above].
- 7-03-05. We solicit the CLIC to help us find a solution concerning Monsieur. Monsieur finds it impossible to walk. The CLIC doesn't know what to do. In the meantime, Monsieur's wife's visa is no longer valid, she decides to go back with her husband. Monsieur intends to return [to France.]
- 6-06-08. No more news from Monsieur since the last intervention.

assumed to constitute “a real cost” to the state (Martine, elder care coordinator, Val d’Oise). Furthermore, since they too are growing old, the men’s wives are perceived as a future burden on the welfare state.

The casefile in Table 7.3 illustrates the constraints to family reunification when loss of autonomy intervenes in a sudden manner. With no time to arrange a longer term visa or appropriate housing, the visit of the resident’s spouse is limited to the duration of a tourist visa. The spouse’s visit culminates with no other option but for both husband and wife to ‘return home for good’.

## 7.4 Moving to a Care Home: The Last Resort

If informal care provided by relatives cannot be accessed through late family reunification, or if no relatives exist in countries of origin to whom an ailing resident can return for care, the last resort for those residents who can no longer stay in the hostel

is for a different type of move, not international but institutional, namely admission to a care home. In France, care homes are commonly referred to by the two administrative acronyms used to define this accommodation, respectively EHPA and EHPAD.<sup>3</sup> Given the short period one can expect to live after entering a care home (Martikainen et al. 2014), ‘last resort’ is an apt expression to describe hostel residents’ perspectives on these establishments. As will be shown below, hostel residents very rarely agree to reside in such establishments of their own volition: generally when this occurs, there is an element of constraint.<sup>4</sup> Three main motivations account for this reluctance to envisage a move to a retirement home: cost, reluctance to leave the familiar social environment of the hostel, and perceptions of ethnic, cultural and gendered barriers to integrating into care homes.

**Cost – a Brake on Remittances** Expense is the most straightforward reason why hostel residents rarely agree to move to care homes. In this respect the hostel residents do not distinguish themselves from other older populations in France, since for any older person – even those who have comfortable pensions – entry to a retirement home is an extremely costly affair. What is particular in the case of the hostel residents is – biographically speaking – the fact that many are expected to remain financially responsible for their extended family in countries of origin even after retirement (Sonacotra 2005a; Unaf 2002).

In 2009, when the research for this book was conducted, the monthly minimum tariff for a place in a care home ranged between €2,000 and €2,500. It is inconceivable that any hostel resident will be able to pay such fees given their lower than average pension incomes and the fact that they do not own any real estate assets in France which could be sold to cover this expense. Thus, any hostel resident who wishes to go into a care home will have to be supported by the state, under a mechanism known as *aide sociale* (see Grandguillot 2009: 123–124). This aid works on the basis that 90% of a claimant’s revenues are appropriated by the state to fund their care, with the state covering the outstanding balance owed to the institution concerned. This latter contribution from the state is a cash-advance, not a subsidy. In other words, the individual’s estate is seized by the state upon death, or if the individual’s financial situation improves. If the deceased has surviving relatives living in France, any monies due the state may be seized from them. Perhaps most critically in terms of hostel residents’ general refusal to enter such accommodation, however, is the fact that they have very little money to remit home once the 90% appropriation of their revenues is applied by the state. For those with very small pensions, the maximum sum which they are permitted to keep from the state, as of 2009, was €85 per month, “just enough to keep them in cigarettes basically”, as one respondent wryly commented.

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<sup>3</sup>EHPA can be translated as accommodation for older people, whereas an EHPAD is accommodation for *dependent* older people, with more serious loss of autonomy and requiring more medicalised or specialised interventions.

<sup>4</sup>Such constraints do not apply only to migrants. Equally French-born elders may be obliged to move into a care home when experiencing frailty or loss of autonomy.

Even assuming that older hostel residents are aware of this financial assistance on the part of the state, it is not hard to imagine the difficulties posed to family finances by this swingeing cut to remittance income. This led Dr Ismail to comment that “the retirement homes aren’t designed with the North Africans in mind.” In a similar vein, a senior civil servant had this to say on the matter:

We have noticed that few residents move to a care home. Few, if not very few, indeed astonishingly few! For reasons specific to these populations, notably when you enter a retirement home, it’s your entire income which goes towards paying for the accommodation (...) For all intents and purposes, to enter an EHPA or an EHPAD means renouncing the remittances which you send to your family each month – €100 – €150 – €200. Not simple. And yet this is the justification – I don’t say it’s the only reason for their presence in France, but it’s the justification for their presence in France, you see (...) And it means recognising that when you can no longer fulfil this function, it’s not simple (...) It’s to recognise that you haven’t succeeded in doing what you left for.

**Familiarity of the Foyer** Care homes can feel ‘foreign’ to older hostel residents in the sense of strange or unfamiliar. As with all older people, hostel residents may be upset by a change in environment: “new surroundings and language problems lead to significant difficulties in adapting” to the care home environment (Sonacotra 2005a). As has been noted at several points in this book, many residents have lived in their hostels for 30 years or more. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising to find that “[t]o leave a residence, in which they have spent the better part of their life, is a difficult act” (Unafo 2002: 45). Indeed, transferring one’s residence to a care home can be validly described as a “new immigration” (Sonacotra 2005a). Put simply, to leave the hostel is to leave home, even if it is not everyone’s ideal of home.

Care homes tend to operate according to a model of individualised, personalised residential care. For some of my respondents this approach was tantamount to separating and banishing older people from the wider community, which was anathema to their views on appropriate care for older people. For example, some of my respondents in Dembanané expressed outrage at what they called the ‘Western’ model of elder care: older returnees in the village were relieved that they had managed to avoid ending up in a care home in France. What is specific to the hostel population vis-à-vis other care home clienteles is the transition “from a lifestyle where the collective served as the means to withstand the difficult life conditions which they were made to experience, to a lifestyle where everything is very individualised, inside the EHPA or EHPAD” (senior civil servant). According to this same interviewee:

it would be necessary that the EHPAs or EHPADs take into account the specific history of these persons. What has enabled them to survive is life in a group, so it’s very likely for someone who is liable to spend a significant period of time in an EHPA for example, that it’s not just one person on their own, it has to be three or four people who understand each other, who know each other a little.

Interestingly, a handful of experiments have been developed by the two largest hostel companies Sonacotra-Adoma and Aftam-Coallia, aimed at creating EHPA or



EHPAD ‘annexes’ for more dependent residents on the sites of existing hostels. Proponents of these experiments argue that creating such institutions on the same site as hostels means the users will not have to endure a difficult change in their routine and social circle. The interventions of home care auxiliaries and nurses will also be facilitated, due to the larger and better adapted rooms available. Others are less sanguine, cautioning that “it’s a subject all the same which demands some reflection, because we can’t very well make a network of nursing or retirement homes reserved for immigrants only” (senior civil servant). Indeed, for the Chief Executive of Sonacotra-Adoma, Bruno Arbouet, such experiments are “*fausses bonnes idées*”, good ideas which have backfired. In his testimony to the Parliamentary Commission on Older Migrants in 2013, he noted with embarrassment how he was forced to cancel the inauguration of one such annex at Bobigny, near Paris, in the presence of the President of the National Assembly, because only three out of 85 rooms were to be occupied by former hostel residents (Bachelay 2013).

**Foreign Bodies: Ethnicity, Culture, Age and Gender** A final important brake on admission to care homes was summed up neatly by Germain (outreach officer, social and legal rights charity) – himself a migrant of Togolese origin – with his reference to ‘foreign bodies’, a phrase he used to imply the ethnic alterity which is posed in such establishments by the presence of ex-hostel residents, in this case of North African origin:

And cohabiting with a population which isn’t North African is also a question. Indeed, you will see very few North Africans [in care homes]. First of all it’s a question of expense, then, when it does happen, there are rejections. You are once again a foreigner amongst people that you have never mixed with before. Moreover, things go badly in retirement homes in general. If, in addition, you constitute a foreign body there, I am very pessimistic for the future of those people.

Beyond ethnicity, the older hostel residents constitute ‘foreign bodies’ in the care home on account of their gender. As was discussed in Sect. 7.2, gender norms and stereotypes can be a barrier to care in terms of the relationship between carer and cared-for, but gender poses a problem also at the level of relations between care home residents, a fact underlined by a report from Unafo, the Union of Professionals in Accompanied Housing: “Retirement homes appear to be ill-adapted to the [male] migrant population (...) due to the very high percentage of women who live there” (Unafo 2002: 45). This is a point also underlined by a Sonacotra-Adoma working document from 2005, which noted that “[t]he relations among EHPAD residents can pose a problem, notably between men and women” (Sonacotra 2005a).

Not only do retirement homes tend to house a predominantly female population, they are also marked by the preponderance of that fraction of the elderly described as ‘the oldest old’ (i.e., aged 85 and over). Yet, with the hostel residents one is dealing with a prematurely ageing population, given the difficult living and working conditions which they have known earlier in life (see Chap. 4). As a health advisor at Sonacotra-Adoma put it: “the average age in the existing EHPADs is 87 years (...) Our old migrants have difficulties well before then.”

In addition to ethnicity, age and gender, a further obstacle consists of divergent religious orientations. As Vivianne (geriatric doctor) puts it, “the culture is not the same, the religion is not the same, which means that [hostel residents] do not feel at home in the EHPADs at all.” One example in this regard is the fear which hostel residents have of being given non-halal food to eat in care homes (interview with senior civil servant). Likewise, hostel companies underline the “difficulty of practising one’s religion, which becomes more necessary in later life” (Sonacotra 2005a). Indeed, religion assumed its greatest meaningfulness for my respondents precisely in the very last stages of life, in the approach to death and the hereafter. It is to this theme that I now turn.

## 7.5 Last-Minute Returns and Posthumous Returns

The prospect of death is often present in the hostels. As the epigraph to this chapter revealed, every day across Sonacotra-Adoma’s 450-odd hostels the deaths of three residents are recorded. During my period of residence in a hostel in the suburbs north-west of Paris, three residents died in the space of a month. Bad news like this circulates quickly in accommodation where the living is at close quarters, in the stairways, kitchens, shower blocks and prayer rooms. In this final section, I seek to understand how older hostel residents approach dying and death, and analyse how these issues influence their mobility decisions after retirement. The conclusion to Chap. 6 noted that some norms and cultural expectations could be ignored or disregarded in the context of emigration (e.g., consumption of alcohol). Yet such compromises do not seem permissible in death: for hostel residents, the rituals associated with death must be undertaken back home. This geographical preference speaks to wider questions of what it means to die a ‘good death’ (Ariès 1983; Kellehear 2007; Walter 2003) and what it means to ‘belong’ to a particular place. As seen in Table 7.2, some residents leave France in the utmost urgency, aware that death could be imminent: these are the ‘last-minute returns’ alluded to in this section’s title. For the less prescient, an elaborate patchwork of formal and informal channels exists to ensure posthumous return, from market-based insurance schemes to consular assistance and ad hoc solidarity among residents, as will be described below.

**Bad Dying, Good Deaths?** For a long time, dying and death in migratory contexts was rarely a subject of social interest or scrutiny in labour-importing Western countries. In public discourse, the image conveyed of migrants was one of young people, of working age, finally as ageless and immortal, to reprise John Berger’s ascerbic critique of guestworker capitalism in *A Seventh Man* (Berger and Mohr 1975; see Sect. 1.1). This disinterest was also a feature of academia: indeed, it is only relatively recently that the social scientific study of death and dying in migration contexts has developed (e.g. Attias-Donfut and Wolff 2005; Balkan 2016; Chaïb 2000; Gardner 2002; Gunaratnam 2013; Hunter and Soom Ammann 2016; Oliver 2004; Venhorst 2013). One axiom emerging from this body of work is that migra-

tion leads to attachment to multiple places, unsettling fixed assumptions about the question of final resting place. One writer who has gone further than most in interrogating this relationship between migration, place and death is Yassine Chaïb. Focussing his attention on the posthumous mobility of North African migrants (for whom, as Muslims, burial is essential), Chaïb writes: “In the choice of place of burial, the soil/earth becomes a fundamental ‘where’, a stable basis by which the place of origin is precisely defined” (Chaïb 2000: 24; author’s translation).

Although death in migratory contexts is an underexplored topic, the issues it provokes resonate with the much more established literature on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths (Ariès 1983; Kellehear 2007). What constitutes ‘good’ or ‘bad’ death has varied greatly over time and from one society to another (Walter 2003). Under conditions of late modernity, when sudden death is rare and dying in old age from degenerative disease is the norm, dying has become more individualised, medicalised and controlled (Kellehear 2007). One aspect of good death thus centres on the degree of control a dying person has over where death takes place. Although such control is never absolute, in many types of society good deaths tend to be associated with dying ‘at home’ in the company of loved ones, whereas dying alone and in unfamiliar surroundings equates to bad death (Seale 2004). Developing the notion of good and bad deaths, research in palliative care has explored the circumstances under which bad dying can become good death, through the care shown to dead bodies and the mediation of ritual specialists (Soom Ammann 2016). As will be elaborated below, correct performance of funerary ritual is the key consideration in hostel residents’ preference for last-minute or posthumous return.

**Dying to Return** Hostel residents tended not to shy away from discussing death with me. Some even approached the topic in a jocular manner, although this may have been a psychological coping mechanism to deflect underlying anxieties about mortality. One fear which was voiced by residents, however, was the prospect of dying alone in the hostel room in France, being equated to a ‘bad death’ (see also Samaoli 2007). Among my respondents, this fear of dying alone in the hostel room was particularly widespread, as evidenced by residents’ repeated comments that their rooms are coffins or tombs. Indeed, such fears were already being voiced in the early 1980s, as Mireille Ginesy-Galano’s work makes clear (Ginesy-Galano 1984: 59). These sentiments are only accentuated as the residents approach their latter years:

[AH: Where do you feel more at ease, here or there?] Over there, with my kids, my family. Here it’s nothing more than a tomb (*c’est une tombe*) ... It’s no life, this! [At this point Mehdi stretches out his legs from the bed and touches the other wall with his feet, to indicate the cramped conditions]. Look! ... But we had no choice: here in the hostels it’s cheaper. (Mehdi, 64, Chlef, Algeria)

Here in the hostel, the room is like a coffin (*cercueil*). What about the residents who die in their rooms and lie there for several days before anyone notices? Where are the nurses who come every day like in retirement homes for French people? That’s my question. (Rahman, 60s, Algeria)

This evening, when I was in the kitchen Moncef told me that a guy on the ground floor of our stair had died, but the body was only found yesterday, several days after his death, once it started to smell badly. Hence the strong smell of disinfectant in the corridor today and yesterday, and the (usually locked) door left wide open at all times in an effort to aerate the corridor. Moncef said it had been five days that the guy had been dead, adding: “it’s sad to die like that.” (From my fieldnotes, 17 June 2009)

This situation recorded in my fieldnotes is in itself an example for hostel residents of not ‘dying well’, in the manner prescribed by Islamic ritual which urges burial as soon as possible after death. Delaying burial is anathema in Islamic eschatology since the soul of the deceased is said to be separated from the body for the period between death and burial and the soul is therefore able to witness the processes which occur in this interim period (the decomposition of the body, relatives mourning and so on). This is believed to be very traumatic for the soul (Smith and Haddad 2002; Venhorst 2013). Furthermore, it is recommended that the attestation of faith (*shahada*) be said over the deceased at the moment of death, which clearly could not have taken place in the death described immediately above. In a study of Bengali Muslim elders in London, Katy Gardner records how critical the presence at the death-bed of family or friends is to ‘dying well’, so that the appropriate ritual processes are set in motion (Gardner 2002). Far from their families, in the institutionalised context of the hostel, residents cannot have confidence that these rites will be observed correctly.

Beyond the confines of the hostel, there are other factors specific to France which increase the risks for residents of a ‘bad death’, notably for those contemplating burial in France. Three significant barriers to burial in France should be noted. Firstly, in some municipal areas there is no Muslim burial provision whatsoever as separate confessional burial space is highly constrained in French law, owing to the governing principle of *laïcité* which dictates that cemeteries should be neutral in confessional terms (Aggoun 2006). Secondly, French cemeteries require the deceased to be placed in a coffin (Sueur and Lecerf 2006), whereas in the Islamic rite bodies are wrapped in a white sheet prior to burial, since direct contact with organic matter is believed to have purifying effects (Chaïb 2000). Thirdly, gravespaces in municipal cemeteries may be automatically reused after a certain period of time – sometimes as short as 5 years – involving exhumation and relocation of the remains to a common ossuary. In some communes the practice has been to proceed to incineration of ossuary remains, which is entirely incompatible with Islamic funeral rites.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the only means to ensure the undisturbed repose of the deceased in France is to purchase – at great expense – a burial concession in perpetuity. Yet some communes no longer offer perpetual concessions, as there is not enough cemetery space to meet demand.

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<sup>5</sup>Following recommendations in government reports by Professor Jean-Pierre Machelon (2006) and senators Jean-Pierre Sueur and Jean-René Lecerf (2006), a ministerial circular was issued in 2008 to all mayors encouraging them to create confessional ossuaries. Thus, mayors would be able to honour the wishes of (Muslim and Jewish) families opposed to cremation. However it must be noted that the legal force of this circular is limited and mayors retain discretion in managing communal cemeteries.

Given the multiple barriers to achieving a burial in accordance with Islamic principles, it is unsurprising that many Muslim migrants in France opt for repatriation following death in France (Chaïb 2000). Indeed, there exist numerous solutions to ensure that one will be repatriated in the event of death. For example, financial institutions are involved in this domain. Repatriation insurance products are offered by several North and West African banks operating in France. I had the opportunity to discuss such products with an employee of the Moroccan bank BMCE (Banque Marocaine du commerce extérieur). The product which this bank offers in the event of a client's death is an *assistance*, not an *assurance* (i.e. there are no cash benefits, just benefits in kind). At the time of the interview in 2009, the annual fee was under €20. According to my contact at the bank, almost every account holder at their Paris branches has signed up for this product.

Hometown associations are also mobilised to facilitate repatriation, as noted briefly in Chap. 6. Indeed, the mutual aid function of the hometown associations – not just in times of death, but also in cases of unemployment or ill health – tends to pre-date their development role (Manchuelle 1997; Timera 1996). As with the West African hometown associations, mutual funds have been set up by North African hostel residents to facilitate posthumous repatriation, but on a more *ad hoc* basis. For example, several deaths occurred in the hostel where I undertook participant observation during my time as a live-in resident. In more than one case the deceased did not have repatriation insurance, so his friends collected money from fellow residents to facilitate this. In addition to such initiatives in hostels, local mosques may be solicited for funds. Usually, between these two sources enough money is raised to fund the cost of repatriation. This can be expensive, typically costing between €2,000 and €3,000. If there is any excess money after repatriation costs have been paid it is sent to the bereaved family in the place of origin. In the hostel where I lived, the president of the Residents' Committee, Saleem (60, Tiznit, Morocco), sometimes even travels to present this money to the family personally.

Such a system again demonstrates the solidarity which it is possible to find in many hostels. Nonetheless, more marginal members of the hostel community cannot rely on such mutual aid. Recently, this situation has attracted the attention of consular authorities in France, as my interview with two *chargé d'affaires* at the Moroccan Embassy in Paris revealed. These officials noted one particular problem: the situation of Moroccans in France who die *sans ressources* (i.e. penniless). The consular staff acknowledged the existence of structures of “parallel solidarity” – mosques, associations, collections in hostels, and so on – but this solidarity always operates “on a case by case basis. Now we're going to systematise the procedure.” Thus the Fondation Hassan II, an agency of the Moroccan government which represents Moroccans living abroad, has recently inaugurated a social fund for the posthumous repatriation of those whose families are too poor to arrange this themselves.

## 7.6 Conclusion

The present chapter has discussed hostel residents' mobility and residential strategies to manage their impending frailty, loss of autonomy, and ultimately, the end of life. Such factors have been under-researched as influences on international migration in later life<sup>6</sup>, but the material above indicates that these factors are salient for older hostel residents.

Several possibilities are open to hostel residents regarding place of residence once loss of autonomy intervenes. The data presented in this chapter suggest that the ideal for hostel residents is to return home definitively in order to benefit from family care. As described in Sect. 7.1, return may be voluntary if a resident still has sufficient agency to undertake the voyage, or alternatively be more or less forced upon residents through a combination of institutional and peer pressures. I then turned to the various options available for those who would remain in France, the first of which is maintaining residence in the hostel in order to benefit from home care services. However Sect. 7.2 drew attention to the numerous institutional, financial and architectural constraints to adequate home care provision in hostels. Instead, given the role of the family as a significant source of care for older people in France, a number of my respondents aspired to bring a relative (usually their spouse) to France, in order to receive informal care. Section 7.3 discussed this phenomenon of late family reunification. Unfortunately, due to difficulties of eligibility for social housing, hostel residents are liable to be trapped in a vicious circle which leads to their applications for family reunification being refused.

If informal care provided by relatives cannot be accessed through late family reunification, or if no relatives exist in countries of origin to which an ailing resident can return for care, the last resort for those residents who are too frail to continue living in hostels is for a different type of move, not international but institutional, namely entry into a care home. However, as Sect. 7.4 made clear, several barriers are erected to this final form of late-in-life mobility. Because of the expense involved, moving to a care home is tantamount to abandoning the life-long mission of remittance sending. The men's 'non-standard' biographies are also problematic from the perspective of those charged with caring for them in residential homes. These biographical factors include lack of family entourage and premature ageing. There are also problems of cohabitation in the largely feminine environment of the care home, and perceived 'cultural' or religious incompatibilities.

Considering this last point, religion assumes its greatest meaningfulness for hostel residents at this stage of life, in the approach to death and the hereafter. The vast majority of hostel residents hail from Muslim societies in North and West Africa. In Sect. 7.5, I analysed how end-of-life issues influenced my respondents' mobility. In general, dying in France was envisioned as a 'bad death' since hostel residents cannot be assured that Islamic death rites will be correctly observed, hence the practice of 'last

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<sup>6</sup> However, when it comes to internal migration within national boundaries, a significant body of work exists. See for example Longino 1992.

minute' returns. Equally worrying is the thought of being buried in France, since French cemetery practices contravene many Islamic stipulations on the issue. Repatriation for burial in the place of origin therefore is an existential imperative and the 'last request' of hostel residents should they happen to be dying in France.

Appropriately, this final empirical chapter has raised points which are pertinent to all four explanatory models of late-in-life mobility presented in Chap. 2. As has just been said, burial in ancestral lands exerts a strong normative pull over hostel residents. The structuralist approach to return migration insists that a successful or sustainable return depends on respecting "vested interests and traditional ways of thinking" in places of origin (Cerase 1974: 258). For those who were not able to return with their 'heads held high' while alive – due to the economic or moral failure of their sojourn abroad – a last-minute or posthumous return nonetheless speaks eloquently of the normative hold of the community of origin over its exiles abroad. Furthermore several informal and formal mechanisms are available to ensure repatriation of the deceased. This highlights the cross-border activities of state and non-governmental institutions – consulates, banks and hometown associations – all of which are actors seen as crucial in the transnationalist approach. For those who are not able to benefit from informal care provided by relatives because time and absence have weakened the ties to the family and the community of origin, the last resort is to be admitted to a care home. In so doing, such individuals become bound to the social systems logic of the welfare state, in which access to care is predicated on meeting various biographically-defined expectations of inclusion. For those residents who continue to be implicated socially and economically in the lives of their left behind kin, the financial cost of a move into a care home conflicts with the desire to keep remitting until the last possible moment. This demonstrates the extent to which the logic of the new economics of labour migration remains pertinent – albeit in a distorted way – even in the very last stages of the hostel residents' lives.

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## Chapter 8

# Conclusion: The Returns from Theory and a New Approach to Home



At the beginning of this book, I characterised the pervading view of the migrant workers who came to France after WWII as ageless and immortal. Yet as was just seen in Chap. 7, the all-too-frequent deaths which occur in migrant worker hostels up and down the land have put paid to this myth of agelessness in the starkest possible manner. Intersecting with the fiction of the everlasting youth of the migrant workers is a second myth, the myth of return (Anwar 1979). Return was a dream to which so many migrant workers in France aspired, but as survey data presented in Chap. 1 showed, most older immigrants now view France as the home where they will live out their days, surrounded by their partners and children (Attias-Donfut et al. 2005). In time, return became less likely for the straightforward reason of family reunification: France is the only home which the migrant workers' children and grandchildren have known.

Less straightforward, however, is the non-return of the migrant workers who are the subject of this book: those living out their days in the hostels, who did not reunify their families in France. At the outset of this research, hostel residents' non-return was presented as a puzzle and dilemma, firstly insofar as their mobility preferences at retirement call into question the assumptions of the 'myth of return' literature, which explains non-return on the basis of family localisation. In this case, though, the grounds for non-return cannot be family localisation, since the men's families remain in places of origin. Secondly, older hostel residents also remain unmoved by the financial incentives of a return homewards, where their French state pensions, paid in euros and fully transferable, would have far greater purchasing power. What this book has sought to do therefore is resolve this paradox, by asking:

What explains the hostel residents' preference for back-and-forth mobility over definitive return at retirement?

It bears reiterating that the hostel population is far from being representative of the older immigrant population in France. Indeed, the hostel system itself can be

viewed as an outlier of history: a last bastion of the postwar guestworker model in concrete form, long obsolete yet somehow still standing today. If this is the case, what benefits can be had from taking the hostels as a contemporary focus of study?

The first point to note is that there is very little empirical work in languages other than French on the migrant hostels, and that which exists is somewhat misleading. Under any circumstances it is hard to concede that a total complement of over a quarter of million migrant worker hostel beds constituted a “restricted scheme” (Castles et al. 1984: 29), as was the case in the mid-1970s heyday of hostel construction (Lévy-Vroelant 2007). Moreover, the lion’s share of Francophone work on the hostels concentrates - not without eminent justification - on hostel residents’ difficult passage to retirement, in particular their acute health and welfare needs. Generally, researchers have overlooked the dilemmas of late-in-life return which confront residents at retirement and the outwardly puzzling preference for back-and-forth migration over definitive return.

Literature gaps aside, this book has also aspired to make a substantive theoretical contribution, cognizant of the rich potential for theory building in the ageing-migration nexus (Torres and Karl 2016). The older hostel residents constitute a population which can generate significant new insights for migration theory, despite their unrepresentative situation. Indeed, the theoretical value of this research lies in the very fact that it takes an anomalous case. Of all the post-WWII labour migrants to France, the hostel residents would appear at first sight to be the *most likely* candidates for return given their family ties to home and the economic incentives of return. That they do not return challenges the arguments of family localisation and neo-classical economics. This prompted me to ask whether other theories might be better able to explain hostel residents’ mobility strategies. Thus in Sect. 8.1 below, I assess the rival theoretical models which were identified in previous chapters as having potential to explain the puzzling preference for the *va-et-vient* at retirement.

Following this theoretical evaluation, in Sect. 8.2 I return to one of the key ideas developed in the book, namely the concept of ‘home’. In Sect. 1.2 it was shown that hostel residents do not appear to be well integrated in the main reference groups of French society - family, local community, nation - and instead retain ties to analogous groups in the place of origin. Yet they do not return there definitively. Does this mean that they are therefore ‘homeless’ everywhere - ‘doubly absent’ as Sayad (1999) put it - or have they found home in new and unexpected places? As the approach with the greatest untapped potential among the theories considered here, I draw on Niklas Luhmann’s social systems theory to ask what ‘home’ can mean for the hostel residents. Moving beyond orthodox conceptions of ‘home’ as connection to a particular locality and/or social group, Luhmann draws attention to the mechanisms of societal inclusion in functionally differentiated systems such as the economy, law, politics, health, education and so on.

Luhmann’s insights about societal inclusion are also extremely pertinent in relation to a recent piece of legislation which goes to the heart of this book’s concern with late-in-life mobility and home. The effect of this legislation has been to create a financial aid - available uniquely to older hostel residents - aimed at encouraging

more durable return to countries of origin. Section 8.3 closes the book by surveying the prospects for this legislation and the men in the hostels which it targets.

## 8.1 Explaining the Puzzle: The Returns from Theory

The guiding aim of the research presented in this book has been to overcome the limitations of migration theory when faced with the outwardly puzzling return decisions of the hostel residents at retirement. The myth of return literature relies on family localisation as the principal explanation for the lack of return amongst the post-WWII immigration cohort in Western Europe, yet clearly this explanation cannot apply to those in the hostels living far from their families. Neo-classical economics was a further approach which had to be discounted at the outset. As was discussed in Chap. 1, despite the purchasing power of their Euro-denominated pensions in countries of origin, hostel residents remain unmoved by this financial incentive to return.

Given that the approaches based on family localisation and neo-classical economics cannot account for hostel residents' prolonged presence in France past retirement, I proposed to examine other theories of settlement and return, drawing on the new economics of labour migration, structuralism, transnationalism and social systems. To assess the explanatory potential of these theories, I will now return to some key points in the data.

**Dependence-Assistance: The Distortion of the New Economics of Labour Migration** For a very few respondents, the neo-classical logic remains valid. As Djimé (Dembancané, Senegal) put it in Chap. 5: “When you are a pensioner here [Senegal], you live comfortably, you’re not the same as those who don’t have any resources, who don’t have a pension. It’s not the same life. Really, when you are a pensioner, you can live better here.” However, the lack of definitive return at retirement by most hostel residents calls into question these neo-classical precepts. Perceptions of individual wealth must be tempered by the size of the household in the pensioner’s charge. For my respondents, as discussed in Chap. 5, it did not make sense to talk of individual economic decision-making. Rather, the decision to migrate or to return is made on the basis of family circumstances, as remittances are a key element of household finances. This observation thus lends support to the theoretical approach known as the new economics of labour migration (NELM) (Stark 1991).

In the opinion of some residents, retirement means that there is less of an obligation to send remittances – “now it’s up to them to get by” (Fouad, 60s, Constantine, Algeria). This is consistent with the NELM assumption that an inter-generational transfer of responsibility in providing for the needs of the family occurs when the migrant breadwinner retires. For other respondents, however, the NELM logic becomes distorted and the assumption of an inter-generational transfer of responsibility is called into question. In these cases, the duty to provide for a significant

number of dependents *after* retirement weighs heavily. Many residents I spoke to enumerated the large families in their charge.

A particularly oppressive state of dependence ensues if the general regime pension is not sufficient to meet the household's needs. In this case, the only means for the family to attain solvency is for the pensioner to remain in France for more than 6 months of the year, in order to meet the conditions of eligibility for the old-age income support benefit (*minimum vieillesse*), topping up the pension to just over €700 per month. Among my own respondents, several explicitly mentioned household dependence on the *minimum vieillesse* as a constraint to more permanent return to the country of origin following retirement. It is worth reiterating that recourse to the *minimum vieillesse* can in no way be considered a manifestation of neo-classical rational actor behaviour: the extra money is channelled to household dependents, not retained by individual breadwinners. This brings to light normative questions over the limits and purpose of social protection in a transnational context. As Lindley (2009) notes, non-contributory income support benefits are a means by which the state guarantees a minimal standard of living for the least well-off in society. Yet some individuals may willingly accept a level of poverty below this standard in order to financially support those in yet more straitened circumstances in places of origin.

**Losing One's Bearings or Returning to Serve? Structuralist Interpretations** The structuralist approach stressed the difficulties of re-integrating to the home context, since migrants risk losing their place within the established order of "vested interests and traditional ways of thinking" when away (Cerase 1974: 258). This was a feature more of North African than West African accounts.

Many North Africans complained of having 'lost their bearings' in the place of origin. They had fallen out of touch with childhood friends and talked of how they would feel awkward when bumping into old acquaintances on the street. It was for this reason that they preferred to stay at home, among their family, when back in the country of origin. Others noted the obstacles to getting development projects off the ground. Respondents felt themselves to be blocked in these endeavours and blamed this on being outside informal local networks after the long years spent in France.

Such a narrative was not a feature of West African respondents' accounts. The normative expectation weighing on respondents was to be of service to the community of origin at retirement, as Waly, an army veteran of Malian origin, noted in Chap. 6: "When you are retired, you should be of service over there; you return to better serve your village and your family" (Waly, 75, Kayès, Mali). For those who live at least some of the year in the hostel in France, such service takes place via hometown associations, which are often headquartered in hostels. Through such associations, hostel residents wield power in their local communities, despite their physical absence. As Catherine Quiminal notes, these associations have "transformed the absence of each migrant into a prominent political presence in the home village" (Quiminal 2002: 40; author's translation).

West Africans, being the drivers of physical and social change thanks to their contributions to village development projects, were not disoriented upon return. Indeed, a virtuous circle operated whereby their political and social status increased

as their hometowns gained in regional significance, which in turn was due to their ongoing development efforts. In the case of Dembanané, improvements to infrastructure there have seen it emerge as a local administrative centre and gain in prominence politically. Critical in this disparity between North and West African experiences of re-integration is the institutional dimension, namely the influence of transnational hometown associations. For West African respondents, these institutions lay the foundations for a political and social presence in places of origin despite long absences, and shape the possibilities for a successful re-integration. North African respondents, on the other hand, were confronted with difficulties when attempting to organise communal initiatives. Participation in hometown associations was far less significant for them.

**The “Pressure of Communicability”:** Evidence for a Transnational View The importance of hometown associations in channelling migrant-homeland initiatives indicated that a transnational approach might be warranted. Indeed, the retired hostel residents are archetypal transnational migrants, engaging in frequent and durable economic, social and sometimes political ties between France and places of origin, managing two household budgets, communicating in two (or more) languages, and forever travelling back-and-forth across the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the motivation for mobility at retirement was often justified on the grounds of affective ties to home communities, as is stressed in transnational accounts (Cassarino 2004). It is only those hostel residents with a history of family conflict for whom return trips are not such a constant feature.

Other aspects which encourage a transnational reading are related to the empirical conditions for regular and sustained migrant-homeland interactions as discussed in Chap. 1. Admittedly, in terms of one of the factors stressed in this literature – the institutionalisation of transnationalism by government actors – there is little evidence to suggest that much attention is paid by sending states to elderly hostel residents.<sup>1</sup> According to one respondent, the consulates and homeland authorities take no interest in their ageing compatriots. “They don’t give a damn... If they did there would be studies commissioned, with numbers and statistics on the people who have returned.” In terms of a second explanatory variable stressed in the transnationalism literature – ease of transport – this is important in explaining *when* and *how* hostel residents travel back-and-forth, but is not pertinent for the question as to *why* residents prefer the *va-et-vient* over definitive return, the main topic of analysis here.

However, a third transnational factor – ease of communication – does appear to be significant, although not in the manner one would expect. Chapter 5 highlighted that communication with family left behind is a central and often daily feature of life for hostel residents. Improved regularity in communications has been a recent development in residents’ lives following the expansion of access to mobile phone communications in origin countries. The transnationalism literature contends that regular communications can facilitate return, since individuals will be better informed about the environment they hope to return to. However for hostel resi-

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<sup>1</sup>The recent concern of the Moroccan government to facilitate posthumous repatriation, as detailed in Sect. 7.5, is one exception to this general disinterest on the part of sending states.



dents, paradoxically, better communications appear to block return in some cases. Low-cost fixed and mobile telephony has resulted in new ‘pressures of communicability’, amplifying the burden of remittance dependency from left-behind relatives. In contrast to accounts which ascribe to ICT a pro-poor and developmental role which empowers people, these new technologies sometimes serve only to further ‘trap’ the men and impede their homeward return.

**Your Papers, Please: Inclusion in Healthcare and Bureaucratic Organisations** Time and again, when meeting older residents for the first time, I was taken aback to hear them launch into a detailed explanation of why they were still in France. These justifications for their continued presence in France were quite unprompted on my part. What was striking was that they were usually based on one or both of the following elements – healthcare and administrative rationales.

With advancing years, health problems unsurprisingly become a more pressing concern. This was discussed in Chap. 4. Hostel residents, although not experiencing a greater incidence of ill health compared to the rest of the French population, tend to experience health problems earlier. As for paperwork, Chap. 3 detailed the many documents of personhood which the hostel residents are required to present in order to access social security benefits, both contributory (e.g. pensions) and non-contributory (e.g. income support, housing benefit). Valid proofs of identity, domicile, and income – such as residence permits, passports, annual tax declarations and rent receipts – are essential in this regard. However, this may be complicated if these biographical records do not conform to the standard assumed lifecourse institutionalised by the welfare state. This was seen, for example, in some respondents’ inaccurate birth certificates, erroneous or non-existent payslips, and duplicate social security reference numbers.

Proponents of economic theories might argue that healthcare and paperwork can be reduced to a simple utility calculation; the French healthcare system is heavily subsidised for all long-term residents, and free to the least well off. To benefit from an equivalent standard of care in the country of origin would require recourse to what can be a very costly private sector. Similarly in terms of administrative tasks, proponents of economic theories would contend that the only reason to keep paperwork in order is to prove eligibility for certain means-tested social security benefits.

In reply, I would argue that the prominence of such justifications for continued residence in France past retirement is not merely an economic rationale. Residence and mobility decisions are also constrained by a requirement to meet expectations of inclusion in French healthcare and legal-bureaucratic systems, so as to have continuity of care and to ensure that their entitlements are recognised. Such an interpretation does not seek to dismiss rational actor utility-based theories. Rather, the requirements for inclusion in the organisations of functionally-differentiated society, as theorised by Niklas Luhmann, broaden the scope of what a rational choice in migration decision-making can be.

For example with healthcare, respondents were concerned with ensuring a continuity of care and treatment. Over the years many hostel residents have developed

relationships of trust with their doctors in France, and have strong faith in the superiority of the French healthcare system. These are powerful rationales for undertaking the *va-et-vient*. Furthermore, certain treatments and drugs are not available in the country of origin. In order to maintain a continuity of treatment, hostel residents plan their *va-et-vient* trips around appointments with doctors and consultants, and ensure that they have sufficient quantities of medication for the planned period of absence from France. Turning to paperwork, again, the rationale is not just a cost-benefit calculation for the hostel residents. What is at stake is their legitimacy to grow old in France: the right to a pension as a deferred salary, the right to a minimum standard of living, the right to home help services. In fact, the issue cuts to the very identity of the hostel residents. At retirement, a renegotiation of identity is necessary in order to compensate for the redundancy of the former *raison d'être*, which was employment (Bolzman et al. 2006). The passage to retirement is a transition whereby documents of personhood become critical tools of social inclusion.

**Discussion** The foregoing has shown that at different points of the analysis there is support for all the theories discussed here. In short, no single theory accounts for all the patterns observed. However this does not imply that the theories concerned are too vague or inconsistent to be of any analytical use. Rather, the theories appear to be partly complementary (cf. de Haas et al. 2015). Furthermore, as Massey and colleagues maintain in a much-cited review of migration theory, the added value of each theory becomes most apparent when levels of analysis are kept distinct (Massey et al. 1993). Here I find Thomas Faist's delineation of micro, meso and macro levels of analysis in international migration a useful typology by which to conceive of these dynamics (Faist 2000).

At the micro level, neo-classical economic explanations taking the individual as the unit of analysis were not validated since they predicted definitive return for retiring hostel residents: purchasing power differentials mean that a pension drawn in euros buys more in the country of origin than in France. Yet for retired hostel residents, it did not make sense to talk of individual economic decision-making, given the number of family members dependent on their remittances. The new economics of labour migration, with its focus on the utility-maximising household as the locus of decision and unit of analysis, made much more sense of the crucial role remittances have played and continue to play at the end of working life.

Beyond the micro level of individual decision-making, hostel residents wishing to return also have to negotiate the wider "web and content of ties on the intermediate level" (Faist 2000: 30). This includes the complex relations implicated in kinship and village ties. The structuralist focus on vested interests and traditional ways of thinking 'back home' illuminated the data here, not least the contrasting fortunes of North and West African respondents as they attempt to re-integrate socially in places of origin. Many North Africans alluded to having lost their 'bearings' in the home community. West Africans, on the other hand, mentioned the normative expectation of return at retirement in order to 'serve' their home communities. They have been able to convert a physical absence into a political presence via their hometown associations.

The significance of the hometown associations suggested that a transnational approach was warranted. This premise was further supported by the prominence of transport and communications technology as themes in hostel residents' accounts. However, while transport factors are useful in explaining *how* and *when* the men travel, they do not address why they prefer back-and-forth migration over definitive return. Cheaper and more regular communications, on the other hand, had an unexpected effect. Instead of hostel residents being better prepared for return, the pressure of communicability they experienced by being 'available and reachable' via mobile phones (Tazanu 2012) sometimes impeded return. In sum, the transnational approach seems better suited to explaining the regularity and duration of back-and-forth trips. When confronted with the justifications for why residents keep on coming back to France, the explanatory variables identified by the transnationalism literature seem insufficient. Thus it was necessary to move up to the macro level of social systems.

Retired hostel residents repeatedly justified their presence in France on the grounds of healthcare and administrative reasons. It was shown that mobility decisions are constrained by requirements for inclusion in healthcare organisations, so as to maintain relationships of trust with medical professionals and to assure a continuity of medication and treatment. The same applies to administrative agencies. By keeping in good order their travel documents and other officially recognised proofs of identity, domicile, and income, hostel residents were able to ensure that their claims were recognised by the relevant authorities (cf. Mbodj-Pouye 2016).

A further insight which follows from this perspective is that different social systems become important to people at different stages of the lifecourse, with corresponding implications for migration decision-making. In Chap. 3 it was shown that hostel residents' documents recording certain key deviations from the 'standard' expected lifecourse only become critical at retirement. Prior to this time such documents do not have a major influence on life chances and outcomes, although they are set in motion from birth and continue into adulthood and employment. While earlier in life it might be more appropriate to analyse return decisions in terms of economic success or failure (Gmelch 1980), later in life other factors become prominent. The idea that motivations for migration vary over the lifecourse is a rather straightforward and uncontroversial point. However, it is a point which is easily overlooked when the gaze of those doing and funding research is focused on younger people who move, be that workers, students or refugees. The growing body of literature on international retirement migration provides a useful and necessary counterpoint, and with this book I hope to have built on earlier conceptual and theoretical advances.

In terms of theoretical advances, I wish to highlight in particular my contribution to the literature on return decision-making at retirement (see Chap. 1 for an overview). While many migrants do return definitively, the available quantitative evidence indicates that those wishing to do so nonetheless constitute a minority, with the circular migration strategy of bi-residence being more popular (Attias-Donfut et al. 2005; Bolzman et al. 2016). The location of close relatives in the country of immigration – particularly a spouse or children – is highlighted as a major

brake to definitive return (Ciobanu and Ramos 2015; Liversage and Mizrahi Mirdal 2017). A notable example is the work of Katy Gardner (2002), whose findings resonate strongly with the analysis presented in this book. Gardner (2002) discusses how her elderly Bengali respondents in London no longer felt at home in their communities of origin, and emphasised the value they placed on the British healthcare and welfare systems. Although she does not reference Luhmann's theory of social systems, the parallels between our respective studies are clear. However, in Gardner's study, definitive return was also shown to be blocked because her respondents had strong attachments to the UK through their British-born children and grandchildren. The added value of the present study is that by analysing the anomalous case of the hostel residents, who have not achieved family reunification, I have been able to isolate the critical importance of access to healthcare and pensioner allowances. This is an important contribution to theorising in this area, since it gives rise to a general proposition that accessing such resources is a key factor in return decision-making later in life.

## 8.2 A New Approach to Home: Domicile and Inclusion in Social Systems

Of the different theoretical paradigms evaluated above, social systems theory is the least well-known or applied in migration studies. One reason for this is that Luhmann wrote for the most part in German and his work is yet to be translated widely into other languages. A second reason is that Luhmann deliberately used abstract language in his theorising of society in order to minimise the risk, as he saw it, that readers would over-simplify his analysis (Moeller 2006). Nonetheless a handful of scholars have grasped the salience of Luhmann's work in the migration field, foremost among them Michael Bommers (2000, 2012), Christina Boswell (2011, 2009 with Oana Ciobanu) and Jost Halfmann (2000).

In these final pages, I would like to build on these pioneering efforts by singling out a term which features prominently in migration research, including in the title to this book, namely the idea of 'home'. There is a growing literature on the relation between home and migration (Ahmed et al. 2003; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Boccagni 2017; Rapport and Dawson 1998). However, ageing migrants' experiences of home and home-making were marginal to this body of work until recently (see Walsh and Näre 2016). More generally, home is a concept which is often deployed rather uncritically in migration studies, being "equated with a country of origin even if migrants might actually feel at home elsewhere" (Hatfield 2010: 245). One manifestation of this is the customary distinction between 'home' and 'host' societies.

The starting point for this book was the observation that geographically single hostel residents did not seem to be well integrated in the conventional reference groups of the French 'host' society – the family, the local community, the nation – and instead retained ties to analogous groups in the 'home' society. Paradoxically,

however, they do not return definitively. These reference groups –family, local community, nation – represent various sites and scales in the literature on home. To conclude, I would like to explore what a Luhmannian concept of home could be.

As I have sought to stress throughout, I was often struck by the fact that hostel residents felt compelled to justify their presence in France on the basis of healthcare needs and administrative requirements, revealing the influence of medical and bureaucratic organisations on the men’s lives. This gave me pause for reflection: could inclusion in the organisations regulating access to different social systems also constitute a type of home for the men in the hostels, valued for ‘instrumental’ reasons insofar as it procures healthcare and a minimum standard of living?<sup>2</sup>

If one takes a Luhmannian view, the answer is yes. What it means to be ‘included’ and to be ‘at home’ no longer necessarily implies only an emotional attachment to a territory (place) or social group (household, ethnic group, nation), as home has conventionally been conceptualised (Porteous 1976; Rapport and Overing 2007). Luhmann’s theory of social systems challenges the assumption that society is formed primarily of groups of individuals distributed across distinct, demarcated territories. This has been the dominant conception of society across history, encompassing kin groups, tribes, ethnic groups, and in the modern era, nation-states. Instead, Luhmann proposed an alternative model of society based on individuals’ acts of communication in distinct social realms differentiated by their function, such as politics, law, the economy, religion, science, and so on (Luhmann 1995). In pre-modern societies, social inclusion and life chances were determined by social strata and rank. But in the social systems which make up functionally differentiated society, social inclusion operates according to the codes and logics of each autonomous system. These criteria are fundamentally more inclusive than in pre-modern times: discrimination on the basis of inherited or ascribed characteristics such as ethnicity or class is no longer relevant. In principle, social systems tend to openness and inclusion: what matters is whether the “rules of access” specific to each system are met or not (Luhmann 1990: 35). For example, whether a job applicant has the required qualification profile, whether a patient has symptoms needing urgent medical treatment, whether a political candidate meets the constitutionally-defined conditions for holding public office. Functionally differentiated systems are “indifferent” (Luhmann 1990: 30) to all attributes other than whatever the relevant expectations happen to be.

Nonetheless, in practice, it is organisations in society (such as courts, hospitals, firms, schools, and so on) which regulate inclusion in social systems, and individuals may in fact be exposed to considerable risks of exclusion (e.g. unemployment). The role of organisations in functionally differentiated society has been most astutely analysed by Michael Bommers, who led the way in applying a systems theoretic approach to migration questions (Boswell and D’Amato 2012). Bommers argues that organisations in functionally differentiated society develop expectations about the typical person profile capable of being included as an organisational mem-

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<sup>2</sup>I develop these insights about ‘instrumental’ and ‘emotional’ conceptions of home in Hunter 2016.

ber (e.g. as an employee, a patient, a student etc.). To counter the risk of not being included, welfare state institutions have designed elaborate interventions in education, health, labour markets and so on, to enable individuals to meet these standardised expectations and thereby to participate fully in society. The effect of these interventions is to accompany and institutionalise the modern life course or career, based around three sequential stages: education in the formative years, employment and founding a family during adulthood, and retirement in old age.

The welfare state backs up the likelihood that careers can be built. (...) This means participation and access to education, work, the family, as well as to economic, legal, political and health resources. Participation in each single context implies the fulfilment of certain pre-conditions that are provided elsewhere (Bommes 2000: 93).

In such a conception of society, it is one's observable and "biographically accumulated" record of inclusion and exclusion in different systems which determines future options for membership (Bommes 2000: 91). Hence the critical importance in the modern era of proofs of personhood such as birth certificates, passports, medical records, diplomas and training certificates, tax declarations, payslips, and social security numbers. As Bommes stresses, migrants are likely to be disadvantaged in this scenario as they have not benefited from the life course interventions institutionalised by the welfare state in the formative years (healthcare, education, contributions to social security and pension funds). Instead, their educational qualifications may not be recognised by the relevant organisations, and their later entry to the labour market means they have accumulated fewer contributions in social security funds. Likewise, to turn to the specific case of the hostel residents, previous chapters have underlined the problems arising later in life from inaccurate dates of birth on proofs of identity, and the consequences of unscrupulous employers not declaring migrant workers on their payrolls.

As has further been underlined in previous chapters, for hostel residents it is vitally important to observe minimum periods of residence in France in order to access certain forms of social protection, be it cash or in-kind benefits. In effect, they have to prove that they are *domiciled* in France. The etymological connection between home and domicile is evident given the latter word's Latin roots, from *domicilium* 'dwelling', in turn from *domus* 'home'. Domicile in modern English usage can signify "a person's home" as well as "the country in which a person has permanent residence" (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1999), giving it purchase on the multi-scalar nature of home upon which geographers have insisted (Blunt 2005). Nonetheless, the potential of the term domicile as a conceptual tool for unpacking the notion of home has barely been explored by social scientists.<sup>3</sup> Instead, domicile is discussed above all in legal and fiscal contexts (Schwarz 2012).

I argued earlier that explaining back-and-forth mobility at retirement in systems-theoretical terms cannot be reduced to a simple cost-benefit calculation for the hostel residents. What is at stake is their legitimacy to grow old in France: the right to a pension as a deferred salary, the right to a good standard of medical care, the right

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<sup>3</sup>One exception is Blunt (2005).

to home help services. As the epigraph to Chap. 3 eloquently evoked, having one's 'papers' in order is fundamental to upholding these rights. Papers also need to be in order when contemplating international migration itself: for many of my respondents, the realisation that they needed proofs of identity in order to travel was the prompting factor in registering (i.e., registering their identity, their personhood) with the authorities. Many of my respondents did not procure birth certificates, let alone passports, until the time when, as young men, they thought about emigrating.

This underlines the initial transition the men had to make from a society of origin where such modern proofs of identity were unnecessary for day-to-day living, to a new society where such documents of personhood are essential and everyday tools of inclusion. In Luhmannian terms, this individual act of migrating to Western Europe represents the transition to a functionally-differentiated society in microcosm. The men had spent the first twenty-five years of their lives quite happily without a piece of paper stating who they were. This changed abruptly when they began to be confronted by state officials demanding certain documents in exchange for certain rights being recognised. These demands have only grown stronger as the men make the transition to retirement, a testament of their life-long struggle to achieve social inclusion and uphold their rights.

In summary, home *can* be about belonging to a territory, a localisable space, just as it *can* be about belonging to a social collective (household, community, nation). But I have argued that to be 'at home' can *also* mean upholding one's claims to domicile and personhood in order to achieve inclusion in different social systems. To repeat, this is not to deny the importance of place-belonging and group-belonging as constitutive of home. Instead, it is to recognise the growing complexity of social relations. If Luhmann's claim that society has become more complex and differentiated is accepted, then it becomes interesting to explore the implications of his theory for our thinking about home. Luhmann's insights about societal inclusion are particularly relevant in light of a recent piece of legislation which uniquely targets older hostel residents and their relationship to home. The final section of the book considers the prospects for this legislation and the people it is addressed to.

### 8.3 Concluding Prospects: Steering for Home?

On January 1st 2016, as I was finishing what I thought was the final draft of this manuscript, a new piece of legislation came into effect in France. Applicable only to people living in migrant worker hostels over the age of 65, this new law had a direct bearing on this book's central question about return at retirement. The primary object of the legislation was to institute a financial aid to encourage ageing hostel residents to return to their countries of origin on a longer-term basis. This new benefit is called the Aid for Familial and Social Reinsertion<sup>4</sup> and given the topic I could

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<sup>4</sup>The full title in French is: *l'Aide à la réinsertion familiale et sociale des anciens migrants dans leur pays d'origine*.



hardly have submitted the manuscript to the publishers without writing about it.<sup>5</sup> A further round of fieldwork in France therefore followed (January–March 2016), interviewing several individuals with close familiarity of the drafting of this law. What was particularly interesting about this new law was that it appeared to contradict the principles of territoriality and nationality which have long shaped the institution of the welfare state (Böcker and Hunter 2017).

The nationality principle results from the fact that welfare states evolved historically as part of a wider process of nation-state formation. Nation-states, therefore, are said to have special responsibilities towards their own nationals and may refuse social protection to non-nationals. In the latter part of the twentieth century, nationality conditions have increasingly given way to residence conditions as a means to define eligibility for social protection (Soysal 1994). Nonetheless, the closure reflex of welfare states may still operate at an earlier stage insofar as immigration policies regulating entry to state territory may deny entry if a prospective immigrant is more likely to be a net recipient of welfare rather than a net contributor.

The territoriality principle requires that social protection is restricted to those persons residing on the state territory. By extension this implies that the consumption of welfare benefits should be restricted to the state territory and that benefits should not be exportable should the recipient move his or her residence (Halfmann 2000). Regarding exportability, an important distinction is to be made between contributory benefits (i.e. those financed by an individual's social security contributions) such as pensions, and non-contributory benefits such as old-age income support (financed by general taxation). This was discussed in Chap. 3, where it was noted that thanks to bilateral social security conventions between France and countries of origin, hostel residents are free to transfer their state pensions to countries of origin. By contrast, non-contributory benefits such as the *minimum vieillesse* (old-age income support) may not be exported. As was pointed out in Chap. 3, due to the biographical specificity of their careers (employment in low-paid sectors; fraudulent employers not declaring employees for social security purposes etc.) many hostel residents did not contribute much to their pension funds and therefore claim the *minimum vieillesse* to supplement their incomes at retirement. The fact that this benefit is non-exportable and requires at least 6 months' presence in France was the stated rationale why many did not return to their families at retirement on a longer-term basis. In effect, the temporal and territorial requirements of inclusion in the welfare state timetabled their presence in France.

The difficulties arising from this situation have not gone unnoticed by policy-makers. Indeed, already in 2004 French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin wrote to the High Council for Integration (HCI), the agency tasked with monitoring migrant integration issues, to request a written ruling on the issues facing France's ageing migrant workers. The HCI report drew special attention to the 6-month residence condition governing access to old-age income support. This was labelled a "de facto inequality" facing older migrants, since foreigners were more likely than

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<sup>5</sup>For a fuller account of the origins and implementation of the Aid for Familial and Social Reinsertion, see Böcker and Hunter (2017).

French-born to claim the *minimum vieillesse* and the residence rule obliged some to remain in France rather than return home as they wished (HCI 2006: 126; author's translation). Relatedly, the report noted the burden on public funds occasioned by providing medical care and long-term elder care to this ageing population, particularly those living alone in the hostels who do not have family members nearby to provide informal support.

It was in this context that the idea for an Aid for Familial and Social Reinsertion was born, championed by Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister of Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing from 2004 to 2007. In essence, the Aid provides a lifelong income to all foreign nationals (including EU citizens) aged over 65<sup>6</sup> who choose to return to their countries of origin for more than 6 months per year. Several restrictions apply. Importantly, to be eligible one must reside in a migrant worker hostel (or a former hostel now operating as a *résidence sociale*). It is also stringently means-tested, meaning that those with annual incomes above €6600 are not eligible. As regards the practicalities of payment, beneficiaries receive a yearly sum which is calculated differentially so as to top up their income to €6600 (equivalent to €550 per month). This income threshold may seem shockingly low, but it should be recalled that due to exchange rates and purchasing power differentials €550 goes much further in Mali or Morocco than it does in Marseille or Montreuil (see Sect. 1.2).

While the numbers eligible for the Aid are strictly circumscribed, its wider significance in radically challenging the foundational principles of the welfare state are hard to overstate. This in large part explains the long delay between the passing of the legislation in parliament (2007) and its implementation (2016).<sup>7</sup> In effect, the principles of nationality and territoriality are turned on their head. The Aid is akin to a non-contributory benefit funded by general taxation, yet it is only open to non-nationals and, what is more, only to those non-nationals who have moved their permanent residence away from the national territory. This prompts the intriguing question as to why French policymakers would open up the welfare state in such a radical and potentially destabilising manner. This risk was made explicit by Yannick Imbert, director of the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII), during his appearance before the Parliamentary Commission on Older Migrants: "Would the French public accept that people no longer residing in our country could continue to receive benefits from French agencies?" (Bachelay 2013: 201; author's translation) The issue is all the more intriguing when one considers that this legislation was developed at a time when in other respects European welfare states were in sharp retreat.

Close analysis of publicly available documentation, as well as ten interviews with politicians, civil servants, union officials and migrant rights activists well-acquainted with the dossier, shows that policymakers had two main motivations in

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<sup>6</sup>Or 60 years if unfit for work.

<sup>7</sup>Due to changes of government and the difficulties of rendering the Aid legally compatible with non-discrimination clauses in EU law relative to social security, the legislation was effectively shelved from 2008 to 2013. See Böcker and Hunter (2017) for details.

drafting this legislation. The first chimes with a broader tendency that I have elsewhere called ‘institutional repentance’ (Böcker and Hunter 2017), that is to say an admission that many hostels are ill-adapted to an ageing clientele, coupled with recognition of the “sacrifices made by these workers for the economic development of France” (République Française 2007; author’s translation). In an interview, Rachid Bouzidi, a ministerial adviser, outlined why Minister Borloo was committed to the policy:

Quite simply the fact that in the cabinet of Jean-Louis Borloo we believe that everyone has the right to live with his family in a decent and dignified way. We believe that it is abnormal that *chibani*<sup>8</sup> remain in France against their will, only to retain their modest incomes and access to health. These men primarily arrived in the 1960s to work, because France asked them to. At that time, not a road, not a bridge, not a building was built without their help. So today, to permit them to live as they wish is not special treatment. It’s simply the right thing to do (Raouf 2007; author’s translation).

A second, more cynical, interpretation is that the true intention of policymakers was to empty the hostels once and for all of a public which poses increasing burdens on public services (Dimier 2007). The fact that the law is targeted exclusively at those living in hostels, rather than older foreigners in other types of housing who may well harbour similar wishes to return, rather reinforces this suspicion. On the one hand, the legislation could be interpreted as a means to accelerate the transformation of the hostels by replacing the older residents with younger publics. This has been a long-term aim of Sonacotra-Adoma’s stakeholders in government since the mid-1990s (Bernardot 2008). As detailed in Sect. 2.2, the company has made efforts to diversify its clientele to include young workers on short-term contracts, single mothers, homeless people and – increasingly – asylum seekers. This interpretation was strongly shared by one of my interviewees, ex-director of a prominent migrant rights organisation: “[The aim of the legislation] is uniquely to empty the hostels.” On the other hand, emptying the hostels of their ageing clientele would also save resources in public services, notably medical and elder care. The same interviewee concurred: “For the government it’s a win-win situation, 100%. They empty the hostels, and they make budgetary savings.” As hinted in the HCI report, and elaborated elsewhere in this book (see Chaps. 4 and 7 especially), caring for older hostel residents constitutes a non-negligible drain on resources in certain municipalities. Borloo himself raised this point in his testimony to the Parliamentary Mission on Older Migrants in 2013, describing the Aid as “a gesture of Republican dignity which moreover would cost France nothing ... One might even regard [the hostel residents’] return visits home as generating savings for our public services, notably in health” (Bachelay 2013: 445–446).

The question as to which of the two rationales dominated is open to discussion, and indeed Borloo’s testimony here indicates that both were at stake. But in any case what is beyond dispute is the outcome desired by policymakers, namely to facilitate the departure of the older men from the hostels on a more durable basis,

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<sup>8</sup> *Chibani* is a Maghrebi Arabic word signifying an older person, literally someone with white hair. The word has passed into the French language as a synonym for ageing migrant workers. The word was included in *Le Petit Larousse Illustré* in 2013.

through a combination of legislation and financial incentives. The Aid for Familial and Social Reinsertion is thus a clear example of ‘societal steering’, that is to say action taken by political or legal institutions to influence the behaviour of individuals in society. The capacity of such institutions to do so has been debated and theorised at length by sociologists, notably Habermas (1984) and Luhmann (1990), and this literature is generally very sceptical that the legal and political systems can directly and causally steer individual action (Boswell 2011). What then are the prospects for this policy and the men in the hostels which it targets? Will it finally result in the mass return of the ageing residents, and the emptying of the hostels?

It is admittedly early to offer a judgement, given the recent introduction of the Aid. Yet the available evidence indicates that a mass exodus from the hostels is highly unlikely any time soon, at least if the current low income threshold is retained. As of May 2016, 5 months after the law’s entry into force, a grand total of four people had filed an application for the Aid.<sup>9</sup> The body responsible for administering it, the *Caisse des dépôts et consignations*, had in addition fielded about a 100 telephone inquiries, and the website dedicated to the Aid had been consulted some 400 times. These figures contrast with the 35,000 potential beneficiaries cited on the government’s press release announcing the entry into force of the legislation.<sup>10</sup> One of my interviewees, a migrant rights activist, explained hostel residents’ lack of interest in the scheme. Firstly, most retired hostel residents have pensions between €500 and €600 per month. So they do not gain very much, if anything, by this measure. They prefer therefore to stay in France for more than 6 months per year in order to be eligible for the *minimum vieillesse*, which brings their monthly income up to €800 (as of 2016). Only those who have very small pensions, say €250 per month or less, may find the measure attractive: by taking it they could spend most of their time with their families and benefit from the relative financial security which a monthly income of €550 affords in countries of origin.

Nonetheless, it bears repeating that the decision to return is not only a question of economic costs and benefits, as this book has stressed at various points. Nor can it be directly incited by the actions of political and legal institutions. As Luhmann (1990: 84) succinctly puts it, people “cannot be steered causally and technically by means of law and money.” Due to the inherent inability of political or legal institutions to accurately model the impact of their interventions in other systems, money and law always lead to distorting and counterproductive effects. In the area of immigration policy, this leads to a “structural tendency to ‘short-circuit’ the complexity of the migratory processes [which policymakers] are attempting to steer” (Boswell 2011: 12). Indeed, the chapters of this book have shown that hostel residents’ decisions about return revolve around a series of complex issues: about

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<sup>9</sup>These figures concerning interest in and applications for the Aid were made public in Alexis Bachelay’s follow-up report about the implementation of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Mission on Older Migrants (Bachelay 2016: 29).

<sup>10</sup>Communiqué de presse 08/01/2015. Ministère des Affaires sociales et de la Santé. <http://social-sante.gouv.fr/actualites/presse/communiques-de-presse/article/marisol-touraine-met-en-place-une-aide-permettant-aux-migrants-ages-de-choisir>

bureaucracy and paperwork, about continuity of healthcare, about friendships and family quarrels, about the observance of religious ritual. In sum, these are questions about social inclusion in a wider systems theoretic sense, and about mobility as a strategy to achieve that.

Last but not least, return decision-making later in life also provokes questions about what Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) call transnational ‘ways of belonging’, via memories, nostalgia and imagined or vicarious connections to distant places. Conceiving of mobility in this way may be especially relevant to older people’s experiences insofar as memories, stories, photographs, food, music and so on can provide compensatory mechanisms when physical movement ceases due to ill-health or frailty (Ciobanu and Hunter 2017). This was brought home to me most memorably during my fieldwork in Senegal, and it is here that I will close, with a scene from my time in Dembanané in January 2009.

Late one sunny afternoon I was out for a stroll with my host Jaabé. He had wanted to show me some of the building projects financed by the expatriate villagers living in France. As intimated earlier in the book, such projects are numerous and although Dembanané is not a big place, we were gone several hours, inspecting the clinic, the post office, two schools, and the recently inaugurated market hall. After the tour, as we were walking back to Jaabe’s house, we came across a group of older men sat in shade by the side of the path. After the customary introductions one of them started to speak to me. It was an observation about the weather: “It’s cold *chez nous*”, he said. Being from a country where that topic is a conversational mainstay, I was almost relieved to be on familiar territory for a moment, as I joked: “*Non, non, au contraire*, it is hot here today, for me at least!” Yet my new acquaintance’s remark was far from idle chatter: he wished to make a point. “*Non, non, chez nous, la France* – there’s snow in Paris.” And the penny dropped: I was in the presence of a fellow Parisian. What he said next struck a chord and will remain forever imprinted on my memory:

You know, after spending forty years in Paris, it’s the only thing in my dreams.  
At night, the *métro*, the boulevards teeming with people, all of that.  
I never forget. I am not able to forget.<sup>11</sup>

How could it be otherwise? In their lifelong quest for inclusion and recognition – in France as worker, pensioner, patient; in places of origin as a person of rank – circulating between these two worlds became an existential imperative. *I do the va-et-vient, therefore I am*. When their bodies can no longer carry them, the voyage back-and-forth continues, in memories and dreams.

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<sup>11</sup> Fieldnotes, 26 January 2009.

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## Appendix: Notes on Method

Return decision-making at retirement may not appear on first view to be a particularly sensitive topic, but this is to forget that the one constant in the hostel residents' lives has been the promise made to friends and family to return 'one day'. By remaining in France beyond retirement they bear the stigma of continued absence. Choukri Hmed encountered the same sensitivities in his doctoral research in hostels in Nice: "To ask questions about return is to violently remind the immigrant of these common-sense representations with which he is regularly confronted and which various governments have contributed to giving shape" (Hmed 2006a: 561).<sup>1</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that reticence to discuss return was not confined to those hostel residents who had 'failed' and 'broken' their promise to return. In Dembanané, the village where I conducted fieldwork in eastern Senegal, many of my respondents had succeeded normatively and objectively in their migration projects. They had been able to return with their heads held high (Salmi 2004) and spent much of the year in the village. When they travelled to France, it was usually in order to take advantage of their entitlement to superior French healthcare. Nonetheless, despite maximising the benefits of migration in this way, I was surprised to find the same reticence to discuss return in Dembanané as I found in the hostels in France. A younger Dembanané man, Lassana, attributed this reticence to the fact that the elders are simply not used to telling their life stories to anyone who asks. He conceded that he also would have difficulty extracting such information from the village elders, even from his own relatives: it would not be respectful. As he put it, "To be told about this stuff is good, but to ask or to enquire, that might seem rude."

In other instances, reticence to discuss return was attributed to a broader suspicion of intellectual activity in general. As noted, most hostel residents have no more than a primary education. Indeed, taking the case of Dembanané, most of my respondents had not attended the local school as it was not built until 1954, by which time they were in their early teens and therefore too old to start school. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> State financial aid encouraging return is one example of government action in this sphere.

when I told my respondents that I was a student or a researcher (*chercheur*), it did not necessarily mean very much to them. Taking the literal meaning of the term, they would ask me, “*Mais qu’est-ce que tu cherches ici?*” [But what are you *looking for* here?] In some cases, such complete unfamiliarity with the idea of academia or research had a significant bearing on the degree to which I was able to secure informed consent, as will be discussed below.

Suspicion could come in other forms. On several occasions residents displayed a great deal of apprehension about my motives, alleging that I was a spy sent by one of the social security agencies to inform on them. This suspicion is understandable given the climate of distrust which reigned in certain establishments and the practices adopted by certain agencies to crack down on benefit fraud (for manifestations of this mutual distrust see Chap. 3). A number of respondents voiced concern about the confidentiality of their testimony, despite my best efforts to assuage these doubts. The following exchange with one respondent – Mehdi – is indicative of such suspicions, as my field notes record:

I asked if it would be OK to record the interview. Mehdi said some very interesting things about this: to do a recording was “*trop grave*” (too serious). If we made a recording, then the government would listen to it and they would try to get him in front of a judge or deport him for something he had said. I said that he could remain anonymous if he wished, but he said no, the government can recognise you just by your voice. He then started talking about how he is a delegate for his *comité d’entreprise* [staff council is perhaps the nearest translation], he has been a delegate for ten years now, and every time there is a meeting the boss asks if he can record the conversation, for the minutes, but he always refuses. Again, because he is scared of the consequences: the boss could easily mess around with the recording, edit it or add words and then he would be up in front of a judge. He is very suspicious of the current government; he is sure that they are against immigrants, and are looking for any reason to deport people, including older people. “*Ils préfèrent que nous crevons là-bas*” [“they’d prefer that we snuff it back home”]. Again very interestingly, he said that if there was a “serious” government in charge – “if the Socialists were in charge” – then he would have no problem giving a recorded interview. I replied that I understood entirely, that it was up to him to decide and that I respected his decision.<sup>2</sup>

Other factors also intervened. A significant hurdle to participation was the potential for miscommunication and mutual comprehension. Later in my research, during my period of fieldwork as a live-in resident, I suggested to Denis, the hostel manager, that it could be a good idea to put posters up advertising my presence and the aims of my study. His response was doubtful – “three quarters of them don’t read”. Illiteracy applied both to French and home languages, given that very few had undergone more than a primary education (Gallou 2005). The task of informing my potential participants about the aims of the research was thereby made more painstaking. Given that French was not my native language either, the margin for miscommunications and *malentendus* was that much higher.

Abdou, who was my *entrée* to the hostels thanks to the drop-in advice service he ran for a migrant rights organisation, empathised with my difficulties. Not a social

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<sup>2</sup>Fieldnotes 30 May 2009.

scientist by training, he nonetheless had sound advice on how to conduct research with hostel residents:

It's a very particular population you know, especially with all the problems that they have. It's like they're people whose confidence you have to earn, there has to be rapport... so that the interviews pass naturally, as naturally as possible.

The methods textbooks couldn't put it more succinctly: "Building trust and rapport are extremely necessary ingredients for conducting sensitive research with the 'vulnerable' and hard-to-reach populations" (Liamputtong 2007: 56). As Berk and Adams recommend, researchers need to: (i) demonstrate consistent commitment to the investigation; (ii) be sincere and honest, not motivated by morbid curiosity; and (iii) explain the research in the most flattering manner, so as to avoid reinforcing any stereotypes of deviance. "Many groups are extremely sensitive to the reasons why they are being studied: and unless the researcher can justify in non-demeaning and non-threatening terms why he wants to do the research, rapport will be difficult to achieve" (Berk and Adams 2001: 63).

Hence in my publicity material, primarily in the form of posters, I was very keen to present the study in the most affirming terms: for instance, the epigraph at the start of Chap. 2 was selected as the header for all my publicity posters. Another communicative strategy to generate rapport was to speak in Arabic with those residents hailing from North Africa, who make up a majority of the older Sonacotra-Adoma clientele. Speaking some Arabic, and intimating that I could understand what people were saying around me, was a novel icebreaker for North African respondents, who certainly were not expecting a Scottish doctoral student to know any colloquial Moroccan Arabic.<sup>3</sup> This is not to claim that I could understand everything that everyone said – far from it (hence my decision to conduct all interviews in French) – but by demonstrating that I had more than superficial knowledge of North African language and customs I earned the elders' respect. I also drafted all my publicity material in Modern Standard Arabic in addition to French (see Appendix 2). This latter strategy cut two ways: as Muslims, both North and West Africans were impressed that I could write Arabic well, but on occasion this also contrived to create further distance, since many less educated men could not read or write Arabic as well as I could. Especially early on, I could sense people's acute embarrassment when I produced my Arabic publicity material. They simply were not able to read it.

This language barrier to participant engagement was compounded by other "deficit[s] in social relations" (Hurley 2007: 185) which seemed enormous at first glance. Between myself and my respondents loomed a veritable chasm of differences, in age, socio-economic class, and disparities in educational and employment histories. Furthermore, the older hostel residents were members of visible minorities in France whereas I, while still a foreigner there, did not 'appear' as such. I

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<sup>3</sup>I would like to acknowledge the generous support for language training, both in Arabic and French, provided to me by the Economic and Social Research Council's 1+3 Studentship programme.

should add that the issues I faced in reaching and engaging older hostel residents were not isolated challenges, unique to my project because of any personal ethnic, cultural or language ‘deficits’. Researchers of North and West African origin have also testified to the peculiar convergence of factors which means the hostel population is withdrawn, ‘hard to reach’ and therefore ‘hard to engage’ for any non-resident. Reading Choukri Hmed’s thesis, one has the impression that he faced similar struggles in engaging interviewees (Hmed 2006a).

These disparities in human capital and struggles to find a common language had critical implications for my ability to secure informed consent. Informing respondents about the study’s aims and the purpose to which findings are put requires adequate communication skills in the first place, and it was noted that not all hostel residents possessed the necessary proficiency in French. Equally necessary is that respondents understand what is meant when the researcher communicates these ideas. Whenever I met a hostel resident for the first time I introduced myself by saying that I was a student doing research about the hostels. However, as noted above, saying the words ‘student’ or ‘research’ meant very little to residents in some instances. This was brought into focus one afternoon when, having gone through my usual protocol about the aims and objectives of the study, I took up my pen to note down something of interest which the man in question had just told me. Anxiously, the man enquired: “what are you doing that for, writing it down?” I realised then that the man had not understood what I had meant when I said “research”. All rapport dissipated and the man broke off our discussion.

This was an event which provoked much self-reflection about what consent means. Subsequently I now agree entirely with Pamela Brink in this regard:

The population cannot give fully informed consent given that many of them have no idea what research means and do not relate to the anthropologist as a researcher. They relate to the field worker as a person who is initially a stranger and then becomes either a friend or a fictive relative. Because research and researcher are not part of their worldview, they do not fully understand to what they are consenting (Brink 1993: 235).

This incident taught me to be much more patient in my approach to hostel residents and to explain more fully what I was doing. I also learned that getting consent was not a one-time event to be crossed off a checklist, but rather a task to be repeated throughout the research stages. This is what Cutcliffe and Ramcharan (2002) mean when they use the term “ethics as process” (cited in Liamputtong 2007: 43-4). Their insight is that ethical issues evolve as research progresses and greater depth of experience and involvement is achieved. In such situations, consent needs to be renegotiated every so often. The difficulty in securing informed consent also had a bearing in who participated in my study. A number of the older men in the hostel with whom I established some rapport appeared to suffer from mental health problems. Securing informed consent would have been highly problematic and dubious in these cases. Other individuals were in a state of physical ill health that led them to decline my invitation to participate. And of course, there was also the issue of language proficiency. Some residents did not have a sufficient command of French to understand some of my more abstract questions. By making it a rule that every

interview was preceded by an introductory discussion where I introduced myself and my project and solicited my interlocutor's views about it, I was quickly able to make an assessment of the ability of an individual to take part and to give informed consent.

From the foregoing, it is evident that I cannot claim that those I interviewed were representative of all older hostel residents. I primarily engaged those connected to the Residents' Committees, which biases the sample towards the more 'respectable' hostel *habitués*. I did however seek to redress this lack of representativeness by asking the hostel management about the typical trajectories found among the residents. Hostel clienteles vary from hostel to hostel, in large part due to the effects of local labour markets and the different industrial sectors found in a given area. Variations in exposure to unemployment, to work-related ill-health, or to administrative irregularities (e.g., not being declared by one's employer for tax and social security purposes) all have a bearing on a hostel's clientele. Likewise, migrant networks can have strong selection effects regarding a hostel's demographic make-up (place of origin, age, cohort effects and so on). As a result, within an *individual* hostel, one is likely to find a number of trajectories which may be assumed to be more or less typical – further evidence that this accommodation can be viewed in Goffman's terms as a 'total institution' (see Chap. 2 for discussion). At the individual level, hostels are interesting biographically because "the population housed [there] presents the particularity of grouping together in one place individuals having a common migration history, in time and in space" (Renaut 2006: 170). However, in an attempt to boost generalisability, I also actively sought out residents who did not conform to the typical trajectories.<sup>4</sup>

Owing to the depth of information demanded by biographical methods, there are inevitably limits to the amount of data which one researcher can collect in a given period. "Since the essence of (...) analysis all too often lies in particularised detail, and since the validity of the analysis is usually shown through the detailing of the analysis, there are inevitable constraints on the number of cases which can be presented" (Chamberlayne et al. 2000: 21). In total, some 25 hostel residents agreed to grant me a life story interview. Compared to the organisational representatives I interviewed, a lower proportion of hostel residents agreed to having their interview recorded, approximately 30%. This is unsurprising given that hostel residents were not as experienced at giving interviews, and therefore less comfortable in this situation. It tended to be those individuals with whom I had developed better rapport who permitted me to record (although in the case described above where doing a recording was "*trop grave*", I was on very good terms with Mehdi). Those who refused a recorded interview were generally more comfortable chatting with me informally, and like Zontini's older Italian migrants in the English Midlands, did not see the need for a recorded interview which might introduce undue formality, if not artificiality, into the research process (Zontini 2015).

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<sup>4</sup>For example, Rahman (an alcoholic), Jawad (who had recently left the hostel and moved into private accommodation), and Issa (who had recently moved to a new hostel).

It seems appropriate to conclude with some reflections on the later tasks of the researcher: analysis and writing. Rather than seeing the autobiographer-respondent and the biographer-researcher as engaged in a fact-mining exercise ‘out there in objective reality’, a more appropriate view, proposed by Norman Denzin is as follows: “The study of biographical research rests on a view of individuals as creators of meanings which form the basis of their everyday lives” (Denzin 1989: 13). If the individual respondent interprets events and thereby creates meaning, then the same logic applies with the researcher too, as Fischer-Rosenthal affirms: “The researcher’s biographical analysis (...) is hermeneutical and reconstructive, just as the biographical structuring itself – the biographical narration – is interpretive and constructive” (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 118). Likewise, Smith and Pitts comment that, “the act of data analysis is an act of interpretation. Done properly, analysis is an extremely measured and nuanced activity that goes from what the data might say to what the data might mean.” (Smith and Pitts 2007: 28).

Analysis – in the sense of searching for constituent elements of meaning – was an ongoing, iterative task, commencing from the moment I started collecting data. However, my full attention was directed to analysis once data collection had been concluded. After full transcriptions of all recorded interviews had been made (including pauses and hesitations where significant), these were uploaded as source files into QSR’s N-Vivo qualitative data analysis software. I also uploaded as source material the following data:

- Grey literature (i.e., not commercially published) produced by the organisations I researched, including reports, statistics, in-house studies;
- Various legal texts, such as bilateral social security conventions;
- All field logs (word-processed from my handwritten notes);
- Administrative data (e.g., anonymised case notes of dependent residents in Sonacotra-Adoma hostels: see Chap. 7);
- Material recorded during my visits to various archives (Sciences-Po Press Archive; archives of the Hauts-de-Seine *département*).

Using N-Vivo was not only a useful means of keeping the project data in one easily searchable place. Above all, I utilised N-Vivo for its coding capabilities. Text was coded according to what initially was a wide range of categories, consistent with the various lines of enquiry suggested by the research problematic and the various theories as described above. At the outset, categories were susceptible to rapid re-evaluation or rejection, but in time they became more embedded and my analysis in turn more refined (Moug 2008). N-Vivo allowed me to develop an evolving set of analytical categories, as I proceeded to break the infinitely complex data down into constituent elements of meaning before re-assembling these elements in a way which permitted some generalisation.

While N-Vivo and its forerunners have been associated rather closely with grounded theory, I should stress that this was not a grounded theory analysis, at least not according to the blueprint originally provided by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Rather than generating theory from the data, I interrogated my data for evidence which spoke to the theories outlined in Chap. 2, as well as evidence which did not



accord with these theories. N-Vivo encourages and facilitates such questioning and rigour. Nonetheless the codes, especially my *in vivo* codes, were developed from and remained grounded in my source data.

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