

**From Permanent to Circular Migrations.
The Experience of (Re)migration in Individual Trajectories in France.**

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Research on international migration has long been based on the implicit assumption that immigrants would settle permanently in a single country of destination, an assumption still dominant in public debates. However, many immigrants eventually remigrate, either returning home or moving to another country of destination. In a context where immigrants and their children account for large proportions of the population in European countries – and in France especially –, a better knowledge of migration patterns constitutes a central issue. Breaking with the simplistic depiction of migration as a one-way and one-time movement, I consider France both as a place of arrival and departure. Taking seriously the importance of migration trajectories to understand integration mechanisms, the main contribution of my dissertation is to explore the role of migration experiences in individual trajectories by using an original approach that focuses on international mobility from and to France for different groups of population.

The thesis is written as a monograph structured in eight chapters. The first two chapters provide the theoretical and methodological framing of my research. The rest of the dissertation presents empirical results based on quantitative analyses.

Chapter 1

Drawing on an interdisciplinary literature review, Chapter 1 underlines the need to go beyond the classical model of permanent migration, in contrast with most existing research on immigrants' integration that overlooks the complexity of (re)migration patterns.

I conceive migration as a continuous process over the life-course, which has two major consequences for the study of migration. First, I take into consideration *complete* migration itineraries, by exploring different moments of migration processes: immigrants' pre-migration characteristics, past migratory journey itself, and actual or potential remigration from France. Second, I examine both the determinants of out-migration from France and the effects of migration experiences in individual trajectories.

I additionally argue that the diversity of migrant profiles and motivations calls for rethinking the traditional categories of international migrants. A third contribution of my work is to widen the population of interest in migration studies beyond the foreign-born category by drawing systematic comparisons between several types of migrants rarely studied together: immigrants¹ – from different countries of origin –, internal migrants from overseas French departments, French nationals born abroad, second-generation migrants from these three groups, as well as natives not belonging to any of these categories. Thus, I put into perspective distinct streams of

¹ According to the official definition used in France, immigrants are individuals born outside of France without French citizenship at birth.

the literature, such as studies on the privileged mobility of natives from Northern countries with more traditional works on labor migration from developing countries.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 lays out the methodological foundations of the thesis. The empirical approach constitutes a central issue, as the lack of attention paid to remigration is not only linked to a settlement bias in studies on integration, but also to technical limitations. The vast majority of data being produced at the national level, quantitative studies usually fail to track migrants from one country to another. Exits are especially difficult to measure, and little is known about out-migration from France for both immigrants and natives. My dissertation contributes to this empirical challenge by combining a wide variety of data and migration indicators, that this chapter presents.

I use an ongoing panel called the *Permanent Demographic Sample (EDP)*, which tracks an exceptionally large sample of individuals since 1968 – around one million individuals in 2000 – by compiling successive censuses and information from civil registries, as well as tax declarations since 2011. Building on these linked-administrative longitudinal data, I propose different methods to measure international mobility from France, often indirectly through attrition. I also use the *Trajectories and Origins* survey (2008) that provides both retrospective data on past migration trajectories and information on future migration intentions (N=21,761). Combining these datasets allows me to examine objective and subjective measures of people's migration experiences at different moments along the trajectory, and thus to better question the role of migration in individual paths using a variety of quantitative methods.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides a general descriptive overview on (re)migration patterns from France. Results underline the variety of these trajectories: circular migration vs. long-term departure, return vs. onward migration for first- and second-generation migrants.

The comparison between different groups of population reveals distinct migration logics. First-generation migrants are more likely to leave than natives, which confirms the role of first migration experience in subsequent geographical mobility. Findings also highlight the intermediate position of children of immigrants. On the one hand, they exhibit larger emigration rates than children of natives *ceteris paribus*, suggesting an intergenerational transmission of a migration capital as well as a sense of attachment to the parental country of origin. On the other hand, in line with classic assimilation theories, their migratory practices (temporary exits rather than long-term exits, preferred destinations) converge with those of the natives. Finally, results point to specific remigration determinants for first-generation immigrants: those who leave are both positively and negatively selected in terms of education and economic integration in France.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 examines in greater detail these remigration mechanisms for first-generation immigrants. The central contribution of this chapter is to show that the effect of immigrants' economic integration at destination on their probability to remigrate is heterogeneous and depends on the way immigrants have been initially selected into emigration from their country of origin.

While this idea is not entirely new, it has never been properly tested because of the difficult measurement of immigrants' pre-migration characteristics. I combine the longitudinal data from EDP with aggregated data on educational attainment distributions in immigrants' origin countries to construct a measure of their relative educational attainment – and hence, of their relative social position – within their origin society. I show that the positive effect of holding poorly-valued occupations in France on remigration is significantly larger among immigrants who were initially highly selected in terms of educational attainment.

These results suggest that the decision to remigrate is not only motivated by the absolute level of economic integration at destination, but may also result from the mismatch between immigrants' initial selection from the origin country – that, I argue, partly captures their pre-migration socioeconomic expectations – and their actual situation in France. Indirectly, these results inform on integration processes, suggesting that pre-migration position constitutes a reference point from which immigrants judge the success of their migration project.²

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 turns to the question of migration intentions. I compare the prevalence and determinants of international mobility aspirations across immigrant generations (G1, G1.5, G2, G2.5) and between intentions to return to the (parental) homeland or to live in a third country. Echoing the conceptual framework of “reactive transnationalism”, a major finding is to show that the effect of the subjective experience in France is strongest for the G2, as they are more likely than their parents to express return intentions when experiencing discrimination in their birth country.

This chapter contributes to migration studies by underlining the value of (a) disaggregating the traditional first versus second generation dichotomy to understand the complexity of migration intentions, and (b) including countries other than the ancestral homeland when studying second-generation transnational practices, as G2.5 are primarily characterized by onward migration intentions. More broadly, results show that migration intentions should not only be seen as proxies for population movements, but also provide valuable insights into immigrants' personal relationship to both the country of residence and expected destination, therefore refining our understanding of integration mechanisms.³

After shedding light on the determinants of actual or potential (re)migration from France, the last three chapters explore the consequences of migration experiences in individual trajectories and for the study of immigrant integration.

Chapter 6

The goal of Chapter 6 is to study the way migration from France affects professional careers upon return. I examine economic returns to international mobility for individuals who have lived abroad for some years, and the extent to which they are unequal across gender, education and ethnoracial origins. Cross-sectional regressions indicate that those who spent time abroad hold better paid positions when returning to France, and that these positive effects are larger for highly educated individuals. Taking advantage of the unique EDP panel, fixed-effect models

² These analyses have been replicated for England and Wales using the ONS *Longitudinal Study* and accepted for publication in the *International Migration Review* (Caron and Ichou, forthcoming).

³ A version of this chapter has been published in the *International Migration Review* (Caron, 2019).

however show that this wage premium is not caused by migration experience itself, but only reflects selection into initial and return migration.

This chapter contributes to a better understanding of the role of migration in social stratification. If the capacity to transform international experiences into economic advantage was unequally distributed, while migration opportunities are already selective, the combination of these mechanisms could increase socioeconomic inequalities within the origin society. By contrast, this chapter shows that circular migrations from France contribute to *maintaining* rather than *reinforcing* the social structure of the society. These results temper two extreme conceptions of migration: one that sees migration as producing social fluidity, and the other one suggesting that international capital plays a key role in increasing social inequalities.

Chapter 7

The last two chapters focus on first-generation immigrants. In different ways, they both advocate for considering immigrants' complete migratory trajectories in the study of their integration at destination.

Chapter 7 explores the empirical consequences of selective remigration for quantitative measures of integration. Comparing estimates of immigrants' economic integration drawn from cross-sectional and panel regressions, I find little evidence of a bias due to selective remigration for standard measures of immigrants' trajectories in the French labor market. Despite the absence of bias, this chapter opens up wider perspectives for the sociology of immigration, by questioning the methodological consequences of assuming that immigrants settle permanently at destination for the quantitative study of integration processes.⁴

Chapter 8

Pursuing this deconstruction, the aim of this last chapter is to study the role of immigrants' past migration trajectories to understand their integration in the host society. In line with the idea that *immigrants* are also *emigrants* and that they did not arrive in France as blank slates, I argue that their migration histories should be taken into consideration for at least two reasons. First, complex migration itineraries might indirectly reveal selection processes in terms of economic, social or legal resources that also affect the positions they have at destination. Second, through their migratory route and the multiple countries crossed, individuals acquire specific skills⁵ that may be useful for their integration in the country of destination.

Using sequence analysis on retrospective data, I construct a typology of immigrants' migration itineraries that I then relate to various integration outcomes in different regressions. Results show that the complexity of past migration trajectories partly explains the heterogeneity of immigrants' socioeconomic positions in France, especially within the same group of origin. Thus, this analytical framework allows to refine the categorization of immigrants by origin only and to better take into account the diversity that exists within groups.

⁴ A version of this chapter has been published in *Population* (Caron, 2018).

⁵ Some researchers talk about "migrant capital" (Paul 2015; Busse and Vasquez Luque, 2016), or "migratory knowledge" (Ramos, 2018) to refer to these "migration-related capabilities and resources" (Paul, 2015, p. 439).

Conclusion

To summarize, my aim in this thesis is to describe the diversity of migration patterns and to explain their role in individual trajectories. Conceiving migration as a continuous process over the life-course, my work contributes to research on migration in three ways.

First, by considering all individuals residing in France as potential (re)migrants, the comparison between populations with diverse origins and individual or familial relationships to migration provides original empirical insights on the variety of migration processes.

Second, the combined analysis of determinants and consequences of international mobility experiences in individual socioeconomic trajectories sheds new light on the place of migration in the (re)production of social inequalities.

Finally, my analyses underline the necessity for taking into account complete migratory trajectories (pre-migration characteristics, past migration histories and future expected mobilities) to better understand integration mechanisms at destination. In doing so, this research reconciles two distinct literatures that rarely talk to each other: sociology of migration, which examines migration determinants and patterns, and sociology of immigration, focusing on assimilation trajectories of migrants and their descendants in the host society.

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