The occurrence of death in an immigrant situation is a little-explored albeit essential subject considering, for example, the presence in France of a substantial immigrant population, migration and social and economic reorganization, especially in the Senegal River region where immigration is aimed at reproducing the family unit. Migrants to France, where the places of death, the rites, and emotional, symbolic, material, and financial management take on new forms, severely brings into question the serenity with which Muslims relate to death. For Muslim migrants, dying in France represents a transgression. These negative representations have a direct impact on determining the place of burial.

Choosing a place of burial

When a migrant dies in France, there are two principle possibilities for the place of burial in France, according to the current legislation, or in the country of origin, after the body is repatriated. Surveys carried out have clearly revealed the preference of migrants from the Senegal River region for posthumous repatriation. Apart from exceptions, those who die in France are buried in the country of origin. However, this practice is relatively recent, the first repatriation of this sort dating to 1949. Since then, the death certificate was buried in France. In some twenty years, the practices and representations have thus considerably evolved. These developments are the result of the conjugation of several factors: on the one hand, the awareness of the burial methods, of the precariousness of burial in France, and of the procedure of rotation of tombs in the Muslim spaces, which is expressed through a ‘conspiracy myth’ that was rapidly propagated throughout the group, and on the other hand, the establishment of a ‘fund for the dead’, an association of people from the Senegal River region who finance the costly operation (more than 4000 Euro) of posthumous repatriation and which functions as a repatriation insurance. But the developments are also due to a return to the religiousness in the early 1980s, coupled with the change in inscriptions of migrants in French space that followed the modification of the religious, customary and migrant's discourses. The idea of death in migrations is the familiarization of certain migrants with the functioning of procedures in the host country. Choosing a place of burial is a matter of ethnic origin and profoundly disturbs the sequence of rituals carried out in the Senegal River region and profoundly disturb the sequential unfolding of funerals. These rituals are played out on a particular register that confront several models, several cultures, several ‘space-times’ (here and there, before and after the transfer), and several groups. They imply the deep root of new repatriations, new symbols adapted to a new situation: life in France.

Transnationalization of the rituals

The migratory context and the repatriation of corpses are both constraints that affect the ritual practices of migrants living in France. They hinder any identical reproduction of the rituals carried out in the country of origin and profoundly disturb the sequential unfolding of funerals. These rituals are played out on a particular register that confront several models, several cultures, several ‘space-times’ (here and there, before and after the transfer), and several groups. They imply the deep root of new repatriations, new symbols adapted to a new situation: life in France.

The original practices are never totally abandoned. The inspiration of funerary rites of Malekite Muslims remain and the practice of the ritual gifts (in money) continues to be a central element in the ceremonial act and affects the ritual practices of migrants living in France. They hinder any identical reproduction of the rituals carried out in the country of origin and profoundly disturb the sequential unfolding of funerals. These rituals are played out on a particular register that confront several models, several cultures, several ‘space-times’ (here and there, before and after the transfer), and several groups. They imply the deep root of new repatriations, new symbols adapted to a new situation: life in France.