Mobility and Family in Transnational Space

Edited by
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Introduction

Transnational families are not a new phenomenon. Research on transnational family lives has led to a growing body of empirical studies and literature. Globalization and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have created conditions that help families survive the geographical distance, staying connected. This is focused mainly on the impacts of transnational way of life in migrant mothers and their interaction with those left behind, while fathering practices during migration have received less attention. Despite the efforts made by parents to ease the geographical separation, often there are changes in the relationship between parents and children, such as the loss of parental authority or the weakening of emotional bonds.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze how the relationship between parents and children is affected by the migratory project, and also identify what practices are carried out by migrant parents to exercise parenting at distance.

The original data upon which this chapter was built come from the fieldwork carried out under the project Places and belongings: Conjugalidade between Angola and Portugal, which aims to comprehend the effects of

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1 Doctoral candidate in Sociology at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT-Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia) granted (SFRH/BD/80499/2011).
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mobility on conjugal family life, and how the (re)constructing of "home" is made by the migrant, favoring the male point of view.

Starting with a brief overview of the migratory context between Angola and Portugal, followed by a description of the methodology adopted, this chapter focuses on migrant parents' narratives regarding their parenting practices and the effects of distance in the relationship with their children. In order to perceive how parenting from a distance is exercised and managed, this topic of the interviews sought to assess how the decisions regarding the children were organized, the perception of the impact of distance on parental authority, the impact of distance on creating conflicts, and the existence of support in caring for children.

The analysis of the interviews reveals that transnational parenting practices are based on communication, with ICT having an important role in the lives of migrants and in which fathers interviewed seem to suffer emotionally due to the separation from their families.

This article contributes to the study of transnational parenting practices and the adaptation to the new family roles imposed by the transnational life style, highlighting paternal involvement and questioning the concept of masculinity.

Migration between Angola and Portugal

Past and Present

Migrations between Angola and Portugal have a specific character, which is grounded on long-standing relationships between the two countries, marked by oppression and colonialism. The Portuguese arrived in Angola at the end of the fifteenth century, and there was a progressive assimilation that led Angola to the category of overseas colony of the Portuguese Empire. Relations between Portugal and Angola were guided mainly by trade (slave trade and later, with the proliferation of trafficking, various products such as coffee, sugar cane, sisal, iron) and also cultural exchanges, although the condition of Portugal as colonizing country tends to have a forceful character.

Following the independence of several other African countries, Angola initiated a liberation war. This war, known among Portuguese as the colonial war, extended from 1961 to 1974. The fall of the Portuguese political regime provided the Angolan independence. Angola would become an independent country, recovering its sovereignty on November 11, 1975. With the independence of the country, a civil war began that lasted 27 years, ending in 2002. The civil war in Angola was a struggle for power between the two main liberation movements Popular Movement of Liberation of Angola (MPLA-Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola-) and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA-União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) of the country. It was divided into three periods of major combat—1975-1991, 1992-1994, and 1998-2002, interspersed with periods of tenuous peace.

Angolan migration to Portugal began in the 16th century. Over time the flow experienced periods of greater intensity. According to Grassi (2010), in the 20th century the main periods of Angolan migration to Portugal were in the 1960s with the arrival of a small group of students; in the period following the fall of the Portuguese dictatorial regime (1974/75), when there was a return of Portuguese living in Angola and Angolans also. In the 1980s following the repression of the political coup of the 27th May 1977, a considerable number of Angolans went to Portugal. Later in the late 1990s and in the early 21st century, the intensification of the civil war in Angola led many Angolans to migrate to Portugal, some to settle, and others to move on to other destinations. The connection to Portugal, the common language and some cultural proximity, made Portugal the chosen destination for many Angolans seeking to escape the armed conflict or looking for a better life and opportunities.

Portuguese migration to Angola begins in the 1930s, motivated by the colonies settlement policy. According to Claudia Castelo (2007), the policy developed by the State to settle the colonies with motherland citizens sought to maintain and enforce sovereignty over these territories. The author states that the policy was developed in two stages: a first moment, initially planned by the State; the second moment, from 1929 (global crisis) until the Second World War, in which migration did not depend only on state intervention, but also the individual initiative of many Portuguese who sought better living conditions. At the same time, the spread of the idea of the colonies as an extension of Portuguese territory beyond the sea facilitated the option for migration.

The collapse of the Salazar regime in Portugal and the outbreak of civil war in Angola triggered the return of many Portuguese who were in Angola. The 1980s and 1990s, witnessed a reduction in the volume of Portuguese emigration. Portuguese emigration to Angola, given the political situation and the military conflict in the country, virtually ended. The global financial crisis of 2008 encouraged its return and Africa emerged again as a migratory destination, with Angola the top destination. The commitment to rebuilding the country meant that Angola undertook a large number of public works. This and the economic growth made it necessary to "import" skilled labor. This window of opportunity,
combined with a precarious and unstable economic situation in Portugal, led many Portuguese to migrate to Angola.

Today the situation is different. We can see that the number of Angolan migrants in Portugal is decreasing, due to a return to the home country, which currently is economically more appealing than Portugal. The progress of the Angolan economy and the economic crisis affecting Portugal is encouraging Angolans to return to their country of origin. Currently it appears that the number of Portuguese citizens residing in Angola is greater than the number of Angolans living in Portugal. There has been an apparent reversal of the migration flow.

Ferreira and Grassi (2012) also refer to the reversal of migration flows between Portugal and Angola. The authors analyze the migration of young Portuguese, noting that the economic crisis and the high youth unemployment rates urge young people to leave. According to the authors “We can conclude that in total 91,900 Portuguese residents in Angola are mostly young people of working age”.

Nevertheless, according to Portuguese Immigration and Borders Service (SEF, Serviço Estrangeiros e Fronteiras), Angolans still remain the 5th largest group of foreign residents in Portugal, representing 5% of the foreign population in the country, and they are the second largest group of African migrants residing in Portugal.

Methodology and Data Collection

Places and Belongings: Conjugality between Angola and Portugal project used a mixed methodology, using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. For more detailed information regarding the methodology followed, see Grassi in Chapter one of this volume.

The data presented in this paper result from the use of a qualitative multi-sited approach. Nina Glick-Schiller (2003) considers the multi-sited ethnographic research to be a good option for studying transnational migration, in particular transnational family life. Data collection was carried out in two contexts: Angola and Portugal, seeking to gain a better understanding of the impacts of migration on family members who are in different geographical contexts.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

Regarding the sample, a total of 27 interviews were conducted: 10 with Portuguese parents in Angola, and 17 with Angolan parents in Portugal.

3 RIFA 2013 (Immigration, Borders and Asylum report, 2013)

Also, 5 interviews were made with Portuguese women and used as a control group.

The interviews took place in 2013 and 2014. In Angola these were in Luanda, and in Portugal were mostly in Lisbon, but also in Leiria (some, in the control group). Regarding the sampling method, for interviews in the control group (women with immigrant husbands in Angola) the type of sampling used was snowball. To make the interviews with the migrants themselves, a convenience sample was used.

Sample characterization

One of the main focuses of interest of the project “Places and Belongings: Conjugality between Angola and Portugal” is transnational fatherhood, and the sample was composed of male individuals with children and who are immigrants.

In this sample, migration of Angolans to Portugal is older than migration of Portuguese to Angola. The Angolan interviewed who had been in Portugal the longest arrived in the country in 1988. On the other hand, concerning the Portuguese in Angola, it was found in the sample that the earliest migration dates back to 2008, the year coinciding with the worsening of the economic crisis in Portugal. Regarding the reasons for the migration, in the Angolan case these were above all the war and the search for better living conditions; while the most recent migrants come to Portugal with an educational or training purpose. The Portuguese migration to Angola is economically driven, based on the job search and the high-salary job offers.

In relation to sending remittances to family, all Portuguese respondents claim to send remittances; some of them say they send their entire salaries home, living on incomes of more informal activities. Portuguese migration to Angola has a markedly economic character. The main reason for this migration is the wages offered and the opportunities for professional growth. Sending remittances somehow justifies the choice of migration, which allows a better quality of life for family members in the country of origin. In contrast, Angolan migrants send fewer remittances—usually not at all. Most of the respondents who migrate in order to obtain education (most recent migrants) are still receiving their wages in Angola, so they do not feel the need to send remittances.

Angolan migrants usually have more children than Portuguese migrants. Angolans have between one and eight children, while Portuguese have one or two. Angolan migrant parents tend to have older children than Portuguese migrant parents. The ages of the Angolan migrants' children
of transnational families has given rise to several thematic approaches. A more economic approach, which focuses mainly on the impact of remittances on the household and on the well-being of the families (Carling 2002; Guarnizo 2003; Schmalzbauer 2004); another approach that focuses mainly on the impact of remittances in the communities (Kaliki, Mazzucato, and Dietz 2007; Osili 2004) and the development of the country of origin of the migrants (Ratha 2003; Adams and Page 2005); and an approach that leans more toward the analysis of the effects of migration on its protagonists.

Migration affects parenting by introducing changes to its practices. It may sometimes lead to a weakening of parental position since it introduces a discontinuity in the performance of parenting. Migration has an impact on how parents exercise their parenting and affects the relationship with the children. The distance and the lack of daily life complicity require the creation of new family dynamics and alternative ways to monitor, cherish, and to discipline children, and this tends to differ according to the gender of the parent.

Usually the family member who migrates is the father, but given the demand for labor, in areas such as care and domestic workers, the number of women migrating has grown exponentially. Transnational family studies have largely focused on impacts of migration on migrant mothers, especially regarding the emotional distress, thereby disregarding the impacts on the well-being of fathers.

There is an extensive literature on transnational motherhood (Segura 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Alicea 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001, 2005; Aranda 2003; Waters 2002; Schmalzbauer 2004; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Nicholson 2006; Falicov 2007; Gamburd 2008; Hewett 2009; Wilding and Baldassar 2009; Zontini 2004; Boccagni 2012; Carling, Menjivar, and Schmalzbauer 2012; Millman 2013). This literature focuses on issues like the financial support. Studies point out that mothers tend to remit more, perform more frequent communication, and exercise an affective monitoring that increments participation in the lives of children, helping to minimize feelings of guilt. The studies focus on the geographical areas of Asia (Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, etc.), Latin America (particularly Mexico), the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe.

The literature on transnational fatherhood is less extensive and is a more recent research area (Pribilsky 2004, 2012; Dredy 2006; Bustamante and Alemán 2007; Avila 2008; Parreñas 2008; Waters 2010; Nobles 2011; Leifsen and Tymczuk 2012; Harper and Martin 2012; Kilkey, Plomien and Perrons 2013). These studies draw attention to the various forms of...
exercise of parenthood at a distance, exposing different strategies of proximity and strengthening emotional ties and care developed by migrant men who seek to maintain a presence within the family despite the geographical separation. It is worth mentioning the work of Pribylsky (2004) on Ecuadorian migrants in New York and how they carry out reconfiguration of marital relationships, family life from a distance, and gender roles within the family; the study of Waters (2010) on migrants of Asian origin in Canada and the challenges of becoming primary caregivers of their children when their wives return to Asia; the study of Parreñas (2008) that analyzed the transnational paternal Filipino parents, finding that parental practices come into line with the traditional patterns of gender (the father is the breadwinner and his function has to do more with discipline and imposing order and authority over children, than providing emotional support for children or establishing a close affective relationship); and also the work of Nobles (2011), who analyzed families in which there was no parental co-residence (due to migration or divorce) and found that if the relationship between parent and child is close, the migration has a positive effect on incentive for activities and school performance.

Transnational Parenting and Communication

Scholars working on parenting and care at distance consider that maintaining intimate relationships in transnational families depends on several care practices that involve the circulation of objects, values, and persons, and also on communication. According to Parreñas (2001, 121), in transnational families the lack of daily interaction prevents familiarity and becomes an irreparable gap in the definition of parent-child relationships. The frequency of contact is very important to maintain social bonds.

New information and communication technologies have brought more ways to communicate, more accessible, more varied. The use of mobile phones offers new opportunities for mobility in time and space and social integration in everyday life, offering the possibility of direct and immediate interaction. The voice can convey the feelings and emotions. This technology is extremely useful in the case of migrants, since it facilitates their participation and allows them to keep up with the daily routines of their families. People can keep a sense of community and continue to function as families. Oiarzabal and Reips (2012) emphasize the role of ICT as helpers to construct transnational and diasporic communities.

Communication between couples, particularly those who are dispersed in the transnational space is very important. Communication creates proximity and allows the sharing of information and feelings, and facilitates the maintenance of social ties. The transnational way of life requires a reconfiguration of the forms of social interaction. Communication through various media plays a key role for those who are unable to make face to face interactions. Communication in migration cases helps minimize the effects of what Falicov termed uprooting (which according to the author can be of three types: social, cultural, and physical).

In our sample we notice that more recent migrants have the propensity to communicate more with their children/family, often daily. Communication between the Portuguese migrant parents and their children is less spaced than communication among Angolan migrant parents and their children. For more details regarding the communication practices of the sample see Chapter one.

Table 7.1 – Frequency of contacts between migrant parents and their children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angolan in Portugal</th>
<th>Portuguese in Angola</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twice per week</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>Every other day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporadically</td>
<td>Whenever can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Parents that have older children and that have a longer time of migration tend to have a different frequency of contacts.

“I never had communication routines perhaps because of having been here when there was no possibility of having routines...we speak, we speak regularly, we talk when we have to talk, I can speak three or four times a day, I can, not speak for two or three days, I don’t have a tight routine”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

In terms of means used to communicate, we verified in our sample the trend for Portuguese migrant parents to use more skype, while communication of Angolan migrant parents with their children is preferentially over the phone:
“It’s always mobile phone, only by phone. She doesn’t have internet there (...) we speak once a week for about one hour”

(Angolan man living in Portugal)

Apparently the Portuguese migrant parents use a greater variety of means of communication.

Table 7.2 – Means used to communicate with the family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Angolan in Portugal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Portuguese in Angola</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Text messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viber</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Portuguese migrants prefer to use Skype because it allows viewing, thereby minimizing the distance, creating a sense of closeness through the “virtual presence.” It is seen as a tool and an ally in the distance parenting, which helps to ease the distance. One of the respondents describes the impacts of using Skype as the sense of being close.

“If I had not seen him for, maybe, 3 or 4 months, maybe I could not stand the way I stand, right? As I see it every day, I know he is well, know when he ... uh, until he... sometimes on weekends he goes fishing... I know when he picks up a sunburn...I mean we ended up being close.”

(Portuguese wife, partner in Angola)

Skype is used as a means for maintaining the presence, continuing to exercise parental authority, and performing tasks that before migration were made in person, such as playing with the child, studying, helping with the homework; and also to draw attention to the behavior. It allows the migrant parent to accompany the everyday life of their children: “when the youngest lost a tooth she showed me on Skype, so happy!” (Portuguese man living in Angola). Oiarzabal and Reips (2012) emphasize the role of ICT as helping to construct transnational and diasporic communities.

The following quotations are examples of the activities carried out via Skype by parents and their children:

“Even games...like the hanged man we got to play on Skype (...) I found that my youngest was already reading and joining words together”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

“Only once I felt it...my youngest - even the teacher spoke with her mother and then the mother spoke to me and I talked to her after I asked

Bacigalupe and Lambe (2011) consider ICT “a new family member” in transnational families, a source of social capital, which promotes speech and helps create a sense that the loved ones are present. All this may include the exchange of messages between mobile phones, creating a sense of constant presence and transnational care.

Even though new technologies bring many advantages and provide greater proximity, or the maintenance of transnational social networks (Willing 2006), to some individuals it is not enough. One of the Portuguese interviewees says:

“Today we have Skype, we have the Messenger, we have the phone, that's all very pretty, but it doesn't work, because you being on a computer screen is not the same as being there ... You are not present there, and those daily hours, you create the habit of being here one hour, but an hour on the computer the kids are distracted seeing cartoons, she's distracted because she has to go make dinner for the kids (...) and if you are at home you are there, present, and really being here even being able to use technologies to bring you closer, I think it does not help much, it is good to relieve the longing, but no”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

**Effects of the Distance**

Distance affects parents and children, modifying the existing family dynamics. In the sample parents report at an earlier stage of migration feelings of loneliness, depression, and lack of emotional contact with family and friends. In relation to their children, the distance sometimes makes them feel powerless, by not being present they are unable to quickly help or cherish their children.

Sadness and longing were also mentioned by the migrant parents.
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and she said she was sad; she was sad because she missed me. I was stunned, with my heart pouring blood.”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

“When you are present it works another way, and when you’re absent they think everything is also absent, so things do not go as it should be”

(Angolan man living in Portugal)

Regarding the effects of the distance on children, the distance in the parental relationship has effects on children—the distance of the parents affects the emotional well-being of children. Several parents report some changes in their children’s behavior. In the following quotes from the interviews, parents describe some of those effects as difficulties in concentration and psycho-somatic disorders.

“He is a troubled kid, he's a kid that gets distracted very easily and also by the fact that I'm here, the kid...the kid has more need of attention”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

“My son went through a phase...and this has to do with the emotional part...also by the fact that the father is not here...ah, every day his head ached...migraines, every day his head ached, then disappeared”

(Portuguese wife, partner in Angola)

Parents tend to consider that the distance brings differences into the relationships—creates emotional distance leading to lack of emotional proximity. One of the interviews mentioned regarding the parental relationship between father and daughter:

“the close relationship he had with his daughter ... he always loved her, and it seems that all this was fading, it was creating a remoteness and..., and this gap has been, it has been made effective.”

(Portuguese wife, partner in Angola)

Parents seem to be aware that distance influences the relationship between them and the children.

“What I lose, effectively lose the sharing of space, emotions, everything else, lose the pleasure of being with my children ...That is a bill that I will pay later is it not ...And I’m aware of it, because my dad is paying it with me”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

In the above quotation of a Portuguese father, it is possible to realize that he is very aware of the consequences, because he has already experienced a similar situation personally.

“I got to the conclusion that my daughter was creating a set of habits that are...these habits that I think were influenced by my distance, in the distance between us, in the fact that I have been here as long as I’ve been”

(Angolan man living in Portugal)

Parents also mention modifications regarding the parental authority that is diminished by the distance. They reinforce the importance of being present.

“Q: Do you think that the distance interferes with your authority with your daughters?
A: Until now no, but at some point it will start to happen ... because at this stage they ...The authority of the ten years, is different from the authority of fourteen, fifteen”

(Portuguese man living in Angola)

“Being present is very important. When it is missing you lose the authority, is it not?”

(Angolan man living in Portugal)

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has focused on the migrant parents’ exercise of parenting at distance. My analysis based on the Angola/Portugal case shows that the main effects reported by the migrant parents regarding the distance in their parental relationship were emotional detachment, the loss in decision-making, the loss of parental authority, and the lack of sharing of the daily life—lack of sharing of the small and the big moments of the child.

Transnational parenting practices are based on communication—parenting by Skype, especially in the Portuguese case and more recent Angolan case. For most Angolan migrants residing in Portugal, parenting is done by phone; the parenting practices also include making visits to the home country or visits of the family to the host country. In this sample an apparent tendency exists for the Portuguese to carry out more communications with the children and also to carry out a larger number of visits to the country of origin. Portuguese migrants in Angola are better positioned in the labor market than most of the Angolan migrants in Portugal, and tend to have qualified and better paid jobs. The economic class also influences the way migrants communicate with their families.
For instance, most of the Angolans do not use Skype because families back home have no computer, Internet, or the know-how to use it. The culture of family organization also seems to have effects—Angolans have extended families that end up being more supportive and protective; Portuguese tend to have nuclear families, which have a lower support network, creating a greater need for migrants to monitor and support the family.

ICT assume great importance in the lives of most migrant parents, and are the way to stay in contact with their families.

For some migrant parents there is a cooling in the relationship with their children (i.e., an emotional detachment of children).

In order to mitigate the distance they feel from their families, and ease the emotional wounds caused by their migratory project, migrant parents tend to focus on migration objectives in order to endure the distance—they reinforce their breadwinner role giving enhanced importance (especially by sending remittances), particularly in the case of Portuguese men whose migration to Angola assumes an economic character; or the importance of getting an education in the case of the Angolan man.

References


