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## Places and Belongings

### Conjugality between Angola and Portugal

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**Abstract<sup>1</sup>:** In the context of contemporary studies of families and transnational lives, this paper sets out the emergence of new forms of conjugality among heterosexual couples living apart (one in Portugal, the other in Angola). Considering the importance of gender stratification we seek to understand how the construction of masculinity is reformulated in the couple when the man migrates to the other country to find work. When a conjugal pair separates as a result of the migration of one person, fluid forms of conjugality arise, demanding realignment of gender roles. The forms of conjugality that are emerging today can also be studied from the point of view of Post-colonialism Theory – seen in the continuities and ruptures in Portugal’s colonial imagination, the gender-role building, and the migrations between the two countries. The paper contains a lecture and analysis of the data already collected in the research project "Places and Belonging: conjugality between Angola and Portugal" (PTDC/AFR/119149/2010).

**Keywords:** transnationalism, conjugality, masculinity, Portugal, Angola.

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<sup>1</sup> The content and the data presented in this paper are developed in a more complete and forthcoming publication of the author as a chapter of an editing book already accepted by Cambridge Scholars Publishing and edited by Grassi, Marzia and Tatiana Ferreira.

## **Introduction**

The paper is grounded on the main results of the above mentioned project in which has been analyzed forms of conjugality that seem to challenge the perspective of postcolonial theory, in their continuities and ruptures of the imaginary of colonial Portugal and that accompany the construction of gender and migration.

Despite the recent reversal of Angola/Portugal migration flows as a result of the European crisis, the number of Angola-to-Portugal migrants – the older of the trends – remains strong, and according to data from the *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (SEF 2015), in 2014 Angola accounted for the sixth largest number of foreign citizens in Portugal. These migrants are often denied access to resources and citizenship rights, as revealed in a recent project on “illegal” immigration coming from the Portuguese-speaking countries to Portugal (Grassi 2009, 2010, Grassi & Giuffrè 2013).

Present-day flows, which are addressed in the current paper, call into question the belief that job-seeking migrants flow only from countries of origin that are less developed to those that are more developed (Grassi 2009, 2014). The research proposes a double theoretical challenge for the study of contemporary migration flows between Angola and Portugal. On the one hand is the use and utility of sociological categories pertaining to the nation-state and the suggestion to think globally and transnationally instead (Basch, Glick-Schiller & Szanton-Blanc 1994, Guarnizo & Smith 1998), which is considered to be the most appropriate for understanding the upheavals underway in contemporary societies. On the other hand, in today’s world in which more and more Portuguese youth are migrating to Angola in search of jobs (Ferreira & Grassi 2012) and the number of Angolans coming to Portugal for education remains strong, the issue of “what a developed country is” is indeed a insightful question. The notion that economic growth should be the assess by which development is measured is profoundly challenged by these facts (Grassi 2009, 2014). In this context the research has been focused on migrant people and their family relationships.

## **Context and methods**

Longstanding relationships, the existence of strong social networks in Portugal, and the war in Angola are important factors to explain the Angolan migration to Portugal. Five thousand Angolans asked for asylum in 1992-1993 but this flow fell dramatically after 1993 (in the year 2000 it mounted at 2,500 applicants, (SEF 2015). Data show the most intensive period of emigration during the 1990s and in 2000, following the breakdown in the Bicesse

and Lusaka UN peace processes. The war in Angola is not to be seen as the only determinant for emigration, however. At the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, immigrants were either young students from relatively well-off families or unqualified young people, some of whom sought work in civil construction, housecleaning, and other low-skilled positions. In 2006 there were more than 33,000 Angolans settled in Portugal. This number fell abruptly to reach 23,500 in 2010 (SEF, 2014). This decrease can be explained by different factors. First, some Angolans went back to Angola, where they had more opportunities or migrated to another country, and second, many of them acquired Portuguese nationality in the meantime. Indeed, the new migration law of 2006 made the acquisition of nationality of foreign migrants easier (Grassi 2014).

Portuguese migration to Angola is more recent than the Angola to Portugal migration flow.

Data for the Portuguese in Angola provided by countries of destination exist only for 2009.

The number Portuguese leaving for Angola can be estimated by two other indicators: indirect data such as remittances and consular records. The most recent census data (INE Angola 2014) do not include information on foreign residents in Angola, meaning that the most recent data come from 1975. It is thus very difficult to estimate the number of Portuguese working in Angola. Also confounded are analyses of variables such as gender, age, and area of employment.

Consular data provide a better opportunity, however. We use figures from the *Direcção Geral dos Assuntos Consulares e das Comunidades Portuguesas* of Portuguese citizens registered with the consular office in Angola; note, however, that this registration is not mandatory. In 2008 there were 72,706 Portuguese citizens registered, and in 2013 the number had risen to 126,356 (Pires et al. 2014). Another indicator that points to a sharp rise of Portuguese migrants in Angola is the rising amount of remittances from Angola to Portugal in recent years. According to information from the World Bank, from 2009 to 2013 these remittances grew by 200%, from 103,126,000 € to 304,328,000 €. As a result of the drop in the price of oil, remittances have fallen since March 2014, but have shown signs of a rebound during the last three months. In February 2015 the volume of remittances from Angola to Portugal were above the figure for September 2014 (Banco de Portugal 2015).

The project *Places and Belonging* explore the emergence and rise of new forms of conjugality among heterosexual couples that live apart – one in Portugal and one in Angola – with a special focus on gender stratification when the domestic space is transnational and unshared (Lubkemann 2008, Bryceson & Vuorela 2002). Data capture some of the impact that mobility has on conjugality, including the self-image of those involved and the domestic

space, understood in its physical, spatial, and social dimensions (Collignon & Staszak 2004).

Results of earlier research of the under the TLM&G research group (Grassi 2010 & 2012, Salvador 2006, Vivet 2010)<sup>2</sup> point to the existence of gender differences in access to migration. This is revealed both quantitatively, in two sets of questionnaires – one in Portugal and one in Angola – and qualitatively, through 30 interviews in the two countries.

Our results<sup>3</sup> provide information on the socio-economic characteristics and migration paths of respondents, their conjugal experience, the view of the conjugal relationship with their partner – Living apart together, sexuality and parenthood at a distance, as well as managing the domestic economics and sense of belonging exemplified in the concept of “home”.

Although our data are not representative in terms of statistics, the analysis can be considered to be fairly generalizable in that it is documented and complemented by information deriving from qualitative interviews realized during the years 2013 and 2014 in Angola (in Luanda) and in Portugal (in the greater Lisbon area), and because of the field work experience of the research team.

### **Looking inside conjugal relationship**

Contemporary Portuguese migration is dominated by young men who are well educated. In the past the typical Portuguese emigrant was a young adult, coming from a rural area, without specialized skills, and illiterate (Pires 2010, Peixoto 2004).

Most of the survey questionnaires in our project confirm this trend, as well: Portuguese men in Angola are mainly adults more than 36 years old, having a more or less homogeneous age distribution between 36 and 50 years old. Most of them are educated (secondary school diploma or higher education – Bachelor Degree, or Master, compared to Angolan men in Portugal (secondary school diploma or Elementary education. Accordingly to their education level, most of the Portuguese men in Angola occupy jobs that require higher education levels, such as senior officials and managers, Professionals and Technicians and associate professionals. In contrast, most Angolan men in Portugal occupy jobs that require lower levels of education, such as Craft and related trades workers. We must also highlight that

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<sup>2</sup> To consult the projects and publications developed under the coordination of the principal investigator visit the webpage of the “Transnational Lives, Mobility and Gender Network” at [www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt](http://www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt)

<sup>3</sup> Questionnaire responses were statistically analyzed in two ways: univariate descriptive statistics, by purifying frequencies; modeling to compare variable pairs, in order to detect differences that are statistically significant. The result of this test (the X-squared) is presented only when robust, namely when the expected frequencies are greater than 1 and no more than 20% of the expected frequencies are less than 5. When these conditions are not met, we speak only of trends and never of statistical significance.

Angolan men are Professionals and Technicians and associate professionals. These are the ones having higher and secondary education. A cross-table analysis between education and professional background reveals that only 65% of Angolan men in Portugal are economically active, and many of them are unemployed (29%). In the target group, about 68% spend between 1 and 5 years in Angola, and although the migration flow from Angola to Portugal is traditionally older, most of the Angolan men in our group arrived in Portugal less than 10 years ago.

All individuals in the target group are men in a transnational conjugal relationship whose partner has remained behind in the country of origin. Conjugal relationships at a distance – when the cause of separation is migration – demand a redefinition of the roles of the couple and of the family. The impact on these relationships largely depend on a number of specific circumstances including social position, existence (or not) of children, the reason(s) underlying the migration, and the adaptive abilities of the individuals involved. Many authors who see migration as a threat to the destination country also see marriage and migration as arrangements of convenience, forced marriage, or trafficking. Others are more inclusive (Williams 2010, Bryceson & Vuorela 2002, Levin 2004, Levin & Trust 1999, Boyd & Grieco 2003; Mahler & Pessar 2006, Wilding 2006), and address the challenges and stereotypes of transnational marriage, describing the ways that couples (re)define their roles, relationships, and family life; as they *learn and live side-by-side* (Pribilsky 2004).

The unit of analysis of *aggregate family*, which is most commonly used for capturing information about the individual and the people with whom (s)he lives, was replaced in our study by a broader concept, the *aggregate of residents*, allowing us to include not only family members, but also persons close to them and who reside with them (Grassi 2009).

Before migrating, most of portuguese migrants in Angola had lived with their partner and children or with their partner only. Following their migration about half of respondents lived alone or with work colleagues. About 8% of respondents lived with a new partner following migration.

The same trend we can find in the interviews of angolan in Portugal.

## **UNDERSTANDING TRANSNATIONAL CONJUGALITY**

What can we emphasize about the features of respondents' conjugal relationships, their family situation, and the way they manage conjugality at a distance? Our sample suggests a trend regarding conjugal relationships and the changes they are currently undergoing as a

result of one partner migrating abroad. Comparing the two case studies may allow for some generalizations.

There are significant differences between the Portuguese and Angolan men, regarding if the present conjugal relationship is the first one. For the Portuguese men in Angola the present relationship is the first (79%), while for 83% of Angolan men in Portugal the present relationship is not the first.

About the length of relationship, among the Portuguese men in Angola there is a considerable percentage of relationships that last less than 10 years (30%) with the majority of them lasting between 10 and 19 years (39%). Almost all of the relationships of Angolan men in Portugal (87%) last less than 20 years (54% from 10 to 19 years and 33% less than 10 years).

A series of questions in the questionnaire sought to capture the vision of the respondents about conjugality and their relationship with their partner. For this purpose questions were made about what they considered as the essential element(s) in a conjugal relationship between two people. The responses point to trust and love. Money was one of the least-mentioned elements as being essential in the relationship. When asked about the elements that nurture a conjugal relationship, the great majority indicated love and respect. Note that some of the respondents mentioned sentiments that are less positive, including hate, contempt, and duty

Regarding faithfulness to one's partner, almost all the respondents in both flows of migrants reported that they consider it to be important in a relationship and almost all indicated that they saw no difference between fidelity on the part of men or women, at least at the level of discourse. A deeper analysis through interviews with Portuguese migrants suggests a difference between couples with children and those without. When there are children with the same partner the vision of the woman that emerges (among both migrant men and the women) apparently grants more leniency to men ("just having an adventure") than to women (carers of their own children). This reaffirms the traditional gender roles of patriarchal societies that see the woman/mother as the caregiver who is more responsible for maintaining the family and its Judeo-Christian morals, and the father as mainly responsible for decisions regarding education of the child(ren) and has a more reduced role regarding presence.

Regarding extra-conjugal relations and managing the sex lives of partners who live in a situation of geographic separation, half of those Angolans interviewed admitted being or having been unfaithful to their (principal) conjugal partner, while 80% of the Portuguese in

Angola denied such behavior. When asked if their conjugal partners had been unfaithful after the date of migration, a small percentage responded “yes” and about half responded that they didn’t know. These results point to very different ways of managing sexuality in a marriage between the two flows.

About 79% of the Portuguese migrants in Angola affirm that sex is important or very important in a conjugal relationship, with about 63% of those questioned considering that their sex life before migration had been better or much better, and about 30% reporting that it had not changed. Concerning the impact of migration on their sex life with their partner, responses varied widely. About 38% indicated that living apart from their partner had not changed their sex life, considering, however, that most of these had not already entered into an active sexual relationship with that partner.

In the case of Angolans in Portugal, the majority claimed that migration has an impact on conjugal relations that produces modifications that nevertheless are not a great concern to either partner.

Even though the Angolans we interviewed are apparently more open to extra-marital (extra-partner) sexual relations than are the Portuguese, in most cases the central role of marriage as a cultural embedment remains a feature of contemporary Angolan society.

## **PARENTHOOD**

In our case study 84% of the respondents report having children – one to two for the Portuguese living in Angola, and one to eight for the Angolans in Portugal. The data show that 40% of the Portuguese have children and that these migrants believe that the separation diminishes their parental authority over their children’s education, while 54% report that there is no difference.

Regarding support for their dependent children, aside from the partner, about 36% report that they receive no help from anyone, 19% count on assistance from the partner’s parents, 23% get help from other family members, and 14% from their own parents.

In the case of Angolans living in Portugal, many have children by more than one woman. Most respondents report sporadic contact with their children in Angola, and mention diminished parental control in specific situations or in times of crisis.

The literature addressing the forms and consequences of parenthood at a distance between Angola and Portugal mention forms of caregiving that are very often informal (Carling 2005, Wall & São José 2004, Grassi 2008, Grassi & Vivet 2014, Grassi & Vivet 2015). The little that is reported about this issue is based largely on partial information or on the findings of

small-scale studies, but often suggest that there is a negative impact on child development as well as emotional costs for child(ren) and parents alike. Even if these findings are reported from many contexts other than Angola/Portugal, too (e.g., Levitt 2001, Parreñas 2005, Olwig 2007 & 1999, Zontini 2007, Suárez-Orozco 2002), these studies also mention the positive effects of remittances, which have been the main focus of the research and debate about migration and development.

### **Places and Belonging**

The emerging forms of conjugality between Angola and Portugal, examined in their continuities and breaks with the Portuguese colonial imaginary that accompany the construction of gender and migration (Grassi 1997, 2010 & 2014, Grassi & Vivet 2014, Castelo 2007) appear to be closely linked to the sense of “home” in the minds of those involved. Feeling “at home” is something that is measured on several scales: domestic, neighborhood, city, and country, and is constructed through the daily activities of the city, of knowledge, a sense of belonging to the urban space, one’s social networks, and a sense of identity with other groups in the city (Gervais-Lambony 1994). In the presence of this multiplicity of “homes” – how and to what extent the residencies of migrants become a true home – a space possessing symbolic value? Which is the place of the relationship of the migrant with his/her home of origin? (Levitt & Waters 2002). We intend to address the process of (re)constructing the home, in both the city of origin and the destination city of the migrant man, as well as its impact on the conjugal relationship of those involved and of their representations and experiences. In all of this there also arises the notion of the third space, explored by Bhabha (1996), which is connected to the concept of cultural hybridity and constant interchangeability of identity, language, and space, which negate essentialism. The pioneering work of culture demands confronting new things that are not part of the continuity between the past and the present. It creates a notion of novelty as an emergent act of cultural transmission. This not only reasserts the past as a social cause or present-day aesthetic; it renovates the past, reconfiguring it as a “between place” possibility that innovates and disrupts the realization of the present. The “past-present” becomes part of the necessity – and the nostalgia – of living” (Bhabha 2005: 27).

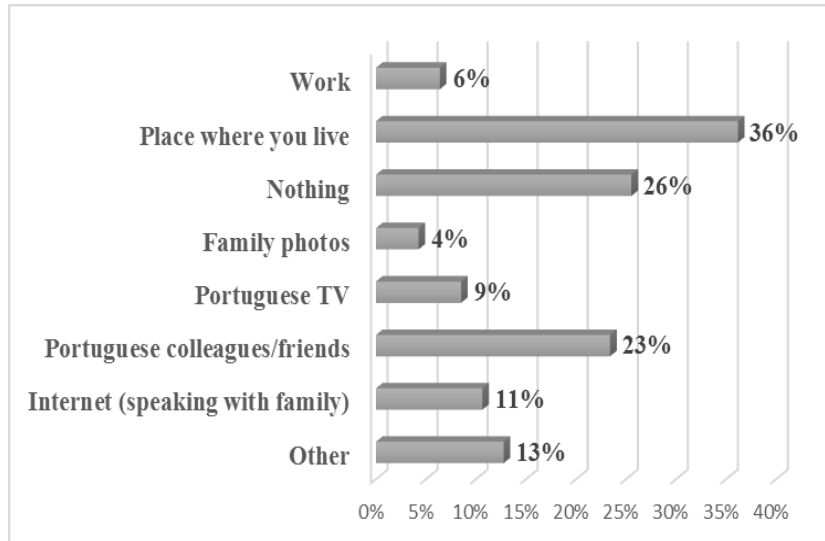
According to our respondents living in Angola regarding the significance of “home”, understood as a “between place”, the vast majority considered Portugal as their home, where their family was (67%), and only 22% considered their home to be in Angola, where they

were currently living. These data seem to corroborate the belief that the intimate and family space is favored in the construction and maintenance of the migrant’s identity.

It seems to have a clear differentiation between house and home. Home is associated with the family sphere, while house refers to the physical space where respondents sleep and/or currently dwell.

When questioned about the area or neighborhood in which they lived, one response arose that was especially interesting regarding the topic of belonging. About 30% of the Portuguese men in Angola identified the area/neighborhood in which their Portuguese home was located, while 26% felt absolutely no “home belonging” to their residence in Angola<sup>4</sup>, and another 36% responded that their only home was the present one in Angola. The existence of Portuguese friend/colleague networks was important, with 23% of the Portuguese respondents mentioning that it was the presence of those friends and colleagues that made them feel at home in Angola. Internet contact with family (children and/or partner) also made them feel at home in Angola (11%) as did keeping photos of family members in their houses (4%). Television, namely Portuguese channels, was also important to 9% of the Portuguese migrants.

**Graph 1 - What makes you feel at home in Angola?**



Most of the Portuguese respondents in Angola lived in an apartment (48%) or a separate house (26%), and about 15% lived in their firms’ lodging facility.

The place of residence was determined by the employer in most cases (63%), with 39% living in their current location for less than three years and 26% for less than one year. In

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<sup>4</sup> An open question that was aggregated in the following way: Work, Place where you live, Nothing, Family photographs, Portuguese TV, Portuguese colleagues/friends, Internet, Other.

96% of the cases the rental fee for the residence was paid by the employer. As for managing their daily living tasks, 82% went shopping in the supermarket only, and 12% shopped in the market. Concerning meals, 20% cooked at home everyday, 21% usually cooked but sometimes went out to a restaurant, and 24% never cooked and normally bought pre-prepared take away food. Many (20%) had “other” meal arrangements, usually meaning that they ate in the canteen of their employer. Some of the migrants already knew how to cook and used to cook for their family from time to time (48%) or cooked regularly (33%) when in Portugal. Half (50%) learned to cook with the help of friends/family.

It was not possible to compile as percentages the responses of Angolans living in Portugal. Nevertheless, we can mention the data gathered in interviews, which confirm the findings of other research into national, ethnic, and religious identity – which is, that Portugal is a favored location regarding the sense of belonging when organized around family, associations, churches, and other social networks that involve the representations and self-perceptions of colonial memory and that address the needs of separation deriving from transnational labor. In this context, marriage, in the absence of children, does not seem to be very influential in determining the sense of belonging.

## **Conclusions**

This paper reports the findings of a case study of an Angolan/Portuguese geographic “space” and the conjugal relationships of Portuguese men who are economic migrants. The existence of transnational families between Angola and Portugal is not a new phenomenon, but it opens in a new (and still strong) era of political and economic dynamics in the history of these countries. The earlier migration flow, from Angola to Portugal, established networks of family and friends that exist side-by-side, and in some cases overlap, new networks among the economic migrants going from Portugal to Angola. This turn-about challenges the earlier North-South paradigm along with the concept of “development” and what the term means. It also seems to be that to some degree the migrants cling to the perceptions and representations of the colonial memory that exists between the two countries.

Our findings from the project “Places and Belonging: conjugality between Angola and Portugal” demonstrates how the transnational approach can be used to advantage in redefining the family and place in the sense of belonging as it pertains to family relationships and gender roles. Such an approach also allows us to avoid cultural essentialisms, and distinguishes the representations between the two groups. For the Portuguese migrants in Angola love and marriage implied fidelity and absence of extra-partner (principal partner) sexual relations.

Many of those interviewed also show the persistence of the stereotype of the black African woman of the colonial memory, as well as the associated gender roles. The same is not perceived among the Angolans in Portugal, who reveal much greater uncomplicatedness regarding sexual behavior, while at the same time confirming the cultural importance of marriage in society. We can conclude that the stereotypes about the conjugal-pair and family gender roles going back to the colonial memory survive in both of the migration flows (Castelo 2007, Grassi 2014).

Besides, we can affirm that transnational conjugality is a factor of transformation of relations in the conjugal couple. Couples at distance are creating a new space for the empowerment of the women who do not migrate, in both flows. The reversal of flows – from Portugal to Angola – is more recent, and provides us with only a hint of what is happening in the lives of individuals moving between the two countries.

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