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### Mobility, family, and gender: A transnational approach

### Mobilidade, família e género: Uma abordagem transnacional

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**Resumo:** A mobilidade em espaços transnacionais modifica as relações entre indivíduos e dentro da família, tanto nos países de origem como nos países de imigração. Os impactos de género no comportamento dos indivíduos determinam os efeitos de longo prazo que a migração traz nas suas vidas. Neste artigo, após a apresentação dos fundamentos teóricos do grupo de investigação "*vidas transnacionais, mobilidade e género*" (TLM & G)<sup>1</sup>, vou discutir as implicações epistemológicas e as escolhas envolvidas nos métodos de recolha de dados nos estudos da mobilidade transnacional. Concluo apontando para a necessidade de repensar a mobilidade e os estudos da família, numa perspectiva transnacional que considere o género dos indivíduos, através da adaptação dos instrumentos metodológicos à realidade da mobilidade humana contemporânea. O objetivo geral do grupo de investigação TLM & G é explorar o impacto da mobilidade na vida dos indivíduos, considerando as relações familiares e domésticas, e tendo em conta a forma como as experiências de integração são afectadas pelas representações de género e pela sua auto-percepção. Do ponto de vista académico, este grupo de investigação irá reforçar a abordagem sociológica e a formação científica nesta área quer nos países europeus quer nos países africanos, com um impacto potencial sobre o transnacionalismo, a migração e os estudos da família. Olhando para a mobilidade como um direito humano e uma oportunidade para os indivíduos e as famílias, o objetivo é contribuir para uma abordagem teórica renovada sobre as condições diferenciadas do acesso à migração na sociedade de origem, bem como no espaço diferenciado de integração social na sociedade de imigração.

**Abstract:** Mobility in transnational spaces modifies the relationships between individuals and within families and households in both sending and host countries. The impacts of gender on individuals' behaviour essentially establish the long-term effects migration brings in their lives. In this paper, after presenting the theoretical grounding of the research group "*transnational lives, mobility and gender*" (TLM&G)<sup>2</sup>, I will discuss the epistemological implications and choices involved in the methods of data collection in transnational mobility studies. I will conclude pointing to the necessity of rethinking mobility and family studies in a transnational gendered perspective through the adaptation of methodological instruments to the reality of contemporary human mobility. The general aim of the TLM&G research group is to explore the impact of mobility on individuals' lives, considering family and household relationships, and taking into account how integration experiences are affected by gender representations and self-perceptions. From the academic point of view, this research group will reinforce the sociological approach and the scientific background in this area in European and African countries, with a potential impact on transnationalism, migration, and family studies. Looking at mobility as a human right and opportunity for individuals and families, the aim is to contribute to a renewed theoretical approach on the differentiated conditions pertaining to migration access in the origin society as well as a differentiated scope of social integration in the host society.

**Palavras-chave:** Mobilidade; Género; Transnacionalismo; Representações; Família

**Keywords:** Mobility; Gender; Transnationalism; Representations; Family

<sup>1</sup> Desde 2008 o grupo de investigação sob a minha coordenação no ICS-UL inclui uma equipe de doutorandos e pós-docs. Em 2010, sob os auspícios da ESF (Fundação Social Europeu) que financiou um workshop internacional em Lisboa, foi formalizada uma rede internacional, que tem agora cerca de 60 pesquisadores de países de todo o mundo (ver [www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt](http://www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt)).

<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 2008 the research group coalesced under my coordination at ICS-UL. Researchers include teams, doctoral candidates, and post-docs. In 2010 under the auspices of ESF (European Social Foundation) which funded an international workshop in Lisbon, an international network has been formalized which now has about 60 researchers from countries around the world, (see [www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt](http://www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt)).

## 1. Introduction

In the context of contemporary studies of families and transnational lives (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), we study the emergence of new forms of conjugality, parenthood, and caregiving amongst individuals living in different countries. Considering the importance of gender stratification when the domestic space is transnational rather than shared (Lubkemann, 2008), the researchers of the group seek to understand how the construction of gender is reformulated in the family when one of the members migrates to another country. Collecting data in this space seeks to capture the repercussions of mobility on conjugality, on parental relationships, and on the organization of caring, self-perception, and representations of those involved in the domestic space – here understood in its physical, affective, and social dimensions (Parreñas, 2005; Collignon & Staszak, 2004).

This theoretical framework establishes an important comparative dimension to discuss gender as an operational transversal category of analysis to study the organization of contemporary society. In this area International-scale collaboration is crucial to discuss the effect of movement of people in the different countries in its own specificities.

Gender and transnationalism result in an operational and transversal approach that enhances the capacity to understand how societies and institutions are changing, taking into consideration how the contemporary society works in terms of classes and access to resources and opportunities.

When family member separates as a result of the migration of one, fluid forms of conjugality and parenthood arise, demanding a realignment of gender roles.

Until now gender studies have focused mostly on female dynamics. We consider it necessary to move away from the stereotype of African women and their relationship with the institution of marriage and family, as well as from the stereotype of nuclear European family. Furthermore, few studies have addressed masculinity and migrations between Africa and Europe. There are even fewer studies (Arnfred, 2009) about migration between Portugal and its former colonies. Our research group intends to fill a gap in the investigation into historic, identity, and symbolic relationships, which since the 16th century have characterized the migrations between these countries, focusing also on male-gender dynamics. The forms of conjugality and family relationship that are emerging today can also be studied from the point of view of the Post-colonial Theory – seen in the continuities and ruptures in Portugal's colonial imagination, the gender-role building, and the migrations between Portugal and its former colonies (Castelo, 2007; Abrahamsen, 2003). It is crucial to emphasize the importance of examining notions of family, sexuality, and gender relations in a transnational context stressing the importance of taking into consideration the organization and culture of migrant people, as well as the imaginary that Europeans built on African people in this area.

All of these issues are closely linked to reconstruction of “*place*” or locality of the sense of “*home*” in the minds of those involved. “*Feeling at home*” can be constructed at several levels: domestic, neighbourhood, city, and country. Besides habitation, which is the first “*home sphere*” – the most intimate and private, where one actually lives with one's partner and family – “*feeling at home*” is something constructed through daily practices in one's city, through the knowledge of and sense of belonging to the urban space, through the building of social networks, and through one's feeling of identification with other groups that exist in the city (Gervais-Lambony et al., 2003). Studies regarding the connection between “*home*” and migrations mostly address the relationship of the migrant to the “*home*” of origin (Levitt & Waters, 2002). It becomes crucial to investigate the process of (re)constructing the “*home*” in both city of origin and city of destination of the migrant family members, as well as the repercussions on the conjugal and parenthood relationship, on its representations and experiences.

Theories and political principles normally do not deal with gender differences in the process of immigrant inclusion and also rarely explore the relationship between inclusion and transnational participation. At the same time, literature on gender and migration shows that men and women

practice their contacts with societies in different ways (Zontini, 2008). Some studies indicate that migration produces effects on gender relations mediated by class, ethnicity, and gender ideologies (Korac, 2009).

Earlier findings (Grassi 2003, 2007, 2009, 2010) point to the necessity to discuss how both men and women feel commitment to their countries of origin and are engaged in transnational relationships that constitute part of their social and cultural participation in contemporary society (Eckes & Trautner, 2000). This is particularly true for transnational families. In our previous work we could identify some familiar patterns on the general grounds of transnational participation between women and men in society. The ethnographic results expected in our research group will teach us about the future of immigrant inclusion and participation, providing analyses about how social sharing (family) practices maintain norms and identities, or how individual trajectories connect to group determinants (agency).

Considering the movement of people across countries from Africa, we admit that this is also related with laws (Sassen, 2010) and its gender implications. Furthermore, the importance of social capital for African migrants in Europe and the main characteristics of translocal projects that African countries undertake play an important role in the interface with European institutions, as well as being crucial in maintaining connections with the homeland. The transversality of the transnational approach becomes clear when the discussion on transnational family, lives, and gender impact on the individual is studied in the context of internal migrations in European or African countries. Is it movement that makes the difference? Or is it culture? Or well-being? Migration, gender, and transnationalism may be interpreted in a clearly political way stressing the importance of distinguishing between political and scientific concepts. The discussion of this approach is crucial in order to question European and African politics in the international space.

## 2. TLM&G Research Group

The research group comprises researchers who have been working, in recent years, in the Institute of Social Sciences under my coordination, on different projects involving European and different African geographical contexts, mostly in the so called PALOP<sup>3</sup> countries. The group includes four PhD candidates with their research in different stages of development, two Post-Doc researchers, and some short-time grant junior researchers recruited in the scope of the projects. Combining the expertise of researchers from different scientific areas and countries (derived from tackling the issue of transnational lives, mobility, and gender), the multi-disciplinary nature of the participants in the team is a very important facet ensuring the capacity to analyse this complex theme in a multidimensional and global approach, both theoretically and methodologically. The importance of collecting contextualized data is stressed and identified as a crucial methodological framework carrying epistemological consequences, as will be clarified below. The group counts on the active participation of several participating institutions based in Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique as well as in France and Italy. Weekly seminars and constant exchanging of ideas is the way that our group tests and discusses the state of our ongoing research. Including young researchers in the undertaking adds the dimension of advanced teaching and learning, further enriching our meetings beyond the research goals.

Researchers involved in this group are interested in delving deeply into the consequences and repercussions of contemporary mobility in human life and institutions. We expect that the group will open new research directions to build a solid theoretical foundation in social sciences on transnational lives, mobility, and gender. The transnational perspective of the research group addresses development, migration, and family issues influenced by migration regarding individuals and their relationships within transnational families and individual lives. It considers the epistemological importance of analyzing the impact of mobility in the countries of origin as well as in the host and transit countries of migrant people.

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<sup>3</sup> Portuguese speaking African Countries : Angola, Mozambique, Guiné Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe

Based on empirical evidence substantiating the persistence of migration flows between Africa and Europe, the ongoing projects challenge the use and utility of sociological categories connected to the nation-state, and provides support for an alternative, transnational approach (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Guarnizo, 1998) that is considered more appropriate in understanding the changes imposed on conjugal/partner relationships, parenthood, and caregiving in migrants' lives as well as in the family institution. The transnational approach is interpreted in a gender perspective moving from a culturalistic approach on gender to an approach that underlines the social circumstances of people as part of the contemporary globalized world.

Our projects seek to highlight the discussion on efforts that have been made to overcome the dominant perspective of migration as an expression of vulnerability. This has been done by shifting the focus on capability and the enabling socio-political structures which play a role for mobility/immobility in times of crisis. Empirical examples resulting from earlier work of our team in the last years covered countries of the African and European continent (Portugal, Italy, and France; Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique), as well as different modes of mobility and migration. In order to allow the discussion of the necessity to refine the understanding of mobility's consequences for individual family members living "*apart together*" (Levin & Trost, 1999, pp. 280-281) in all of its complexity, an appropriate multidisciplinary approach is required. It is expected that such an approach will demand a specific and challenging methodology for the collection of data that will allow an epistemological shift in migration, family, and development studies.

### 3. Gender and mobility studies between Africa and Europe

Since the 1990's, approaches to transnationalism have addressed the lives of migrants with regard to either their country of origin or their country of destination and mostly focused on changes for the individual and/or his/her family in the medium term. Other targets of research have been institutions (Lubkemann, 2008), paths to development (Grassi, 2003, 2009), and redefinition of feelings of belonging to the multiple "*homes*", not only from the geographic point of view (Vivet, 2010), but also the spiritual (Levy, 2002) and cultural one (Appadurai, 2006).

The transnational lives of migrants demand constant reformulation of the sense of belonging as a meaning of the places where persons live, work, and organize their own reproduction. Research on changes in the family relationships has targeted gender issues mostly, stressing the vulnerability of women in relation to men. Furthermore, emerging research on masculinity often refers only to western-world settings.

In migration studies, it was from 1976-1985 that the first studies on migrant women as actors who were visibly autonomous of males (Morokvasic, 1983) and on female migratory flows (Kofman et al., 2000), even though these were focused on case studies in which there was a majority of women. As such, these studies did not yet set out a conceptual framework on female migration (Carlings, 2005, p. 4).

However, in accordance with Donato et al. (2006, p. 10), the first consistent analysis of gender appeared in the literature on migration in 1992 with Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe's introduction to the book "*Gender and Migration*", in which the authors highlight that thus far studies on women and migration have restricted their scope to establishing the statistical differences between the sexes in migratory flows without ever substantively analysing differences in terms of gender. Other specialists such as Pessar and Mahler (2003) agree that the explosion of interest in the role of gender taking place in various academic fields with an interest in the theme of migrations cannot be attributed, as so very often is the case, to either the emergence of post-modern philosophical currents as from the late 1980s or even to trends in post-colonial theories. The research findings on gender and migration of these authors were gathered in another special edition of this journal that pointed to examples of a cross-disciplinary space in which it is possible to intermingle the differing insights of each field on this theme. This publication reveals a powerful area of analysis capable of driving scientific and

theoretical creativity (Donato et al., 2006, p. 14). This space does not, however, see disciplinary boundaries simply fading away as broad variations in the practice and acceptance of transversal gender analysis remain with regards to their respective prevailing epistemological, theoretical, and methodological characteristics.

According to the above-mentioned authors, it was within the scope of each particular field that social scientists have picked up gender as an intellectual strategy to overcome the marginalization of the work of women in society as detailed in the papers collected together in the special edition of *International Migration Review* (IMR), edited by Mirjana Morokvasic.

The majority of studies on migrations and development seem to reflect the conceptual point of view that attributes to women the status of subject following male patterns of behavior (Carlings, 2005). Engendering development processes require more than a focus on women, however. Correspondingly, when men decide to emigrate alone, they rarely depart without first gaining the consent of the conjugal partner that they leave behind. In their memories and wishes, such feelings remain present – to a greater or lesser extent depending on the reproductive role that the respective culture attributes to women and men concerning the life plans for the person behind. Portuguese speaking African countries are specific in terms of gender role organization in the family and in society, as demonstrated in earlier works (Grassi, 2003, 2007), and this constitutes crucial theoretical baggage in the research on transnational lives and conjugality between Portuguese speaking African countries and Portugal (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). In Portuguese- African studies, “*patriarchalizing*” interpretations of African societies prevail and gender power relations normally are taken for granted. At the same time hierarchies of age (seniority; relational) are, often mentioned as more important than hierarchies of gender. Furthermore, when the focus is on marriage, “*the woman of feminist theory is a wife*” (Oyeronke, 2001). At the same time, as this author stresses, the hierarchies of insiders / outsiders to given lineage are also often more important than hierarchies of gender (Arnfred, 2009).

In Portuguese - African studies, gender studies have focused mostly on women (Andrade Silva, 1983; Grassi, 2003, 2006, 2007; Andall, 1999) with some interesting exceptions (Arnfred, 2005). Studies on men in and from African countries reflect mostly power questions about black men with a concern in politics (Marriott, 2000).

Our approach seeks to show how the constructions of masculinity are fluid and changing and have to be renegotiated and redefined in transnational family relationships. The migratory process is not neutral but highly “*gendered*”, meaning that gender constitutes a core organizational principle for social relations. In male-gender studies, masculinity norms differ according to the contexts as well as within each context, depending on negotiations about those definitions between individuals or groups (Amadiume, 1987). It is crucial to look at the changes inside the family relationships to understand how the construction process of masculinity is renegotiated between man and woman in transnational migration and how the social reproduction “*in motion*” (Koser, 2003) works in the context. Critical studies of men (Kimmel, 2005) stress that it is impossible to fully understand masculinity without considering its connection with family change and women's change. This research places men and masculinities within the realm of family life, examining men's practices and discourses in their relationships with women and their changing femininities.

The importance and increase of economic migrations point to the emergence of important changes in the organization of family relationships, lives of individuals, and gender roles. (Baby-Collin et al, 2009). Recent case studies have generated an interesting body of literature on the structural factors, both family and individual, in this process (Kofman et al., 2000). Gender maintains its relevance to understanding an individual's culture in that it is tied to the position that the woman and man take in a family structure in one or another culture deriving from the greater or lesser extent of responsibility attributed to the man and woman for sustaining and reproducing the household.

To capture this complexity in motion the methodological option of this research group is to embrace the belief that an adaptation of the methodological tools is crucial especially considering the theoretical gap in the Portuguese academic world in this research area (Mazzucato, 2008, Grassi, 2011). Therefore, from an analytical point of view, the position of the actors serves to explain the normative challenge posed in restoring ethnographic techniques to contemporary sociology. As a recent study showed, this restoration may be achieved through references to theories posed by the Chicago School (Vianello, 2006).

Migrant experiences in destination countries also derive from differentiation revolving around the gender function, producing differing propensities to migration as well as different results between men and women (Boyd, 2004). Hence, stating that migratory flows diversify according to the variable of migrant's gender implies the existence of inequalities stretching over the entire migratory experience, right from departure from one's own country through to arrival in the host community and the experiences encountered therein. Asymmetries in power between men and women produce differences in the organization of migrant lives and permeate through social institutions, the family, economy, and politics. Gender inequalities translating into disadvantages for both women and men in the destination countries of these migratory trajectories may be linked to exploitation and recruitment into illegal trafficking networks. Studies on migrant women carried out thus far in Portugal (Grassi, 2003, 2007; Hellerman, 2005; Peixoto et al., 2006) found that women bring with them the responsibility – with which they self-identify – for maintaining bonds with the country of origin, influencing the ways in which they process their social relationships in Portugal.

The origins of migration lie in an experience that in the majority of cases emerges out of a family history context that approaches geographic relocation as a vital possible recourse, already tried by others, discussed and held up as a cause for celebration. Correspondingly, there are an increasing number of women deciding to emigrate alone but who rarely depart without first gaining the consent of the family that they leave behind. In their memories and wishes, such feelings remain present – to a greater or lesser extent depending on the reproductive role that the respective culture attributes to women – in concerns with the life plans for the children left behind. Recent case studies have generated an interesting body of literature on the structural factors, both family and individual, in this process (Grieco & Boyd, 1998; Kofman et al., 2000; Piper, 2005). Thus, and in accordance with some authors, the “*feminisation of migration*” (Castles & Miller, 2009) is associated with the “*feminisation of poverty*” and suggest that growing levels of insecurity is caused by rising exploitation by states, families and individuals of informal subsistence level female labour that Saskia Sassen refers to as the “*feminisation of survival*” (Sassen, 2001). If the latter is related to the feminisation of migration, at what cost does this happen? And what forms does this process take in transnational families between Africa and Europe? The dynamics resulting from cultures encountering each other change when the site of observation alters and we engage in a comparison of different ethnicities (Pires, 2000).

Saying that the migratory process is not neutral but highly “*gendered*” also means that gender constitutes a core organizational principle for social relations and gendered individual perspectives may improve the level of understanding and clarify social processes observed in contemporary society in movement and consequently the path of development.

#### 4. Remarks on Methodological approach

Amongst the different disciplines we can find a variety of explanations of meanings, processes, scales and methods around the knowledge of 'transnationalism'. Transnationalism is considered an opportunity for development, a reconstruction of 'place' or locality, a type of consciousness, a kind of cultural reproduction, and a place of political commitment (Vertovec, 1999).

Some authors', exploration of the social theory and consequent methodology that underpin studies of transnational migration locate their approach to migration research within a larger intellectual project that has been taken up by scholars of transnational processes in many fields,

rethinking and reformulating the concept of society such that it is no longer automatically equated with the boundaries of a single nation-state (Levitt & Schiller, 1995; Stoller, 1998). Following this approach, our research programme gives a central importance to the necessity of contextualizing analyses and methodologies in transnational mobility studies in a globalized view (Burawoy, 2000) considering what happened in both migrants' origin countries and in Europeans ones, giving to this double sided approach a special significance when the migratory flow is between countries with different levels of development, as is the case of economic migrations between Africa and Europe.

Concentrating on epistemological implications in researching mobility, we defend appropriate methodological and theoretical choices able to provide transnational and intergenerational perceptions giving a gendered and multicultural angle (Baldassar et al., 2000).

The TLM&G research group will question, from different disciplinary perspectives, how the focus on transnational living, gender relationships, and integration experience allows for understanding the individual's concrete lives (in terms of identities, culture, political affiliation, appropriation of material resources, and development). This approach reinforces the research at the level of both European and African developing countries.

The theoretical approach (about which we summarized only a small part of the literature), needs the design of a specific methodological approach. At the same time, team members have recently developed advanced expertise in quantitative methodology in coordinating and organizing surveys in African and European countries in the context of previous and ongoing projects (see <http://www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt>).

All of the projects designed in the scope of our research group's work have a strong comparative potential, giving central importance to the data collection based on three different paths: multiple locations; multiple types of migrants (low and high skilled); combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The specific aim is to collect consistent and contextualized transnational data based on gender, family, and household dynamics (conjuality, parenthood, care, and education) in the transnational spaces between Africa and Europe. As has been stressed before, data are collected in the migrants' countries of origin, countries of transit, and countries of arrival, that is, in all of the contexts that can influence the mobility of individuals and family members. This approach allows for the reformulation of gender relations within families and households to capture the different ways in which individuals identify and negotiate gender processes across power relations, when family members live in different geographical contexts. Reinforcing the contributions with scholars coming from African and European countries, our ongoing projects planned the collection of data according to a multisided methodology. This approach can also be explored in other contexts as the extensive literature on Asian and American transnational families suggests.

We consider that the networks already established with national institutions and civil society organizations in all the countries involved in the movement of people (in origin countries (Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, Morocco, and Senegal), and in host or transit countries (France, Spain, Portugal and Italy) is crucial for the epistemological implications mentioned above.

This methodology has resulted in extremely important information for the identification of core dimensions to gender and family dynamics and their impact on both migration access conditions and resource-access in Europe and Africa. Qualitative methodology has been crucial in interpreting how the indicators resulting from this analysis may subsequently be applied as points of reference for the definition of core variables for broader quantitative studies. The relevance of ethnographic collection of contextualized data, in all the countries involved in migration flows, has to be stressed and identified as a crucial methodological framework carrying epistemological consequences. This methodology reveals specificities on the construction and negotiation of individuals sharing space, resources and affectivities in the globalized contemporary world. Stressing the lack of relevant ethnographic and contextualized



case studies on migrants' dynamics between European and African countries, this research group shows interesting results from the collection of ethnographic data in different European and African countries and different immigrant groups in highlighting new forms of practices and contextualized dynamics of family relationships at distance.

Paying attention to migrant adaptation strategies to the new contexts and societies, through the comparison of ethnographic information of immigrant dynamics of integration and transnational participation as gendered experiences in the European multicultural society and in immigrants' home countries, improves the understanding of the organization of quantitative data in this area. This helps to fill the lack of a deep seated indicator capable of capturing the complexity of transnational family relationships (Bernardi 2011), a research opportunity of an uncovered area considering gender in a life-span perspective: children/youth and parenting practices; intergenerational issues; conjugality in the case of family members "*living apart together*" (Bannon & Correia, 2006); caregiving at distances; laws; class determinants and the invisible upper class migration; memories and emotions. The comparison of ethnographic information on immigrant dynamics of integration and transnational participation as gendered experiences is central in the European multicultural society and in immigrants' home countries and helps to understand the multiple aspects of this complex area.

The proposed methodology aims to contribute to an epistemological shift in migration, development, and family studies. Earlier research on transnationalism and migrations from African regions (Grassi, 2003, 2007, 2010; Vivet, 2010; Lubkemann, 2008) points to gender differences affecting migration in the source societies. The collection of transnational data in the countries involved in the migratory flows considered by this research group seeks to fill the gap in qualitative information in the countries of origin. When social changes emerge and affect institutions and behaviour of individuals, as occurs in contemporary transnational families, we need to be able to capture the reality with well identified and well defined new specific indicators. This methodology allows for marking visible specificities of the construction and negotiation of individuals sharing space, resources and affectivities in the globalized contemporary world. Furthermore, as we emphasized before, data can be used as points of reference for the definition of core variables for broader quantitative studies. Stressing the lack of relevant ethnographic and contextualized case studies on migrants' dynamics in European and African countries, the research group reveals the necessity to collect relevant information on differences through the collection of ethnographic data in different European countries and immigrant groups focusing on migrant strategies to adapt to new contexts and societies.

The selection of the countries of origin studied by this research group (Portugal, Italy, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Senegal, and Morocco) draws upon the expertise of the principal investigator and of the other nuclear members of the research team, Post Doc researchers. The PI and other team members have, in earlier projects, obtained interesting results on the issues of migration, cities, multicultural settings, and gender relations in Portuguese-speaking contexts, with specific concentration on history, identity, culture, and development (Vivet, 2010; Grassi, 2007, 2010; Ferreira, 2011, Ferreira & Grassi, 2012).

We intend to highlight the discussion on the efforts to overcome the dominant perspective of migration as an expression of vulnerability by shifting the focus on capability and the enabling socio-political structures which play a role in mobility/immobility in times of crisis. Empirical examples resulting from previous work of our team in recent years come from countries of the African and European continent as well as different modes of mobility and migration. The team's future work will examine and refine the understanding of mobility's consequences on individual family members living "*apart together*" in all its complexity (Levin & Trost, 1999).

With the theoretical and epistemological common bases mentioned the following main research questions on transnational lives, mobility, and gender:

*How does transnational mobility change the individual and shape group relationships (family and social networks) between Africa and Europe?*  
*How are individuals affected by migration laws in Europe and in Africa?*

*How is gender power negotiated in transnational conjugality and transnational parenthood?  
How do the different sending and receiving national contexts influence the functioning of social lives of transnational family members?*

## 5. Closing

Firstly, the relevance of the complexity of our framework in academic research is linked not only with migration and development studies but also, and in a significant way, with sociological family studies. In the globalized world new family forms already exist and are characterized by emerging dynamics for managing parenting, conjugality, caring, and gender roles at distance. We can find new forms which differ from the sociological definitions grounded in the national states approach, the so called “*European family*” or “*African family*”. Questioning theory and methodologies in family studies is very important in the search for a new paradigm on the family institution in the globalized world in movement. Taking into consideration the difference in the development level of the countries involved in contemporary economic migratory movement reinforces the importance of the analysis at global level to avoid ethnocentric approaches and interpretation based on any kind of “*cultural superiority*” of societies. The European economic crisis and the reverse flow migration between Angola and Portugal is presently a good example of a reason this.

The second consideration is related with methodology and its epistemological potential considering the framework and thematic scope of different objects of studies involved in our projects. All these projects (see [www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt](http://www.tlnetwork.ics.ul.pt)) adopt their methodology on common bases with the aim of capturing contextualized social, cultural, and historical information characterizing European and African countries involved in the movement of people. Both the countries of origin and the country of immigration influence the process of reconstruction of relationships between the family members of transnational families. Researchers need to avoid the temptation to look for generalizing definitions of family at macro level (European family or African one). The influence of the context for individuals living at distance shows its importance at the transnational and micro levels. The fact that both Africa and Europe are continents and not countries is often insufficiently translated in development, migration, and family studies and at the same time the national level is normally used to compare family dynamics and economic and social welfare of the countries. In our research group we realized that if the analysis is on transnational families, using the national level is not the most efficient choice for perceiving the emerging dynamics of adaptation of institutions such as the family.

There is a sophisticated literature on “*developing world*” as well as the so called “*occidental context*” related with human economic life of men and women and their gender dynamics. However, the lives of men and women inside family relationships have remained either vaguely drawn or invisible. Adapting methods and theory to the different contexts, balancing between the global and the micro levels of perception and social representations is what we are exploring in our research group.

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