

DOI: 10.17689/psy-2014.2.12

УДК 314.7:159

From an ex-colony to the ex-metropolis: Being an emergent adult in a foreign friendly country. A Critical Psychology perspective

© 2014 Ferro, Maria Jorge

PhD, Universidade de Coimbra, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação
Coimbra (Portugal), mariajorgef@fpce.uc.pt

Annotation: Four years have past since we've presented an investigation about the situation of foreign Portuguese-speaking students at the University of Coimbra (Ferro, 2010). This group of students is constituted by any young citizen that arrives to Coimbra from any Portugal's previous colonies in Africa, but also from Brazil or East Timor. For the investigation we had 77 participants (men and women, aged 19 to 52 years), and the project began in the middle of 2005. The research was conducted as a Grounded Theory project (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Carmaz, 1995; Wuest, 2005) and some questions about migration are reviewed here in a critical psychological perspective. Social relationships and societal macro level discourses about constraints of modernity will be also taken into account in this paper.

Key words: migration; emerging adulthood; post-colonialism; cultural soul wounds; relational challenges

От бывшей колонии до бывшей столицы: Что значит быть мигрантом в стране, где лояльно относятся к иностранцам. Критическая оценка перспектив данного феномена с точки зрения психологии

© 2014 Мария Жорже Ферро

Доктор философии, Университет Кимбры, г. Коимбра (Португалия)
mariajorgef@fpce.uc.pt

Аннотация: Четыре года назад нами были представлены результаты исследования о положении иностранных португалоговорящих студентов в университете Коимбры (Ферро, 2010). Испытуемые студенты, приехали обучаться в университете из бывших португальских колоний в Африке, а так же из Бразилии и Восточного Тимора. Статья содержит результаты исследования в котором приняли участие 77 человек (мужчины и женщины, в возрасте от 19 до 52 лет). Исследование было начато в середине 2005 года а в основу его реализации легли теоретические разработки Глазера и Страуса (1967), Кармаза и Веста (2005). Ряд вопросов, касающихся миграции рассматриваются здесь в критическом психологическом контексте. Социальные отношения и общественные дискурсы макроуровня относительно ограничений современности будет также учтены в этой статье.

Ключевые слова: миграция; взросление; постколониализм, культурные душевные раны; реляционные проблемы

Introduction. Portugal is a small country with an immense history and a deep connection to some African countries as well as with Brazil or East Timor. The community of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP) was constituted in order to reinforce those liaisons and until 2014 (year when another country joined CPLP) it incorporated Angola, Cape Verde, Guiné Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé e Príncipe and also Brazil and East Timor and Portugal. According to the History of all those nations, Portugal was a previous colonizer of all these African countries named before as well as of Brazil or East Timor but each of them correspond to different situations: African territories become independent after the Portuguese revolution in 1974, Brazil is an independent country since 1822 and East Timor is recognized as independent after its own battle for freedom in 2002. Since those times but even before the Portuguese's revolution, students from all those mentioned countries used to enrol Portuguese universities. Before the revolution only some selected individuals were able to study abroad. Usually only rich families were able to support their children's studies aboard and even though just the intellectual elite was allowed to leave and study in the Metropolis (and the Metropolis was Portugal). Among that elite came to Portuguese universities some of the most leading and crucial individuals who contributed to rebuild the new independent African countries such as Eduardo Mondlane (from Mozambique) or Agostinho Neto (who was from Angola and died in Moscow in 1979).

Nowadays and even though studying aboard is a very expensive entrepreneurship students from all Portuguese-speaking countries continue to join some universities in Portugal. Political agreements that underlie that venture are the same as they were written during the seventies of the twentieth century. Agreements are the same but people and each country are not what they were forty years ago.

If migration can be perceived by emerging adults as a strategy to cope with limited employment opportunities in their countries, being a migrant student is much more complex than that. The quest for better education and certification in order not just to ensure one's ability to contribute to one's own country development but his or her own ability to succeed in life is now assumed as a right people have [Oboe & Scacchi, 2008].

The University of Coimbra, one of the most ancient and renowned Universities in Europe, has a long list of prominent students from all African Portuguese-speaking countries and even a major list of students that returned to their homeland and worked as skilled professionals in all professional areas. But some years ago (specially since 2004 when the University started to prepare its Cultural Week under the theme "embracing lusophony") we felt that we could improve our job as institution if we could better understand who are in fact the students that attend our xxi century college curriculum's and the way they live in Coimbra during college years.

The Investigation and some findings. As we assumed we knew to little about students from all Portuguese-speaking countries we organized an investigation inspired by Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory and according to Charmaz (2005) and Wuest (1995) grounded methodologies. The investigation took place during four school years. Participants were 41 female students and 36 masculine students with an age scope from 19 to 52 years. Those individuals represented the group of more than six hundred foreign Portuguese-speaking students at the University of Coimbra between 2005 and 2009. During the investigation all participants lived in Coimbra and were there from less than one year to more than 20 years.

As it was a qualitative investigation it was mandatory that investigator and participants could trust each other and find a common language to share information. After everyone assumed to be committed to the investigation participants signed their

consents and the process to collect data began. All interviews, personal narratives, debates, meetings or encounters were recorded in audio and transcript. Coding all the material was a long and difficult job and required the ability to triangulate information through the material we've collected and discuss codes and categories with a group of investigators used to qualitative methodologies. The project predicted 3 different backgrounds: (1) individual interviews, (2) focus group reunions and (3) final individual interviews and group discussions.

In order to reach the largest range of information (and not trying to collect immediately the most accurate data), 9 individual interviews took place with participants from all countries. Those interviews were prepared to scan as much points of individual interests as possible. On that moment of the investigation the main concern was to access each individual as a unique subject but at the same time as someone representing his/her own country. In fact, information about culture, religion, family organization, gender roles, school organization or social organization emerged quite vividly. At the same time, participants revealed themselves and talked about fears, values, memories, emotions in general and expectations in particular. Everyone assumed their social status as migrant student and reflected about that situation, its problems and benefits.

Focus group meetings were brought about in two separate sessions with 19 individuals assuring at least two participants from each country in each discussion. In each of those sessions we talked about everything mentioned by all students on previous individual interviews. Focus group's participants were other individuals and everyone expressed their concerns, some issues were strengthened and some others were discussed. Some new data emerged and some new questions were brought into discussion according to each session's plan.

For the third stage of the investigation more 49 students joined the group and for almost 2 years and a half we had weekly meetings. That was a long process and a very complex way to collect and compare data. Final individual interviews were led

in order to contrast information from the first moment of the investigation with information after being immersed into the group and the objectives of our investigation. Group meetings were assumed as time to share worries and accomplishments in order to rehearse skills to overcome future obstacles. That third part of the investigation was in fact a multicultural counselling intervention.

Summing up we can describe a) some starting problems, b) some data and c) crucial conclusions:

a) Starting problems. Emerging adulthood is not the same for African students, Timorese students or Brazilian students as it is not the same as it is usually described by mainstream psychology; Being black in a white people's county; Gender roles can be outstanding in all Portuguese-speaking countries from Africa and are specially critical in Timor; Being student migrant can be an overwhelming experience for these group of individuals not just because they are immigrants but because of the social and economical difficulties it implies; Social status or citizenship issues are crucial; Subjects as religion or spiritual guidance must be deeply well thought-out.

b) Some data from the investigation. African students are very different according to each one's nationality: Students from Guine assumed to be much less independent (in all aspects) than all the others; Students from Angola are much wealthier than most of the other students; Students from Cape Verde seemed to be better prepared to immigrate again after graduation but, at the same time, expressed mixed feelings about returning to their homeland; Students from São Tomé seemed to be quite concerned with national traditions and cultural dissemination and this ensure them a special joy and a profound sense of belongingness.

Students from Angola or Mozambique (but all the others as well) started to feel mixed emotions about their migrant situation and the Portuguese population: increasing numbers of young Portuguese citizens that have started to departure to Africa during that period (2005-2009) was a new data for these students in Portugal. After all, their countries could be more appealing than they would imagine.

Racism was not assumed as a problem for many of the students but some others claim they felt it in Portugal. Racism is a difficult issue to talk about in Portugal. People avoid the topic and usually an effort is made to elude any approach to the subject not only by students in or investigation but also by citizens in general.

Starting a family is something that can occur without no special preparation: many of the students in our investigations and many more that were not part of the group of participants, become parents during college years – that detail is extremely important because of the children himself/herself and because of all implications a child brings to parents lives. There are a large number of students that must find a job in order to support themselves and their own new family. But there is also a sensitive question that may not have been taken into account when the couple assumed the newborn: what will it happen to the child if mother and father were not from the same country and both are yearning to return home? It is just one more problem for a fragile young adult to find a solution on his/her own.

Academically speaking, many of those students used to start their studies without a correct notion of what it is to be a college student: they can start college with feeble domain of specific knowledge basic to their course and fail exams after exams. Many of them used to feel bad and unable to deal with the problem. Most of them after several years of failures used to abandon school or, at least, tried to change their main area of studies. What has been said substantiates situations of more than 10 years enrolled in the same faculty but with no proficient academic results.

Again, academically speaking, many of those students don't attend all classes and during many years it was quite difficult to understand why it used to happen. Somehow, it began to be noticeable that many of them had to find a job and work in order to manage to survive. Even though they shouldn't loose time in activities that aren't essential for their academic or personal development, if they had no other way to live, it was obvious that they must find a job. Notwithstanding the need for a job could be comprehensible in legal terms it is a new and monstrous problem: as student

migrant they can not have a real job. They can find an occupation, usually underpaid what implies many hours lost to ensure a poor salary.

Finally and returning to the migrant status that those students must assume, we can recall five compelling premises when dealing with emerging adults [Syed & Mitchel, 2013] – they are experiencing the age of *instability*, a time for so many *possibilities*, the age of *self-focus*, but also the feeling of being trapped in a kind of *in-betweenness*, and the time for *identity explorations*. Those students must deal with all of it even though they can't focus long enough on non-practical affairs: they had to manage in order to live far from their comfort zone.

c) Crucial conclusions. The way a social relationship is understood by people in touch is fundamental to understand why problems are solved or sustained: Portugal is usually assumed as a very friendly country so it seems natural that students from any Portuguese-speaking country would wish to study here. But one fundamental gain of modernity is the increasing demand for Excellency: Universities wish to have the best group of students (the most proficient, the most brilliant, the most scientifically well prepared future professionals) and students are eager to enrol the best university (the institution able to work for them and work with them in order to certify their personal growth as students and future professionals but first as persons) having said so, Coimbra's Academy must and can do better:

It can become more supportive for young women [Hinton & Earnest, 2010] especially for those who have children and wish to continue their studies. Knowing how young women grow assuming they have to care for others [Frost, 2005; Lupton, 1998, 2003], Portuguese academy must understand why African students (and most drastically Timorese students – as we were told by East Timor students, in their culture it is usual for women to be considered less important than men, women are worthy if they have someone to take care of) assume their pregnancies and tries to deal with life after becoming mothers (for most African cultures at least those connected with Portugal, being a woman implies having children, giving birth,

becoming a mother. A woman who has no children is not a complete woman, some students actually said so.). We are not encouraging those situations we are just justifying those young women decisions' to become mothers even though their lives were not prepared to change so dramatically. As we've studied their realities, as we've recognized their beliefs and values, we can understand why many of them start a family during college years – For Timorese young women, for instance, take care of someone is the most honourable task of all tasks in a woman's life so, if a Timorese girl gets pregnant, becoming a mother justifies every difficulty one must overcome. We can argue this argument, we must argue this situation, but we must do that before pregnancies occur, before those (Timorese or others) students started to drop out from college. Before immigrant students start to experience the loss of self [Charmaz, 1983, 1999].

Academia must discuss racism because it can be understood as “the product of particular historical relationships between groups of people in which some people have unjustly asserted claims to dominance over others.” [Durrheim, Hook, Riggs, 2009, 198-9]. Many years past now and people in Portugal keep avoiding the issue as if racism had never been a real problem in Portuguese History.

College years can be full of conquests but also full of traps: unbearable difficulties during the first year can make a student perish. Different kind of difficulties can weaken trust in oneself capacity to succeed [Ekstedt & Fagerberg, 2005]. Migrant students are supreme victims for difficulties first of all because they are alone, far from their homeland, far from their families and friends; they may not have set up in new supporting social surroundings and may experience difficulties with the academy environment and pressure. When only some elite arise to foreign universities, those students were more prepared to deal with difficulties as difficulties themselves were from other kind. Those previous migrant students had not to find a job in order to survive, they had financial support from grants; They had

not to study some other subject than the one he/she had chosen, they knew exactly what they wanted to study and achieve; If they find a life partner, they hadn't to assume a child right away or if so, the new family would be able to find a way to support themselves and keep on the track to accomplish the academic degree or, if it had to be so, they abandoned the university and find another path. Time and the subjective experience of time seemed to be different. Nowadays as some authors mane it modern years brought some new modern feelings or "new emotions" [Widerberg, 2006] and migrant students are younger and preferable victims of those new emotions such as tiredness, restlessness and irritability.

Migration can be perceived by emerging adults as a strategy to cope with limited employment opportunities in their countries. Being a migrant student can be a way to diminish that limited employment opportunities that emerging adults can assume. In fact, migration can provide especially for women and young girls from African Portuguese speaking countries with new opportunities.

After some years of immigration as students young African women can recognize their ability to foster and change gender roles and gender responsibilities. At the same time, young men can experience their own changes and nurture transformation in terms of gender equity. This is a crucial conclusion when we realize many discourses on demands and constraints of modernity concerning gender that must be acknowledge.

Discussion. Humanity would be "led to associate by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies" [Eagleton, 2009, p.62] so it is expected that these 8 countries sharing the same official language would be "good friends", at least good partners. People from any of those countries when in touch with others from the same community of speakers would be able to express him or herself in a way that everyone else would perfectly understand and consent. In fact, it is easy to comprehend that it is not just that simple. Even though officially sharing the same language, this group of 8 countries – so distant one from the others as we can

visualize in a glance through the world map (Brazil in South America; Portugal in Western Europe; Angola and Guiné in Western Central Africa; Mozambique in South East Africa; Timor in Asia and clusters of islands as Cape Verde and São Tomé in the Atlantic ocean) – are in fact very different one from the other and citizens from each of these nations are indeed products and producers of (at least) 8 different cultures. Portuguese language is a link, can be a true link but investigation on culture, history, anthropology, psychology cannot forget the power that native languages really have. All countries have and cherish its own main language and Portuguese is not the most important code to communicate in African Portuguese-speaking countries.

The foundational seed of a community of countries could have been language but in order to sustain everyone's identity, other national languages were cherished and nourished by its natives. It is the case of Creole from Cape Verde. As Pardue puts it, creole is “a product of colonialism, diaspora, trade and other forms of mass migrations, creole speaks to the human condition of contact, power and cultural expression. (...) represents a particular history of language and belonging” [Pardue, 2013, p.126]. Students from Cape Verde talk between them using creole and frequently are asked to teach creole to others. In fact, they assume creole as their main language. Angola, Guiné, Mozambique, São Tomé, Timor and even Brazil, people from every one of these countries can think of more than one or two other languages from where they came from. Nevertheless in order to keep in touch and communicate with others, Portuguese language is the common ground each one can use and share and deal with.

What had been wrong all along these years was the abusive assumption that because of a common official language everyone from every one of these countries would be perfectly similar to the average Portuguese citizen.

Migrant students keep on coming into a country that they knew first as an oppressor. Even though they are all too young to have lived during colonial war, their families weren't and their grandparents at least have memoirs from that time. At the

same time people in Portugal still remember colonial war and Portugal as a “Metropolis”. There are too many cultural soul wounds [Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008] that were not assumed and those invisible wounds keep on overshadowing people’s communication.

Since the beginning of this last economic crisis in Europe [OECD, 2012], many Portuguese young people started to migrate to different locations but many of them had chosen African countries to live and work. Once again Angola and Mozambique are receiving Portuguese people but now Angola and Mozambique are independent countries and so Portuguese citizens are immigrants there and this changes everything. Economic supremacy can now function as rebound tool. If then racism and cultural supremacy could have been grants for a way of living, now economy can challenge it. Citizens from Angola and Mozambique may feel empowered because they can recognize their own countries as places to work and make a living just after they finish their studies abroad. In a sense of an African-bond every student from African Portuguese-speaking countries can value their own importance: They are no longer someone in need because they are now citizens from countries helping Portuguese people as well. This changes everything but this is not rational yet. Portugal has Academia. Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa are lands of opportunity and “a profound decolonization agenda is required for both colonized and colonizer peoples. Given the psychological, linguistic and cultural components of this agenda, critical psychology has an opportunity to make a significant contribution” [Huygens, 2009, p.282]. May people from everywhere recognize it and respect it. In fact, this is one more reason for psychologists to be aware of. Psychology must assume its critical perspective or, as Sloan (2009, p.332) puts it “the point of doing theory critically is to generate and disseminate ways of thinking and forms of action that undermine ideology and foster intersubjectivity.” History is changing because people and world population is in turmoil. Hope this turmoil results in development

and growth for everyone. Critical Psychology can produce knowledge in order to promote change for a fairer world.

References

1. Charmaz, K. (1983). Loss of self: a fundamental form of suffering in the chronically ill. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 5(2), 168- 195.
2. Charmaz, K. (1999). Stories of suffering: Subjective tales and research narratives. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(3), 362- 382. doi:10.1177/104973299129121910.
3. Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded Theory in the 21st century. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 507-535). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
4. Duran, E., Firehammer, J., & Gonzalez, J. (2008). Liberation Psychology as the Path Toward Healing Cultural Soul Wounds. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 288-295.
5. Durrheim, K., Hook, D., & Riggs, D. (2009). Race and racism. In D. Fox, I. Prilleltensky, & S. Austin (Eds.). *Critical Psychology: An Introduction* (pp.197–214, 2Ed) London: Sage.
6. Ekstedt, M., & Fagerberg, I. (2005). Lived experiences of the time preceding burnout. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 49, 59-67.
7. Ferro, M.J. (2010). Teoria Crítica e Aconselhamento: Para uma intervenção multicultural com os Estudantes da Cooperação na Universidade de Coimbra. Doctoral Thesis presented to the University of Coimbra – Portugal. Available here: <http://hdl.handle.net/10316/14536>
8. Frost, L. (2005). Theorizing the young woman in the body. *Body Society*, 11, 63-85. doi:10.1177/1357034x05049851.
9. Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. NY: Aldine Publishing Company.
10. Global Commission on International Migration, 2005 Report. <https://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org.ny/files/GCIM%20Report%20%20PDF%20of%20complete%20report.pdf>
11. Hinton, R., & Earnest, J. (2010). Stressors, coping, and social support among women in Papua New Guinea. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20, 224-238. doi:10.1177/1049732309357572
12. Huygens, I. (1997/2009). From colonization to globalization: Continuities in colonial ‘common sense’. In Fox, D., Prilleltensky, I., & Austin, S. (Eds.) (2009). *Critical Psychology: an introduction* (pp. 267–284, 2 Ed.). London: Sage.

13. Lupton, D. (1998). *The emotional self: A sociocultural exploration*. London. England: SAGE.
14. Lupton, D. (2003). *Medicine as culture: Illness, disease and the body in western societies* (2nd ed.). London. England: SAGE.
15. Oboe, A., & Scacchi, A. (2008). *Recharting the Black Atlantic. Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections*. Oxon: Routledge.
16. OECD (2012). *OECD Journal: Financial Market Trends, Volume 2011 Issue 2*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/fmt-v2011-2-en>
17. Pardue, D. (2013). The Role of Creole History and Space in Cape Verdean Migration to Lisbon, Portugal. *Urban Anthropology*, 42 (1, 2), 95-134.
18. Sloan, T. (2009). Doing Theory. In D. Fox, Prilleltensky, I., & S. Austin (Eds.). *Critical Psychology: An Introduction* (pp.319–334, 2Ed) London: Sage.
19. Syed, M., & Mitchell, L.L. (2013). Race, ethnicity, and emerging adulthood: Retrospect and prospects. *Emerging Adulthood*, 1(2), 83-95.
20. Widerberg, K. (2006). Embodying modern times: Investigating tiredness. *Time & Society*, 15, 105-120. doi:10.1177/09614 63x06061348
21. Wiklund, M., Bengs, C., Malmgren-Olsson, E. B., & Öhman, A. (2010). Young women facing multiple and intersecting stressors of modernity, gender orders and youth. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71, 1567-1575. doi:10.1016/j.socs-cimed.2010.08.004
22. Wuest, J. (1995). Feminist Grounded Theory: An exploration of the congruency and tensions between two traditions in knowledge discovery. *Qualitative Health Research*, 5 (1) pp.125-137.