

Culture, ambivalence and schismogenesis: Mothering double binds and gendered identities within Cape Verdean and Indian migrant families (Portugal)

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Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of two ethnographic case studies on double bind interactions within the mother-child relationship. In-depth interviews with, as well as participant observation among Cape Verdean and Indo-Mozambican migrant families settled in Portugal provide insight into the way in which mothering double bind interactions influence the dynamics of change and resistance involved in the gendered identities of their adult sons and daughters. In the analysis, we draw upon Bateson's dynamical theory about communication, as well as on theories of Psychological Anthropology that reiterate an intersecting dialectic of levels at which ambivalence exists and structures human experience. We argue that confusing or conflicting messages in the mother-child communication are an integral part of a differentiation process (*schismogenesis*) structured by socio-cultural contradictions that are yet amplified in a context of migration.

Keywords

Motherhood; Double bind interactions; *Schismogenesis*; Gendered identities; Migrant families; Portugal

Introduction

Through a comparative analysis of two ethnographic case studies, this article aims to discuss potential connections between double bind interactions within the mother-child relationship and the dynamics of change and resistance involved in the gendered identities of adult sons and daughters. The theoretical-conceptual frame that supports the ethnographic interpretation relates the concept of *schismogenesis* (or progressive differentiation) forged by Bateson in his anthropological papers (Bateson, 1972/1935) with the double bind concept developed by Bateson and his colleagues (Bateson et al., 1972/1956) in their approach of family contradictory patterns of communication. By considering these two constructs as part of a single dynamical theory, the article addresses

the potential role of mothering double bind communication on the meaning-making processes operating in the differentiation of the gendered identities of adult children, either through consolidation or attempts at change.

One of Bateson *et al.*'s most central contentions is that in order to understand the self regulatory aspect of human communication one needs to examine the ongoing interrelationship between communicative expressions and the relational frameworks within which these expressions take place. Accordingly, the comprehension of mother-child communication is situated within their family relational frames which are embedded in larger socio-historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the ethnographic sections particularly highlight the links relating the micro approach of mother-offspring communication processes and the demands situated at the meso-level routines, rituals, moralities and recurrent anxieties prevailing in their immediate socio-cultural environments (Valsiner, 2007). This articulation is explored through an analytical lens that conceptualizes migrant mothers' cultural environments as a vehicle for the expression of their own ambivalent interactions and a source for the possibility of novel meaning-making communicative processes.

The article uses a strategic comparative approach focusing on Cape Verdean and Indo-Mozambican migrant families whose family and gendered values and practices have become a focus of public attention in Portuguese debates about immigrant integration (Trovão, 2014). In Portugal, as in other European countries, policy-makers and social practitioners often views migrant mothers as transmitting traditional, ethnically cultural values and resources which helps or hinders their children's integration (Ganga, 2007; Erel, 2013). Although both groups of mothers actively contribute to the intergenerational renew of cultural and/or faith practices, social values and identity through child-rearing, they define themselves as belonging and/or participating in Portuguese society and are

committed to the social integration of their offspring. Therefore, the two ethnographic case studies investigate the extent to which mother-child double bind interactions may be affected by conflicting cultural frames guiding family and gendered performances.

The article is structured as follows: the first section introduces the conceptual frame and explores unexamined links between double bind and *schismogenesis*. The following section provides information about the qualitative methodologies used in the case-studies. Then, the article presents and discusses the interplay between double bind mother-offspring communicative exchanges and their immediate socio-cultural environments, interrogating at the same time how the exposure to values and expectations of the current receiving society can be experienced as a source of contradicting demands. The conclusion highlights the creative potential of mothering double binds in differentiating, changing, and stabilizing gender and family social-cultural dynamics.

Connecting schismogenesis and double binds: an approach to ongoing cycles of family interaction

Gender, parenting and conjugality constructions are mutually constituted on an ongoing basis within family communicative frames. Families, on the other hand, are embedded in larger relational contexts which in turn are socio-historically and culturally configured. Despite the variability observed, families often establish communicative frames for relations of descent (parent-child relationships), conjugality (spouses) and kinship (siblings, extended family), and they differentiate these relational frames in order to maintain a certain degree of autonomy between them (Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Collier & Yanagisako, 1987; Héritier, 2002).

Bateson (1972/1936) applied the notion of *schismogenesis* to conceptualize this process of growing autonomization by identifying two different types of progressive

differentiation: symmetrical *schismogenesis* – in those cases in which family members who share the same relational frame exhibit a symmetrical communication pattern among themselves, each member driving the other into a competitive emphasis of the same pattern; and complementary *schismogenesis* – when family members, whose communicational frames are fundamentally different, adopt a preponderantly complementary communication among themselves. Moreover, he discussed *schismogenesis* ‘not as a process that goes inevitably forward’ but rather as a dynamic process which is either ‘controlled’ or ‘continually counteracted by inverse processes’ (Bateson, 1958, p. 190).

In *Toward a theory of schizophrenia*, Bateson and his colleagues Jackson, Haley, and Weakland (1972/1956) also focused on certain types of contradictory communicative expressions within family relationships. They conceptualized them as ‘double bind interactions’. Defined as conflicting messages conveyed more or less simultaneously on the verbal and the nonverbal level, double bind interactions can be pathogenic if the accurate discrimination of messages is not feasible in a vitally important family relationship. The following communicative exchange (one of love, conveyed verbally, and one of disgust, conveyed non-verbally) constitutes a typical example of double bind in terms of conflicting emotions:

A young man who had fairly well recovered from a schizophrenic episode was visited in the hospital by his mother. He was glad to see her and impulsively put his arm around her shoulders, whereupon she stiffened. He withdrew his arm and she asked "Don't you love me anymore?" He then blushed, and she said, "Dear, you must not be so easily embarrassed and afraid of your feelings." (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1972/1956; p. 217).

Later studies on the regulatory aspects of communication in the family context have shown that double binds can be also characterized in terms of conflicting relational frames. Transitional periods and disturbing events in the life cycle of individuals and families (death, disease, economic hardship, divorce, migration to a new cultural environment, etc.) may be (but not necessarily) accompanied by double bind exchanges without producing apparent psychopathological symptoms (Koopmans, 1998, 1997).

Double binds with regards to conflicting relational frames often take place when elements of two incompatible communicative frames situationally intersect: for instance, the parent-child frame with the spousal frame. In other cases, they involve a conflicting impasse between the content of the communication and the existing relational frame at a particular moment of the family interactive process. Not infrequently, this impasse derives from a communication that presupposes a certain type of relationship that has not been previously established or stems from the denial of a relational transformation that presupposes a different type of communication. For instance, in the transition to an interactive state whereby parent and child should treat each other as adults, but continue to interact according to previous parental and child roles and expectations. Moreover, as several studies on transnational migrant families have demonstrated, double bind exchanges can be seen as an indication of multiple conflicting frames guiding interactive behaviour. When family relations are perceived as incompatible with equally important priorities toward migratory integration, the contradicting demands can be experienced as double binds.

According to Bateson's anthropological hypothesis, it is also possible that a relational framework itself may be perceived as culturally ambiguous in the sense that it does not resolve whether the communication is loving or hostile, complementary or symmetrical, and so on. As Bateson wisely remarked in the second epilogue to the

American second edition of *Naven* (Bateson, 1958), we need to determine in which situations cumulative double bind interactions are integral to progressive processes of *schismogenesis* and/or contribute to inverse processes of de-differentiation. In other words, he called for further work on the role of double binds to better understand the self-regulatory dynamics of human communication.

One way to enhance Bateson's theoretical contribution to the study of culture and communication is to consider *schismogenesis* and double bind as two inseparable constructs of a single dynamic theory. By addressing the potential effects of double binds in differentiating, changing, and stabilizing family and gender relationships, the two case studies presented below suggest that there are good reasons to (re)examine their theoretical connection.

Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews

This article is supported by ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2002 and 2012 under several distinct research projects on Cape Verdean and Indo-Mozambican migrant families settled in Lisbon [1]. Different neighbourhoods, associations, networks, and communities of worship, known for a strong concentration of Cape Verdean and Indo-Mozambican families, emerged as a strategic stepping stone for the ethnographic encounters. Cumulative findings encouraged us to respatialize fieldwork by addressing in further detail the intimate communications, practices, identities, moralities, and claims relating to issues of the body, sexuality, conjugal relations, child care, parenting, and family in both migrant groups.

In order to deepen the study of conflicting mother-child interactions, we conducted repeat in-depth interviews (a minimum of three) with thirteen female informants from Cape Verde and fifteen of Indo-Mozambican origin, whose ages ranged from 42 to 58. The interviewees were selected through snowball sampling, whilst

ensuring varied profiles in terms of family dynamics and trajectories of integration. All migrant mothers we worked with can be described as active economic agents. They usually find employment in the Portuguese care and domestic service market, which favours migrant workers. Their migration processes have been shaped by specific roles and expectations regarding gender and family.

We also narrowed previous ethnographic encounters with their children (nineteen daughters and twelve sons whose current ages went from 21 to 35) through in-depth interviews and participant observation, most of which in family and community environments. Some youth were born in Cape Verde and Mozambique but have been living in Portugal since childhood. Many were born in Portugal. The resources accumulated by their families have enabled a certain degree of upward social mobility in their offspring, especially when families instilled the importance of academic and professional training. Inspired by the daily life of the neighborhoods where they grow up, young interviewees often reinvent and update family-origin cultural and religious repertoires. Nevertheless, their lives within and out of the neighborhoods also lead them to develop affinities beyond their families and migrant communities.

The first interview focused on growing up, family, gender and generational relationships, roles and conflicts, as well as on strategies to deal with personal and family crisis. We attempted to understand how families embedded in their socio-historical and cultural contexts establish communication frames for conjugal relations, ties between parenting persons and children, among siblings and other relatives and how these distinctions are behaviourally constructed on an ongoing basis. The second interview sought to record gendered narratives, sexual experiences and intimacy, marriage, and spousal relationships at different levels: models, needs, aspirations, and idioms of distress. The third interview was conducted to explore intra and inter-group comparisons

about gender, parenting, spousal, and family relationships; negotiation processes of multiple frames guiding interactive behaviour; as well as solutions and strategies of cultural continuity and transformation in family and gender values and practices. In the Portuguese migratory context, as we will show, the two types of migrant families studied adopt or are presented with alternative modes of organizing family lives (in particular marital and generational relationships), and this sometimes leads to tensions both within the family and in relations with the receiving society. We thus questioned whether such tensions could be experienced as double binds.

Supported by several semi-structured guides adjusted to the respondents' positioning in the family life cycle, the interview process followed a strong biographical orientation, thus providing the interlocutors with incentives to elaborate on their life-stories. The interviews elicited not only contexts, actions and strategies, but also information on how the biographers subjectively experienced them in order to construct meaningful memories and self-narratives.

Aspiring to companionship and recognition in marriage: new challenges for Indo-Mozambican migrant women

The forefathers of our Indo-Mozambican respondents migrated from Gujarat to Mozambique during the 19th century. Following decolonization, the nationalization process implemented in this territory and the civil war that ensued in the mid-1970s led to a peak in Indian emigration in the early 1980s. Most Hindu families chose Portugal as their destination. Men belonging to mason and carpenter castes soon became active in construction; the remaining castes invested in hawking in street markets across the country or opened businesses in traditional retail trade.

Hindu family relations, as reconstructed in Portugal, involve reciprocity and hierarchy. Parents invest work in their children, and instil into them the moral

responsibility to ensure economic support and hierarchical respect (in their own old age). Men are charged with the material sustenance of their family and the protection of its women; reproductive work and care of the husband and other family members are the primary responsibilities attributed to women. All members of the extended family share the responsibility for the upkeep of the 'reputation' associated to 'the family name'.

The last decade, however, was marked by unprecedented change. Women are no longer economically inactive agents. Their entry into the labour market (especially in the cleaning sector) was a widespread adaptation strategy to the precarious professional situation of men as a result of a prolonged labour crisis in the Portuguese construction industry. While they avoided confronting their male partners with their failure towards their gender-based responsibilities, these women gained an increased negotiating power against the pressures of kin, caste, and ethno-religious networks. They also won access to social intercultural capital which offered them new possibilities to express their own selves and construct alternative conceptions of the social world (Trovão, Ramalho & David, 2015).

A number of mothers, influenced by Portuguese middle-class values, began promoting a less-differentiating gender pattern in their offspring's development of academic skills. The cross-boundary positional moves imposed by their productive role also afford them self-confidence about their own qualities as 'cultural workers' (Erel, 2009). As a result, efforts towards bi-referential cultural subjectivities have been integrated into their caregiving performances.

A slow transformation of arranged marriage to a parent-assisted agreement necessary to preserve class, caste and family identities was reflected in the consideration given to the individual preference of our respondents in choosing a partner. Additionally, they also began to aspire to a more effective marital relationship, which would include

friendship, companionship, and mutual respect. These expectations however are still deeply frustrated by husbands who remain rooted in traditional attitudes of satisfying such emotional needs with other men.

Further dissatisfaction is often experienced as the result of an unbalanced relationship whereby the husband fulfils the requests of his mother and establishes a relationship of veneration and obedience towards her, thereby increasing his wife's frustration and jealousy. Nonetheless, most interviewees tend to excuse their husbands for this distress. In line with the conflictual mother-in-law/daughter-in-law framework embedded in multiple cultural traditions, they usually adopt another explanation according to which the rivalry and envy that potentially characterize this relationship originates with the mother-in-law.

In the beginning, she treated me like a daughter. But the mother-in-law cannot stand to see her son's happiness with her daughter-in-law. She'll fill her son's head with poison. (Ratan, 42 years old)

I believe that destiny is written. My marriage was already decided. All my problems with my husband, I call this jealousy. My mother-in-law has the evil eye on me. (Lakhu, 51 years old)

According to these women, physical and psychosocial distress is a result of destiny (linked to moral actions from past lives) and evil influences. Moreover, a magical-cosmic involvement impacts on individual destiny and affects everyday relationships and situations. In the case of marital distress, the most sought after community-based solutions are the houses of worship in which a woman, chosen by the mother goddess as a temporary vessel, enables her to communicate with human beings. Besides providing a therapeutic forum, female possession performances constitute a divinatory device which provides an aetiology of suffering. The diagnosis is invariably similar: the cause can be

found in the fact that some deity or ancestor has not been properly worshipped. Magical retribution resulting from situations in which the sufferers themselves had maligned others is also a common cause. However, envy (by close relatives) is believed to be the major driving force behind processes of malignant influence. While appeasing the suffering of its devotees, the divine power itself highlights the hidden and ambivalent dimension of kinship relations as sources of human distress.

‘The problem is that both husband and wife have a powerful mother inside them’

The childhood memories of their offspring stress the physical and emotional closeness and the gratifying relation between Hindu mothers and their young children. They also evoke mothering pressures towards containing feelings of aggression or resentment so that they don’t disrupt the familial emotional matrix, while fostering a way of relating that is very sensitive to the needs of the others. Initiating a developmental pathway to ‘an autonomous related self’ [2] (Kagitçibasi, 1996, 2005, p. 14) children internalize the notions of shame and family pride. They learn that the respect attached to the family's name depends on their individual acts. Urmila and Anand’s words express both a contextual ethic and an experiential structuring of the self that is highly relational:

She (a close friend) ran away to marry the boy. Everyone’s eyes were on her.

I couldn’t talk to her. They will think I will run away too. It would be too great shame for my family. (Urmila, 25 years old)

If I want to go visit a cousin of my father with whom my family is angry, I can’t because I’m dishonoring my family (Anand, 28 years old)

This structuring process of the self through which relatedness and autonomy do coexist is also strongly mediated by hierarchical notions. In each family cycle, all subjects are positioned as either hierarchically superior or inferior to other family members based on kinship and gender criteria. These hierarchical relationships are internalized and

expressed through kinship terms, forms of appropriation of space, differential etiquette behaviors, responsibilities and expectations, as well as through rituals and oral traditions. Simultaneously, different emotional investments are associated to hierarchical family relations through verbal and non-verbal communication processes. For instance, a congruent interactive communication with its hierarchical structural frame in which a subordinate acts with deference to his superior that, in turn, protects his subordinate may be accompanied by non verbal aggressive feelings or, alternatively, by an affective empathy between them. Therefore, any relationship depends on a balance, not necessarily consistent, between the language of structural hierarchy and the emotional quality of the hierarchical intimacy relationships (Kakar, 1978, 1989; Hsu, 1985; Roland, 1988). Shefali provides us a personal reflection on this balance:

When a mother-in-law speaks positively to her subordinate and dutiful daughter-in-law, this does not mean that they are true friends. In my community, when someone wants to hurt another, they usually become deferential so that the other won't be suspicious. (Shefali, 28 years old)

The interactive communication between men and women within the family is another glaring example of the ambiguous balance between overt and more covert structural hierarchical languages and their emotional qualities. The family hierarchical framework is male-oriented; women are deferential and subordinate to men. However, their symbolic-religious powers are viewed as 'superior': women are often seen as potential divine agents, granted special powers to promote family and community development. In parallel, mothers exert a structuring influence on the self-development of their children, while maintaining the symbiotic emotional mode of relating with them (Kakar, 1978). In turn, sons and daughters are raised with a deeply internalized stance of

eneration towards their mothers. Expressions such as ‘to my children, I am more than a goddess’ are overtly communicated both privately and publicly.

Although parity is part of their ideal construction of gender relations, our respondents produce their own gender identity asymmetrically, thus triggering the reproduction of gender inequalities. A contradictory image of themselves is transmitted to children both at verbal and nonverbal levels, as well as through actions. Simultaneously, mothers actively participate in the internalization process of asymmetrical and complementary gender behaviour. Since the honour of men and families significantly depends on female moral and sexual behaviour, they often stimulate their adolescent sons to monitor and control the conduct of young sisters and cousins. This ‘policing’ (Dywer, 2000, p. 479) appears to operate as a mothering strategy through which their sons’ masculine ethno-cultural identity can be maintained. In turn, mothers explicitly advise their daughters not to engage in erotic relationships before marriage. Despite their own negative or ambivalent experiences within extended households, mothers prepare their daughters to ‘care’ for a new family and to act according to the expectations of deference and subordination which dominate over emotional intimacy in the early years of a young woman’s marriage.

The following narratives reveal how accumulated inconsistencies underlying the mother-daughter communication can be experienced as double binds or confusing messages, which are progressively integrated in the inner feelings and behaviour displayed by daughters. Furthermore, they show how the construction of femininity is inter-related and responds to the way in which masculinity is built, leading to a progressive process of *schismogenesis* driven by complementary attitudes.

Within my father's family, my brothers and cousins eat first, while I stay in the kitchen. And they like to give me orders. One day I answered back at

them. My mother just pulled me into the kitchen and said: ‘You can’t dishonour all the women of this family’. This public obedience to men is a bit confusing especially coming from my own mother, who always battled against those things. (Ekta, 23 years old)

Male domination over women has been a problem for many of us. Sometimes I talk to my mother: ‘I’m upset with Anand’ and she tells me: ‘Your husband is upset with you’. And I argue and argue. She just says: ‘Women must not stand up to their husbands’. You know, I still tend to agree with that. (Dina, 27 years old)

Meanwhile, Hindu mothers are very much committed to the successful social integration of their offspring into Portuguese society. Therefore, they often promote various forms of cross-boundary identification and attachment in emergent generations by negotiating through caregiving ‘what count[s] as ethnically specific resources’ (Erel, 2009, p. 149) with that which constitutes cross-cutting and hybrid resources. Their children’s ability to act appropriately and differentially within distinct contexts and relationships actualizes what Ramanujan terms the ‘multiple diglossia’ featuring ‘context-sensitive’ cultures (1990, p. 57). However, the autonomy to compartmentalise does coexist with relatedness. As suggested by Sita and Jay’s marriage stories, when family connectedness competes with other equally vital relationship a conflicting impasse may be experienced.

Like many Hindu young people, Sita (27 years old) expressed her preference ‘to only marry the person I really loved’. Influenced by their non-Hindu Portuguese friends, she also found it ‘acceptable to be in a relationship before marriage’ (albeit in an ambivalent fashion since her marriageability, as well as that of her siblings, would risk declining). She fell in love with a ‘baglo’ [white] friend but her decision to marry for love

is constantly disturbed by the fear of losing her parents' love and ruining the family reputation. Jay (31 years old) always claims a positive hyphenated identity – that of 'Portuguese Hindu'. Despite the rapid diversification of family/household structures that occurred in Portuguese society (even among his best friends), he finds it extremely difficult to remain with his Indian wife and her child from a previous marriage. According to his internalized values, his love marriage entails 'shame and harm to the family honour'.

In fact, ethnography shows that sons tend to develop their masculinity and gendered conceptions of marriage in a more traditional fashion. After a temporal period for courtship and romance that they also desire, sons emphasize the integration of their wives within the extended family and especially their compatibility with their mothers, more than actual companionship and emotional relationship with their own wife.

I thought Bhavika could fit into my family. If in future there is a need, my mother doesn't mind that she works as long as she doesn't neglect her duties as a daughter-in-law and contributes to the household. (Dipesh, 22 years old)

Conversely, daughters construct their own femininity and expected marriage patterns based on more conflicting feelings. They have to negotiate the marital ideals of compatibility, parity, and attraction they share with Portuguese friends with their mother's ambivalent messages of duty and sacrifice *versus* companionship and mutual respect. The paradigm of love marriage propagated by the Hindi film industry, itself strongly oriented by the key ingredients of a Western romance (Mishra, 2002), adds to all this.

I am the sort of person who finds it difficult not to cook and clean for my husband and his family because my mother always taught me to do so. (Javanti, 32 years old)

I grew up watching Indian films with their expectation of a romantic marriage. My husband secretly sides with me, but he does not dare openly oppose his mother. (Ridhi, 23 years old)

Someone has to jump out the window, me or my mother-in-law. My mother asks me not to be so demanding because husbands cannot tolerate too much open assertiveness. (Jaia, 27 years old)

Mothers' communication with their daughters and sons is culturally mediated by community networks. Mothers attempt to elaborate their own gender dilemmas in close overlap with the gendered constructions, practices and expectations of significant peers. By inciting sons to a more 'traditional' marriage and daughters 'to arrange love' accordingly to family and community norms of filial duty and endogamous marriage, mothering dynamics illustrate the adaptive and creative potential of contradictory communication (Sinha, 2014). Indeed, the duplicitous emphasis on 'love' and 'duty' can upset the particular balance of the husband-wife relationship hierarchy where women are expected to observe the etiquette of female-male deferential behaviour and where, as mothers, they are experienced as unusually powerful in the male and female psyche due to the intense mothering of children and life-long close attachment to them.

'So strong with *fidji* (child), so weak with *pai-de-fidj* (father of the child)': Cape Verdean migrant women disillusioned by 'Creole men'

Significant social changes have accompanied the centuries-old migratory history from Cape Verde, a country whose population resides mainly outside of its borders, in particular in Europe (in countries such as Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland), the USA, and Angola (Batalha & Carling 2008). Among

these changes, the intensification of Cape Verdean female migration indicates that the male no longer performs the traditional role of sole family breadwinner.

The majority of our respondents arrived in Portugal with the goal of improving their families' welfare. Some reunited with the father of their children. Others, younger, unmarried, and childless, migrated in order to help members of their close family. Others still, single mothers, left their children in the care of relatives and finance their education – either 'back home' or in Portugal (when family reunification is finally achieved). Lastly, there are those, with or without children, who emigrated to pursue higher education and improved career perspectives; however, they often only found work in the cleaning and domestic work sector. Those students who do complete their degrees already anticipate a future outside Portugal. Many Cape Verdeans live in rundown neighbourhoods where life is, as they themselves say, 'highly problematic'. Low income levels, unemployment, academic failure, and youth delinquency are common. These neighbourhoods have such a bad reputation that locals often experience difficulty finding employment. The experience of racial discrimination often engenders resentment and a rebelliousness which validates the juvenile delinquency which caused the bad reputation in the first place.

Despite the difficulties experienced in terms of economic integration and social recognition, our interviewees agreed that migration to Portugal did not bring any significant change to family relationships. Resulting from the encounter between European traders and West African slaves, Cape Verdean family structures have been simultaneously influenced by a patriarchal family model inspired by Catholic values and a family setting marked by the volatility of marital relations. While the authority of the father and the pre-nuptial virginity of brides tend to be projected to a more or less distant past, family patterns such as co-parenting, priority of the mother-child relation over the

conjugal one, and the extended family as a meaningful unit still remain significant (Rodrigues, 2007; Akesson, Carling & Drotbohm, 2012).

While amplified by migratory circulation, experiences of co-maternity are supported and legitimized by pre-migration practices of co-parenting and child shifting. Children are nonetheless considered ‘an individual's wealth’ and a ‘long-term investment’, especially for their mothers. A high number of children do not grow up with their father. The absence of the biological father does not translate into the lack of male role models, which are guaranteed by uncles, grandfathers, or older cousins. However, the ‘head of the family’ is usually the mother.

Concerning conjugality, cohabitation is prevalent. Men may have more than one female partner at the same time, while women must be serial monogamists. These practices justify some of the tactics deployed by our respondents to ‘secure’ their *pai-de-fidj* in order to ‘avoid causing problems for the kids’ and to postpone, as far as possible, the ‘loss of respect’ that befalls on a woman whose *casa (sem home) é um navio kebrod* (lit. ‘house without a man is a ship adrift’).

Would you believe that in all these years he had three women? I forgave him, I don't know why. (...). Because a woman who doesn't have a man around isn't respected. We always hear this from our mothers (Lurdes, 37 years old)
People think that we are less than them just because we live alone with our children. I made my decision. No more men. It was very painful, something that I don't want to repeat (Luisa, 48 years old)

While the disappointment with the *pai-de-fidj* can lead to the search for another partner (who usually accepts the woman's children from previous relationships), repeated disappointment often supports the decision to build a life focused around the children. Investment in the mother-child relationship results in meaning, self-esteem, and identity

fulfilment, while the male/female relationship guarantees neither material security nor respectability.

For Cape Verdeans, meanings and solutions for psychosocial distress often involve supernatural phenomena rooted in a Christian spiritual repertoire in which values of suffering and religious responsibility for the wellbeing of others remain important (Beijers, 2004). The religious-civic activism promoted by some of our respondents (mainly in mother, infant, and elderly caregiving) also provides identity compensation for the impracticality of a marital relationship.

‘The problem is that men are looking for a mother in every woman’

The children of our Cape Verdean respondents often mention the household of their maternal grandmother, in which they were raised by their mothers and close female relatives while being temporarily looked after in other family households related by networks of exchange and solidarity through an informal delegation of child care. Two respondents experienced co-parenting by foster mothers (grandmothers, aunts, or godmothers) for years. Despite the diversity in the living arrangements of children, sons and daughters share the same social construction of mothering figures as providers of children’s emotional, material, and educational needs. Mothers are described as the ones who ‘give it all up for the benefit of their kids’. They are ‘both mother and father’, ‘full of strength’, ‘full of everything’, the ‘first and foremost of all’ and a safe haven, where one will always find ‘an open door’. In tandem, the representations of both biological and foster mothers often include traits of malleability and a wide-ranging generosity. Both types of mother, in turn, have expectations of a reciprocal (emotional and material) attachment on the part of their real and fostered adult children.

Even when fathers (or other male role models) are present, mothering figures exert a strong influence on the gender identity processes. From an early age, children hear their mothers say: 'Women put children in the world, women and men are not equal.' While biological mothering and the mother-child bond acquires a higher centrality in the construction of femininity, sexual and reproductive performances are closely associated to masculinity.

Creole men cannot resist a woman, whether in Cape Verde, the Netherlands, the USA, France, or Portugal. They cannot eat from the same dish all the time.

Mothers themselves instil this in their sons' heads. (Antónia, 47 years old)

Men need to have many wives and children from many mothers. Their own mothers, from very early on, tell them: a true man cannot be man to just one woman. When a man avoids all that, they'll immediately say he's weak.

(Susana, 26 years old)

Early sexual activity marks a rapid transition of the young into adulthood. The first pregnancy of a teenager, while producing a ritualized crisis which can include threats of expulsion from home and corporal punishment, is rapidly accepted by her mother and close female relatives. In this new phase, mothers concentrate on the welfare of their daughters and grandchildren, rather than on the daughters' marital situation. In this sense, mother-daughter communication emphasizes the primacy of the mother-child bond over marital ties in the construction of a female-person.

I took a beating from my mother. Nothing happened to him. When the baby was born, my mother told me: you're a mother now, you're grown-up, your son is your life. The milk you'll give your child is the first of many. A mother's responsibility is to breastfeed her children throughout their lives.

(Neusa, 22 years old)

When the first child of their adolescent sons is born, Cape Verdean mothers appreciate the proof of masculinity, but they excuse the young fathers from parental obligations. They often justify this because of the greater maturity of girls compared to boys of the same age. Some interlocutors also mentioned that sons take longer to reach maturity, and experience difficulty in breaking with their maternal homes.

My mother told my brother: ‘Don’t worry, you still need to grow’. I never forgot those words. It is often said that girls gain maturity earlier than boys. Indeed, it is also said that men remain their mothers’ breastfed babies until they die. (Cristina, 25 years old)

The mother-daughter communication pattern defines the first mother-child bond as the entrance into adulthood, reinforcing the self-esteem of daughters – ‘you’re mothers now’, ‘you’re grown-up’, ‘you provide the example, they (brothers and fathers of *fiji*) do not care.’ In parallel, the ambivalent communication to sons who have just become fathers – ‘you’re men/fathers’ and ‘you still need to grow’ produces a double conflicting impasse both in the content of the communication, and in the mother-son relational frame. While the mother-child bond is experienced as a relationship between adults in the case of mothers and daughters (who are also mothers), sons ‘remain their mothers’ breastfed babies until they die’ because mothers minimize the relational transformation introduced by their sons’ fatherhood, which presupposes a different type of mother-son interaction. This is further enhanced by the mothers’ willingness to provide care through food to their adult sons, and to host them in their houses in times of transition between partners.

However, when a son has more than one female partner at the same time and starts having multiple children, his mother condemns such behaviour and stresses the suffering that it causes upon the women and children involved (often evoking their own shared biographical experience). Nevertheless, the mother-son interaction often expresses a

duplicity which hinders the detection of the model to which the son should conform. For example, the moral message – ‘don't do it, it's not right’, ‘don't mistreat your woman like your relatives have done’ – is partially invalidate and/or contradicted by a concomitant message that excuses the son who does not act according to the previous demand – ‘you're like your male relatives’, ‘if I don't mistreat them, I won't mistreat you’.

My mother always warned me: ‘Pay attention to what you're doing, because it's not right. You know what I suffered. You know what you suffered growing up almost fatherless. Do you want to repeat what your father did to you?’ (Paulo, 32 years old)

You look around and you say, my grandpa was like that, my dad was like that, my brothers, they have two, three, four [women]... and then you look at your own son. I don't mistreat my own. I can't do it. (Paulo's mother, 48 years old)

Mothers' double binding is strongly developed in relation to the moralities and anxieties prevailing in their immediate cultural context, which is not homogeneously ambivalent in terms of gender ideals and practices. Mothers update the constant gossip and public criticism especially found among Cape Verdean women in relation to male simultaneous relationships. However, in line with their fellow countrymen and countrywomen, they also recognize the role of Cape Verdean masculine self's ideal conception – that of a potent womanizer – in the shaping of a man's reputation and desire. Paraphrasing their own voices, self-distanciation from and against significant peers produces acute identity vulnerability. A son afraid to follow his desires – or seen to be controlled by a single woman – is typically depreciated either in Cape Verde or abroad. Similarly, mothers transmit to their sons the ideal of the responsible father, according to well-established values. However, when their sons do not fit this ideal, they accept the fact easily. Although aware of fatherhood obligations, they do not advise their daughters

to make use of judicial authority (to force '*pai-de-fidj* contributions') because this can be interpreted as a failure in the performance of their daughters' maternal responsibilities.

By defining both male and female ideal conceptions as motherhood and fatherhood responsibilities in relationship to one another and in complementary to each other, mothers-offspring interactions actively participate in the process of *schismogenesis* through which Cape Verdean men and women tend to adopt preponderantly complementary communication among themselves.

We have those old ideals of man and woman. Men have to flaunt freedom and independence to women. A man cannot tie himself to a single woman. There are other targets around. (Miguel, 22 years old)

I won't force a man, who knows that he has children, to give money to them, never in my life ! What would people think of me? That I cannot take care of my children? I would die of shame. (Dulce, 33 years old)

In the attempt to spare 'their daughters [suffering] later what they suffered', mothers also encourage them to differentiate themselves from the previous female generation. Indeed, many respondents grew up listening to their mothers saying that 'school is the best way to earn a livelihood and not to take abuse from men'. Their own mothers, however, push them (using arguments such as long-distance Cape Verdean nationalism) to choose partners who share the same origin, which tends to perpetuate similar paths of distress. Even in the case of those daughters who hold higher social and academic capitals, whose narratives often try to combine the values of 'the old days' with 'progressive ideals', they take on their children's upbringing without the contribution of the children's father and try to forgive their partners' infidelities. Nonetheless, the very attempt to rethink their own mother's mothering practices may include some transformative potential.

Our mothers brought their sons food in bed, they washed their feet if necessary. We don't want to do that with our sons. (Celeste, 32 years old)

Portugal, in contrast with many European countries, presents very low levels of media coverage and public discussion of migrant families and has not adopted progressive gender policies (Trovão, 2014). Nevertheless, driven by various assumptions about how migrant gender and family identities generate inclusion or exclusion and contribute to the reproduction of migrants' vulnerability, social welfare programs increasingly seek to intervene in certain sexual, mothering, and childrearing practices found among migrants of African origin through specific technologies of care, responsibility, and morality (Pusseti & Barros, 2012).

Non-normative use of one's sexuality and fertility, teenage pregnancies, and children from different fathers – especially when the person concerned is a young immigrant (or a child of immigrants) of African origin who lives in a 'problematic' neighbourhood – can lead to labels of maternal 'deficit' or 'irresponsibility'. Although their main mission is protecting mothers and children from economic poverty and racial discrimination, social welfare providers do not always problematize the extent to which their interventions are selectively racialized, nor the damage caused to women and children when they devalue their internalized constructions of motherhood and childhood.

Converging with several studies on migrant mothering experiences (Moro, Neuman & Réal, 2008; Ingleby, Chiarenza, Devillé & Kotsioni, 2012), our findings indicate that many Cape Verdean mothers are subject to contradictory demands which can be conceived as double binds. The pressure of co-ethnics in Cape Verde and their neighbourhoods of residence in Portugal contributes to the reconstruction of certain 'patterns' which sanction early sexual activity, teenage pregnancies, and volatile marital experiences. Poorer mothers in particular are confronted with the need to provide

financially for themselves and their children. Integration problems and social isolation, combined with the aggregated effects of racial discrimination, can make it harder for them to successfully combine work and mothering responsibilities (Wall & São José, 2004). Understandably, they become anxious about being seen as ‘bad mothers’ (Akesson, Carling & Drotbohm, 2012) by their own communities and child welfare programs. Further, their encounters with the Portuguese health services, whose dominant biomedical model ignores cultural differences, often increase their anxieties with regard to motherhood (Challinor, 2012). Fearing that their children might be taken away from them because they are jobless and their mothering practices do not fit the maternal carework model valued by paediatric services, some of our respondents tend to only seek social welfare and health programs when they reach severe stages of material deprivation and disease which subsequently increase the probability of losing the guard of their children.

Concluding remarks

The mothers we worked with define themselves and communicate with their children through double bind expressions which are consistent with their socio-cultural contexts of belonging. Their cultural ecologies serve not only as a vehicle for the expression of their own ambivalence, but also offer them cultural resources for an attempt of elaboration/resolution. These processes, however, cannot be read as mere specificities of both case-studies.

Several theories within Psychological Anthropology have pointed to the existence of three dialectically intertwined levels through which ambivalence structures human life: the (structural-dynamic) ontogenetic process of the individual self; meaning construction; and social organization (Schwartz, White & Lutz, 1992; Lindholm, 2001). Although apparently conflicting, both individuation and autonomy as relatedness and belonging are

basic human needs (Fromm, 1941; Fromm & Xirau, 1968). Therefore, the processual construction of the self is based on a sequence of identifications and de-identifications, emotional investments and de-investments in people, meanings, categories, social positions and groups aiming an increasing acquire of relational self-esteem and scope of action (Erikson, 1950, 1968). At the same time, to follow Freud's final synthesis on the issue of ambivalence (1930) developed by Erikson (1950, 1968, 1980), Roheim (1968) and Devereux (1985), the self's construction process is also oriented towards the elaboration of tensions (deep-rooted urges to love and to rage, to merge and to separate, to cooperate and to dominate, etc.) inherent to the self-other relationship which is structurally ambivalent.

Social systems, as collective organizations, are no more without tensions, conflicts and contradictions than the individuals who live within them, as Bateson pointed out by focusing on the constant conflicting interaction of opposing socio-cultural forces (Bateson, 1936). Meaning systems, operating at an intermediate level where symbolic objectivation and subjectification processes take place (Obeyesekere, 1990), connect the individual and the social levels of human ambivalence. Meaning production especially aims to provide cultural solutions to issues on which ambivalence is maximized, such as primordial bio-psycho-relational experiences, cross-relationships between generations and gender, or interpersonal and intergroup identity comparisons. Moreover, as Devereux (1967) has remarked, an excessive cultural unanimity or an obsessive use of binary oppositions regarding these issues may be conceived as culturally specific efforts to deny the ambivalence they trigger. Within the multiple cultural frames guiding our respondents, as everywhere, the production of meaning is never complete, definitive, and consistent; rather, it is an ambivalent and unsatisfying effort, which may even attempt to deny the constitutive and structuring ambivalence of human life.

Taking this analytical framework as a crucial touchpoint to return to ethnographic interpretation, it is worth underlying that in both case studies the interplay of double bind mothers-offspring interactions with the multi-layered cultural contexts within which they take place contributes to a gendered process of complementary *schismogenesis* which produces contrasting effects on the self-construction and expectations of sons and daughters. The development of a more 'traditional' Indian masculinity could not exist without subordinate and dutiful wives/daughters-in-law. Similarly, the Cape Verdean male ideal of the womanizer could not prevail without female peers that forgive the infidelities of their children's fathers and assume the responsibility for the subsistence and education of children. Nevertheless, what seems more meaningful in both ethnographies is the way in which mothering ambivalent communication to daughters suggests a potential connection between double bind and dynamics of change, while producing a stabilizing effect the in the case of sons.

As we have shown, double bind interactions within the mother-child relationship are connected to a desire for change which comes from a redefinition of women-mothers' ideals to access different forms of gender relationships. Concomitantly, the conjugal relationships which are most in need of change are those in which mothering double bind messages most occur and the ones most resistant to change. However, these empirical findings should not be mistaken as a statement that double binds always express an inability to modify an important relation. Pushed by their mothers to choose partners who share the same origin and simultaneously encouraged to differentiate themselves from the previous female generation, Cape Verdeans daughters feel confident enough to invest in subsequent marital relationships and are willing to risk losing or discarding the relationships in the process. Moreover, the very act of rethinking their own mother's mothering practices with regards to sons is in itself potentially transformative. In turn, the

Indo-Mozambicans daughters are more dependent on the spousal relationship upon which double-bind messages take place. However, mothers' emphasis on the over male dominance and the covert powers of women constitutes a persuasive source of novel meaning processes through which daughters may fulfil expected female roles and negotiate personal goals of companionship and parity.

As discussed in both case-studies, double bind communicative dynamics can be amplified by migratory processes which particularly compel migrants to rethink and reconfigure their cultural constructions of self and family. While the Indo-Mozambican adherence to a strong corporate family ethos (i.e. promoting extended family relations and values, family relatedness and parent-assisted marriage) does not create conflict with Portuguese dominant values and integration policies, certain patterns of sexuality, motherhood and childhood found among Cape Verdeans migrant families do not correspond to the culture-specific moral subjectivities and assumptions of social services providers. Concomitantly, Cape Verdean mother's caregiving practices have become a primary focus of ethics and politics of care aiming at educating them into persons capable of taking care of themselves and their children.

The implications of these findings may be significant regarding both theory and practice. Although Bateson's double bind theory has been discredited in the discussion of the relationship between schizophrenia and family interactions, his dynamic theory about communication enables us to highlight the creative potential of double binds in differentiating, changing, and stabilizing family and gender cultural systems. A careful discussion on the culture-specific moral subjectivities of professionals who simultaneously aim to give support and orientation for integrating immigrant families and deal with the diversity of female and male identity constructions and self-other relationships is also imperative.

Notes

[1] This article is part of distinct research projects funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, 'From Mozambique to Portugal, and to other opportunities. A study of transnational families' (2002-2005), 'Different Children of Different Gods. Uses of religion in migrant strategies of social insertion' (2004-2007) and 'Immigrant families in dispute: internal agencies, media debates and political practices' (2009-2012), under the direction of the author with the collaboration of several PhD and master students.

[2] As proposed by Kagitcibasi (2005, p. 412-413), a model which involves a fourfold combination of the two dimensions of interpersonal distance (relatedness - separateness) and agency (autonomy-heteronomy) leads to four different types of self and familial contexts: the heteronomous-related self, high in relatedness but low in autonomy, which develops in the family context of total interdependence with obedience orientation; the autonomous-separate self, high in autonomy but low in relatedness, which develops in the family context of independence with self-reliance orientation; the autonomous-related self, high in both relatedness and autonomy, which develops in the family context of psychological interdependence with both control and autonomy orientation; and the heteronomous-separated self which has been observed in hierarchical neglecting families with rejecting and obedience-oriented parenting.

Funding

This article was supported by the FCT (Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology) through UID/ANT/04038/2013 - CRIA (Centre for Research in Anthropology).

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