

Migrant women from the global South in the pandemic context in Portugal

Renata Maria Franco Ribeiroⁱ 

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

1

Migrant women from the global South in the pandemic context in Portugal

Abstract

This report is part of the field notes of my research of the master's degree in anthropology in the years 2020 and 2021 in the parish of Vale do Amoreira in the Municipality of Moita (Portugal). We propose to analyze the paths and daily lives of Guinean women from the agency and networks with reflection of the female habitus that mobilizes social networks, acting in a framework of microfreedoms and microassistências at the heart of emancipation and citizenship, in the pandemic context of Covid-19. I would like to point out that these women have different migratory paths from societies with cultural codes of belonging, different sociability. We will bring the experiences of two participateers. The research took place in the field of migrations and transnationalism dialoguing with decolonial and feminist epistemologies. It was verified the participation and engagements of Guinean women in facing the constraints in migration and in times of crisis in the state Portuguese.

Keywords: Guinean women. Networks. Pandemic. Work. Everyday.

Mulheres migrantes do sul global no contexto pandêmico em Portugal

Resumo

Este relato faz parte das notas de campo da minha pesquisa do curso de mestrado em antropologia nos anos de 2020 e 2021 na freguesia Vale da Amoreira no Concelho de Moita (Portugal). Propomos analisar os percursos e cotidianos das mulheres guineenses a partir da agencia e redes com reflexo no *habitus feminino* que mobiliza as redes sociais, atuando num quadro de microliberdades e microassistências no cerne da emancipação e cidadania, no contexto pandemia da Covid-19. Destaco que estas mulheres possuem percursos migratórios distintos e oriundas de sociedades com códigos culturais de pertenças, sociabilidades diversas. Traremos as experiências de duas partícipes. A pesquisa se deu no campo das migrações e transnacionalismo dialogando com epistemologias decoloniais e feministas. Constatou-se a participação e engajamentos das mulheres guineenses no enfrentamento aos



constrangimentos na migração e em tempos de crise pandémica no estado português.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres guineenses. Redes. Pandemia. Trabalho. Cotidianos.

1 Introduction

2

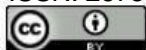
This paper proposes to narrate the journeys of Guinean women living in the neighborhood of Vale da Amoreira-Moita (Portugal), where we address the mobilization of agency and daily life, highlighting the survival strategies in the diaspora from a theoretical and conceptual framework that articulates agency, daily life, social networks and practices of sociability and belonging with a framework in the feminization of migration, transnationalism and the work context.

The participants of this research, as mentioned above, constitute distinct migratory trajectories, Guinea-Bissau/Portugal and Guinea-Bissau/Brazil/Portugal, who migrated for different motivations to continue their studies, to join their partners, for health treatment and in search of better life opportunities for themselves and their children.

Our participants between the ages of 34 and 53 have a history of organizing in local community-based, union and family networks since the first moment of the project to migrate.

The women in this research are from multi-ethnic societies. They organize themselves with diverse beliefs, values and belonging sharing common identities and knowledge that trigger the means of social transformation in the current pandemic context through the practices of affections, networks of solidarities, constituted even before arriving in Portugal (GODINHO, 2008).

The starting question was formulated in the following terms: How do Guinean women from the Vale da Amoreira neighborhood (Moita) use social networks to





reinterpret their practices and belonging, manage their daily lives in the relationship with Portuguese institutions and with the country of origin?

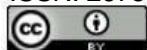
The relevance of this research is in the feminine potential, making use of capital and networks, managing their daily lives in times of crisis, considering that the Portuguese state cannot reach everyone with the mechanisms created with social assistance and decent working conditions..

Therefore, to expand the discussion of the feminization of migration, female protagonism, reconfiguration of networks and agency, focusing on the particular case of a group of Guinean women, they are women who are educated in distinct ethnic societies, in the country of origin of Guinea-Bissau. I emphasize that this research did not treat the personal and collective narratives of the participants as subaltern women, but rather respecting their trajectories, their cultural codes, knowledge and belonging, and how they reconfigured their networks in times of crisis.

My relationship with the Guinean community does not begin here in Portugal, it comes from my home country Brazil in the state of Ceará for various motivations and, especially academic as a former student of UNILAB-Ceará and, currently, extends to my academic and temporary work cycle, where I also have the opportunity to live in private and public with Guinean and Angolan women, At the same time that these women made themselves available to collaborate with the research, we built a reciprocal relationship of respect and admiration, and sometimes shared the constraints of precarious work conditions and the care of our children.

2 Methodology

To obtain the information, we asked questions of a personal, social, cultural, economic nature and other reflections that arose, considering the current situation at the global level, the Covid-19 pandemic, impacted the lives of people in different aspects, that is, the health and forms of sociability of all of us migrant women.





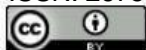
To understand these issues, we favored qualitative research allied with participant observation techniques, with data collection through interviews with a semi-structured guide and the construction of biographies (life stories), we opted for the methodological tools of ethnography with the paradigms of interpretativism, in which according to Oliveira (1996) enables a relationship of living and experiences in everyday life with the women participants, sharing their projects and actions, therefore, "Listening and Looking cannot be taken as totally independent faculties in the exercise of research" (OLIVEIRA, 1996, p. 32) .

In this perspective, it emphasizes the importance of subjective meanings, of relationships built in intimate coexistence, based on emotional ties, family, social relations, as symbolic actions, in the way Guinean women construct their own reality and narrative of experiences in their daily lives (GUEERTZ, 2008).

3 Results and Discussion

For the conceptual theoretical framework, the concept of networks is broad and diverse (CARLEIAL, 2007; FARIA, 2017), articulates functions, structures, and diverse interests, whether in the personal, individual, associative, or institutional sphere, at the level of family, social, affective, belonging, and cultural relationships, recreating relational practices and possibilities that cross historically constituted borders, creating and readapting personal-collective projects.

For Quintino (2004, p. 289), the already established networks contribute to the labor insertion process. They are the networks of mutual help and solidarity. These members provide guidance in the first moment at the place of departure and, later, at the place of reception (arrival), such as documentation, housing, and other directions for adaptation in the new society. The networks of belonging can be activated by subjects of an ethnic and family basis, for example, the network of Muslims that is reproduced in the





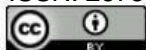
so-called minigrids, or by their relatives such as grandchildren and children, these establish family ties (QUINTINO, 2010).

The history of Guinean migrations is not recent, they have a history marked by networks of social relations (kinship, ethnic, family, neighborhood) from the country of origin (CÓ, 2004; QUINTINO, 2010; COSTA, 2016), and that social networks tend to play an important role in migration processes. As the project of migrating materializes as a personal project, but also a collective family one, we perceive, on the one hand, the dynamics that networks generate and, on the other hand, how social networks are created and how it has been reconfiguring such issues in times of pandemic crisis.

The participants of the research, Guinean women, experience in the personal-collective sphere, the impacts of inequalities, whether in social absence, education, health, the opportunity to work since the country of origin Guinea-Bissau (GOMES, 2010) and now experience in times of pandemic crisis in the Portuguese state, the precariousness of work, the right to protection of their health, their children and relatives, to have conditions to make the social isolation, which add other factors such as the stress of multitasking assigned to women.

According to Bourdieu (1980), we understand personal/individual agency within migratory social networks, as an individual attribute on a collective scale. In this way, we need to think about how the reinvention of collective social organizations involve connections, which cross the boundaries of groups and categories to meet their interests, whether in the socio-political and economic field, which gives to meet personal or collective interests to realize their life projects.

For Borges (2000, p. 367) "women are economic and social agents in which, through their daily experiences, they catalyze social change". In this scenario, women reorganized themselves in strategies of resistance in the care of their children, in commercial practices such as sales of clothing from the country of origin, food products such as dried shrimp, calabash, palm oil, fish, peanuts, and others.





According to Quintino (2004), the Guineans elaborate a package of ethnicity, sharing codes and available instruments that they use in their processes of symbolization of origin. Thus, it is important to highlight the catalyzing action of women in the creation and recreation in the way of being and doing in the diaspora.

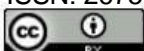
As the participant reports in the princess's garden, a place where women gather to trade:

The rules determine isolation, stay at home, I never stayed at home...imagine who is going to feed my children? If I say that I won't work because of the covid, the boss puts someone else in my place...a friend of mine who has been here longer managed to get other hours of work. With the schools closed I was a little lost, but everything came together later. And I got a few more hours of work, there are a lot of people out of work, I left my children with a nanny, I had to pay, of course...the big difficulty that pisses me off are the too many hours of work and the hour is small €4 (Manjaco participant, 38 years old, trained in human resources).

The narrative of the participant above shows this pandemic context and impacts on her daily life, how the measures of social distancing recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), reflect distinct impacts on the daily lives of the populations, and in this way, thinking about the place of disenfranchisement of poor, racialized, and migrant women, who basically occupy the place of all the responsibilities of the family and with children, were felt differently as: lost the partial or total capacity of their incomes, or had to accept more working hours even though the income is low, schools and day care centers closed, due to social isolation measures, all this needed to be thought and managed by the women mothers, grandmothers, aunts, student workers to "follow normally" their survival projects in the migration.

I have been living here in the valley for a short time, almost three years. I first migrated to Brazil-Ceará to study, and in February 2020 I arrived here. Because of the pandemic, my partner was not able to enter the country, I am here with a 4 year old son. Everything is very difficult, the working hours are different, I have to leave at 6 in the morning, then I leave at 2 pm, arrive home at 10 pm, then I am out of work. I still don't have a resident permit, so everything is more complicated. I also have family here, and I have a godmother who takes care of my son when I work.).

In the work context and in the daily experiences in the Vale da Amoreia (Moita) neighborhood of the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Guinean women create and recreate





possibilities to overcome the constraints beyond the symbolic borders of the State and Nation, built in a perspective in the social and transnational field that keeps them connected to the networks of origin and recreated in the diaspora.

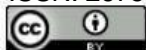
It is possible to observe in the relationships of these women, as mentioned by the participant above, that to manage their daily lives they mobilize their networks, whether of kinship, family, and solidarity. The support of other women in their daily lives is fundamental to be able to manage the hours outside the home to perform work activities that arise even if informally.

I bring the interview by Evelyn Regner, Lusa President of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality, "the current pandemic is "a women's crisis", this reflects the evident impacts on the lives of the most vulnerable people who, on a global scale, are women, because they are disproportionately impacted by reinforcing poverty and precarious work".

It is true that the policies on a global and local level are still not able to include everyone in order to minimize the impacts caused by social inequalities that cross gender, race, and class and that have been accentuated in the Covid-19 pandemic scenario. It is important to reflect that we cannot universalize women and their life projects, but rather understand how these women readapt their resistance strategies in the diaspora.

Guinean women in their societies of origin are simultaneously agents of education, of family tradition, of transmission of values through orality, of economic agents responsible for managing household expenses, that is, Guinean women assume dual roles of managing and activating resources for their survival and that of their dependents, as well as the keeper in the education of their children (GOMES, 2019).

We understand that the networks thought and managed by women, are more fluid networks, from mini networks in the neighborhood, family, as women of the same ethnicity, religion, work, neighborhood and, if necessary outside these networks, when





built a relationship in the private, these forms of organization, in the case of women of other nationalities.

4 Final considerations

8

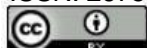
The problematic from which the research was outlined focused on understanding the mobilization of social networks of Guinean women, highlighting the practices of sociability, agency and reconfiguration of networks in times of global pandemic crisis, in which women were impacted in different proportions.

It is important to reflect on the agency of these women in negotiating and coping with the multiple difficulties experienced in the pandemic scenario, activating their personal and collective resources, breaking with the pre-established roles in both the private and public spheres, rising against norms reproduced by patriarchy and sexism, constant in the dominant discourses, both in the society of the country of origin (departure) and in the host society (arrival).

According to Marinucci (2020, p. 2), "the reduction of women as passive agents in the migratory act is increasingly questionable and obsolete," we must consider the motivations for migrating, even if women migrate to join their families, children and husband, these women act directly in the migratory project articulating emancipation and autonomy in the mobilization of networks.

The social networks are essential in the migratory context of Guinean women and, above all, in the social and labor insertion in the place of arrival, as well as in the strengthening of sociability practices that reflect education and belonging updated in the diaspora, as a perspective of building citizenship between two worlds.

We emphasize that on the margins of the Portuguese state, these women recreated their collective practices of micro-resistances at work, in the education of their children, in informal commerce, activating resources within the neighborhood, with relatives, and outside the Portuguese state with family members to minimize the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in their daily lives.





Thus, it is relevant to think of intervention plans as public policies in a perspective of inclusion and gender equality and access to microcredits for the promotion of activities that mobilize commercial practices managed by Guinean women.

We reflect that the challenge of being a migrant and African woman is faced daily and has been accentuated in the pandemic, both for newly arrived women and for women who have been living here for some time. The networks of resistance of these women are formed in solidarity between women in the affirmation of their autonomy and participation in the society of origin and in the society of arrival.

References

AGÊNCIA L. **Pandemia é uma crise das mulheres e aumentou a desigualdade de gênero**. Entrevista concedida a Lusa em 07 mar. 2021. Disponível em: <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2021/3/7/253245-pandemia-e-uma-crise-das-mulheres-e-aumentou-desigualdade-de-genero/>. Acesso em: 10 jan. 2022.

BOURDIEU, P. **Le capital social**. Notes provisoires. Actes de la Recherche in Sciences Sociales, 31: 2-3, 1980.

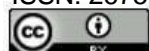
OLIVEIRA, R. C. de. O Trabalho do Antropólogo, Olhar, Ouvir, Escrever. **Revista de Antropologia**, v. 39, n. 1, p. 13-37, 1996. Disponível em: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/ra/article/view/111579>. Acesso em: 10 jan. 2022.

CARLEIAL, A. Cultura Migratória. XIII Encontro da Associação Brasileira de Estudos Populacionais, 13, 2002. **Anais...** Ouro Preto/MG-Brasil, 2002.

CÓ, J. **As associações das comunidades migrantes em Portugal e a sua participação no desenvolvimento do país de origem**: o caso dos guineenses, SOCIUS WP 12, Lisboa: ISEG, 2004.

COSTA, B. A. **Diáspora guineense como agente de desenvolvimento local**: o papel das Associações Guineenses em Portugal nos projetos de cooperação e desenvolvimento na Guiné-Bissau. Dissertação de Mestrado. Lisboa: IUL, 2016.

FARIA, G. J. Feminização dos Circuitos Migratórios: um diálogo entre o trabalho do Care, Redes Sociais e Processos de Desenvolvimento Social. **Revista Latino-Americana de Geografia e Gênero**, v. 10, n. 2, p. 24-41, 2019. Disponível em: <https://revistas.uepg.br/index.php/rlagg/article/view/13652>. Acesso em: 30 jun. 2022.





GEERTZ, C. **A interpretação das culturas**. Rio de Janeiro: LTC, 2008.

GODINHO, S. C. **Novos possíveis**: estratégias identitárias de mulheres oriundas da Guiné-Bissau em Portugal. Tese de Mestrado. Lisboa: ISCTE, 2008.

GOMES, P. As mulheres do setor informal: experiências da Guiné-Bissau. CONGRESSO DE ESTUDIOS AFRICANOS EN EL MUNDO IBÉRICO, 6., **Actas...** Las Palmas, Aquário, p.682- 700, 2010. Disponível em:

http://www.oi.acidi.gov.pt/docs/Revista_6/Migr6_Sec1_Art3.pdf. Acesso em: 30 jun. 2022.

MARINUCCI, R. Feminização das migrações? **REMHU - Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana**, v. 15, n. 29, p. 5-22, 2007. Disponível em:

<https://remhu.csem.org.br/index.php/remhu/issue/view/4>. Acesso em: 30 jun. 2022.

QUINTINO, M. C. R. Práticas associativas de guineenses, conexões transnacionais e cidadania incompleta. **Migrações**, v. 6, p. 81-102, 2010. Disponível em:

https://www.om.acm.gov.pt/documents/58428/183863/Migr6_Sec1_Art3.pdf/9ef68b94-7dc2-49f4-a067-6382b958463b. Acesso em: 30 jun. 2022.

QUINTINO, M. C. R. **Migrações e etnicidade em terrenos portugueses**: guineenses estratégias de invenção de uma comunidade. Tese de doutoramento. Lisboa: ISCSP, 2004.

ⁱ **Renata Maria Franco Ribeiro**, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7455-3589>

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Doutoranda em Estudos Africanos pela ISCTE-IUL, Portugal. Mestra em Antropologia pela Universidade de Lisboa, UL, Portugal. Bacharela Interdisciplinar em Humanidades (UNILAB). Especialista em Educação para as Relações Étnico-Raciais no Ambiente Escolar (UNILAB). Especialista em Administração Escolar (UVA). Especialista em Psicopedagogia Institucional (Fundação Darcy Ribeiro). Graduação em História e Geografia (UVA). Funcionária Efetiva da Secretaria Municipal da Educação de Guaramiranga/Ceará/Brasil.

Contribuição de autoria: Concepção e elaboração do texto.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/8306959040910206>

E-mail: renatafrancounilab@gmail.com

Responsible Publisher: Cristine Brandenburg

Ad-hoc expert: Andréa Abreu Astigarraga





Como citar este artigo (ABNT):

RIBEIRO, Renata Maria Franco. Mulheres migrantes do sul global no contexto pandêmico em Portugal. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 4, e49192, 2022. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.47149/pemo.v4.9192>

Received September 25, 2022.
Accepted on November 22, 2022.
Published on November 22, 2022.

