The Angolan diaspora in Lisbon: An introduction

CECILIE ØIEN

ABSTRACT: This article aims to contextualise the data gathered on informal economy and networks in the Angolan diaspora in Lisbon within the context of the «Angola em Movimento» project. This data derived from a questionnaire. In the discussion of the data the author drew on twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork she has been doing on the diaspora since 2002, she looks at possible ways to interpret this new knowledge. The base consists of 200 valid questionnaires. The findings partly correspond to the author's experience, as they demonstrate the importance of extended family and kin relations to informal economic transactions and practices.

Key words: Migration, Informal Economy, Kinship, Governance

TÍTULO: A diáspora angolana em Lisboa: Uma introdução

RESUMO: Este artigo pretende contextualizar os dados reunidos sobre a economia informal e as redes da diáspora angolana em Lisboa, no quadro do projecto «Angola em Movimento». Os dados foram recolhidos através dum questionário. Na discussão da informação recolhida a autora baseia-se no trabalho etnográfico de campo sobre a diáspora, que vem realizando desde 2002, procurando novos instrumentos para interpretar este novo conhecimento. A base consiste em 200 questionários válidos. Os resultados correspondem em parte, à experiência da autora, pois demonstram a importância da família alargada e relações étnicas nas trasacções e práticas da economia informal.

Palavras-chave: Migração, Economia Informal, Parentesco, Governação

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I give a brief ethnographic background to the data gathered regarding the Angolan diaspora in Lisbon. This is crucial as there are some important differences between what 'informal' means in a Portuguese versus an Angolan context. Yet, the most significant difference between these two research contexts is that moving from Angola to Portugal, changes the focus of our enquiry from studying a majority to working with a minority. This move is also indicative of changes in national practices of governance, and Angolan migrants in Portugal relate differently to the state through work and everyday life practices than they did in Angola. I give some examples of this and also look at the importance of (informal) economy in people's migration projects. First, however, I start with a more general introduction to the diaspora.

My knowledge of Angolan migration to Portugal is based on the empirical research I did for my doctoral degree. This particular material was gathered during 18 months of fieldwork spanning from July 2002 until December 2003. The fieldwork was by and large undertaken in Greater Lisbon, but also with a group of women in a small town on the Algarve coast[1]. In addition, I spent 2 months doing fieldwork in Lisbon on the Spring2007[2]. The main concern in my research has until now been the continuities and discontinuities in perceptions of home and belonging in the Angolan diaspora in Portugal (see Øien, 2007, 2006). I explored these issues primarily from the point of view of women's memories, visions and narratives, to demonstrate how these stories were connected to particular public discourses and collective experiences of colonialism, postcolonialism and migration in the Portuguese context. Because I realised how heterogeneous this group of migrants were, I decided to combine the study of groups of migrants that are usually studied separately: it encompassed all Angolan migrants from (white) decolonisation migrants (or *retornados*) and «black immigrants». I have thus worked with Angolans from a wide range of socio-economic and racial backgrounds. I was determined from the beginning not to look exclusively at one category of Angolan, such as either poor, middle-class, rich, or elite, or white, black or mixed-race. As for the geographic distribution of these migrants in the city, there are definitely areas with higher concentration of Angolans than others, but there is no such thing as an exclusively Angolan neighbourhood in Greater Lisbon. My research has therefore been completely dependent on social networks: starting from initial contacts and their networks, or from 'fixed localities' such as associations and the people who frequented them – and then again following their networks. This is also telling of how Marzia Grassi and Inês Hasselberg worked with the questionnaires of this project.

It would be overstating the case to say that the Angolan diaspora in Portugal is definable in terms of a strong, homogenous common culture. More important to my interlocutors was the understanding that they shared the same notion of sociality and culture of relatedness (Carsten, 2000). These, as I see it, were primary markers of Angolan identity and highlighted the differences between themselves and the Portuguese. The people I knew often described these markers of both belonging and differences through the concepts of convivência and calor humano[3]. Convivência literally means living together. It refers to intimacy and familiarity and would in many circumstances be best translated with conviviality. However, the concept was perceived of as such an important aspect of how they lived their lives that sociality is a more suitable way to describe its meaning. Calor humano or human warmth was another term used to describe the difference in quality between Angolan and Portuguese social relations. Convivência and calor humano were thus concepts that created a common base from which Angolan migrants understood their social world in comparison to Portuguese society. These concepts tended to be a point of departure for talking about sharing something with ones relatives and others outside the immediate family, a practice they would more generally describe as «African hospitality» and «African solidarity». This would refer to everything putting people up in your house when they needed help, always having food and drink enough to offer guests, and never refusing to help friends or relatives. A word of caution is necessary here, as this is an ideal that guides people's (inter)actions that is often in conflict with what really goes on. I return to this issue in connection with a discussion of social capital in the final part of this text. But this is also were the issue of informal economy initially enters in my discussion of the diaspora, first as the goods that people bring for each other over borders (even for people they do not know particularly well themselves), but also in the economic exchanges they do between themselves in everyday life. One of the possible reasons why the people who took part in the survey answered that they were not involved in informal economy might be explained by their perception of it as equalling informal trade, in contrast to informal exchange with kin and friends. However, as could be read from other of the data, there are exchanges of goods taking place, but since it happens in networks of relatives and friends, these are not necessarily defined as «informal economy».

As I see it, the main challenge working with this diaspora, is the fact that there has been and still is very little done especially on Angolan residents in Portugal[4]. This becomes very noticeable when compared to the broad spectre of work in Cape Verde and on migration from this archipelago[5]. Furthermore, since the qualitative research coming out of Angola itself until recently was almost inexistent, and with the research done in that country not being circulated well enough, there is not really an updated empirical and ethnographic backdrop to compare one owns research

findings with[6]. The project «Angola em Movimento» thus provides interesting new data, that I contextualise in this short introduction to the diaspora based on my own research (see also Grassi, this volume). I will now sum up some of the findings that are most relevant for the discussions in this article.

The age of my interlocutors range from young children to elderly people in their late seventies. Grassi elaborates on this in her article, but since the focus of the research for «Angola em Movimento» in Lisbon was youth between 18-30 resident in Portugal, the respondents to the 200 questionnaires represent a more specific age cohort. Of these 79% were Angolan nationals, 7,5% had Portuguese citizenship, and 13% of the respondents had double nationality. 67,5% of these youth were born in Angola and only 6% in Portugal[7]. In terms of years they had been in Portugal, 15,5% reported to have lived there less than 5 years, 32,5% had been resident in the country between 6 and 10 years, and 16% of the respondents answered they had been living in Portugal for more than 10 years[8]. There were more or less an equal amount of men and women represented in the group, but somewhat surprisingly compared to the people I have worked with, 82% were single and only 16% were married or living with a partner. Another aspect of this cohort that is rather unexpected is that relatively few of them had children: whereas 13,5% had one child, 7,5% had two, and only 2% had three, a total of 72% of the respondents did not have any children. Several points need to be elaborated here. Firstly, although the majority of people were single and did not have a large number of children themselves, there was nevertheless a high percentage that lived with two or more people in their households. 70% of the 200 respondents lived with between three to six other people. Secondly, the majority of the participants were working students and the level of education of both the respondents and their relatives was higher than what I would have imagined based on my own material. This is where things get interesting, and I claim that this in fact is suggestive of some socio-economic characteristics of those who participated in this survey. It is crucial to keep these characteristics in mind when analysing the rest of the data, as their answers to questions especially relating to trust, solidarity and mutual help networks will be influenced by their socio-economic and educational background. In addition, it is necessary to take some general characteristics of Angolan migration to Portugal into consideration to see these data in a wider perspective.

MIGRATION, ECONOMY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Angolans are today the second largest group of African migrants in Portugal, after Cape Verdean nationals. There were 267026 legal Angolan residents in Portugal in 2004 (S.E.F., 2005). Official statistics aside, it is believed that if illegal or undocu-

mented migrants were counted in, the Angolan community might be much larger[9]. It is, however, also difficult to judge these numbers for other reasons, for one because there are quite a few Angolans with Portuguese citizenship. Also, the case is that within one household or a network of Angolans, some might be permanently living in Portugal while others stay from one to several months a year in the country. Others might have double nationality and come to Portugal when they need to consult medical specialist they cannot access in Angola, or when they need surgery. There are also a growing number of people whose jobs require them to move between the two countries, because the companies they work for have important relationships to businesses and banks in Portugal. This is a form of privileged movement of migrants that do not appear on any statistics, but that are important part of the circulation of goods, money and people in relation to the diaspora. It is a kind of work migration that seems to be on the increase, and should be seen in relation to Portuguese migration and travel to Angola too.

The ambivalence in many Angolan migrants' situation can best be understood if one takes the view that «migrants' search for better opportunities is not dictated by strict economic calculations» (Olwig and Sørensen in Åkesson, 2004, p. 17), but is part of what Jørgen Carling defines as their «life-making projects» (Carling, 2002). Åkesson stresses how «the Cape Verdean conceptualization of migration as life-making indeed concerns livelihood», but also that it is related «to the construction of the ideal life or existence» (2004, p. 18). Many of the Angolans I knew, mentioned wanting to create a better life for themselves and their families as a reason for migrating. «A better life» meant access to education and employment, but there were more subtle reasons as well. A handful of them mentioned «modernity» as something desirable and «out there» to be had if one migrated. One woman, herself from a middle-class family and in the process of finishing her university degree, which in the future would give her a prestigious job, described this as a possible motivation for migrants. She said that: «Everybody's working or studying abroad these days». She stressed that this was part of wanting to do what people in the First World do, and asked me why people expect Africans to want less in life: «Why should we be kept away from enjoying the same opportunities as Americans and Europeans?». This is inevitably a crucial point that brings to light an important, implicit marker of difference between Western and Northern European citizens and migrants to Europe. The international movement of the first category is controlled, but not questioned per se. For non--European nationals the situation is very different. For some people, although I will not go into this question in detail here, «creating a better life for oneself» might involve paying people smugglers or sending their children with care takers who live abroad. These are economic activities that criss-cross boundaries between the formal, the informal and the illegal, and that become defined as either the one or the other

according to the context. As well as being economic activities, these often involve dif-ferent parts of people's social network(s). In European public discourses on migra-tion, the lengths people go to migrate, or to help relatives migrate, and not least why people act as they do – is often poorly understood. It is particularly in light of this that thinking of migration as part of people's life-making projects represents a possi-bility to grasp the complex background for their movement – and not least their eco-nomic investment in it.

Ghassan Hage uses the notions of «existential mobility» vs «physical mobility» to understand migration (Hage, 2005). He argues that physical mobility – rather than being exclusively a matter of economic migration – is a means to achieve existential mobility. In this view, migration can be seen as a means to create better opportunities in life and thus as a remedy to create a momentum for «moving forward» in a life that seems to be «stuck». It is but one step within a larger life project, a way out of difficult circumstances for which migration seem to be the only solution. Hage's argument about existential and physical mobility does to a large extent explain the migration pathways or strategies of the people I worked with. In Angola they had «felt stuck» and migration was their attempt to take control over their lives, however difficult the process might have turned out later. For many Angolan migrants, Angola has been and still is – despite the end of the civil war – a place with «no future». «Looking for a bet-ter future» they thus go abroad attempting to better their prospects.

In my recent fieldwork in Greater Lisbon, I interviewed several women, whom had been involved in Angola in the informal economy as street peddlers, in markets or in smaller trade businesses they organised themselves. These were women who had been the breadwinners in their families, but who after their arrival in Portugal had lost their economic «freedom» in the sense that they were not able to continue with the work they knew best. They claimed that in Portugal they were not able to do this work, as they were afraid of what the consequences would be if they were caught. Here we can clearly see how activities that had been informal economy in Angola was now seen within a different interpretative framework: it was now perceived of being illegal or at least an activity that were in the borderline between 'legal' and 'illegal'. The women realised that trade was controlled by the state to a much larger degree in Portugal than in Angola, and as a consequence they did not get involved in this kind of work. This is not to say that they were not involved in informal economic trans-actions at all, rather informal trade is not considered a possible full-time job or as a major source of income.

More importantly and as I indicated above, what seemed to have changed most was their perception of their economic possibilities. I am not here only talking about the

factual possibilities of living of such work in Portugal: what had changed most dramatically was their economic imaginary or outlook. None of the women I spoke with who had been involved in such trade in Angola had picked up the same line of work after they migrated. The explanations they gave for why they had not recommenced with this work in Portugal was that they now lived in a country were «everything is regulated», that there is nothing to earn from it if you do it within a regulated framework, and not least: what could be called a sense of economic spontaneity was not possible to achieve in Portugal[10]. One of them explained to us how these forms of trade or economic practices took place in Angola:

> For example, if the three of us sitting here now wanted to work together we'd start by buying the merchandise. Say that you contributed with 500, I with a 1000 and Teresa with 1500 Euros. We would split the work between us according to what we were good at, or what amount of time and travelling we can spend. We'd then, for example, buy a truckload of bacalhau (dry salted cod) or shoes in one part of Angola and next we'd take it to the capital or some other town were we know there will be a good profit from the sale. Then we'd split the earnings according to what we had put in, in regards both to time and work. In that way you can earn quite large amounts of money, but here I neither have the money to put in to start a business, nor do I have friends or neighbours I trust to go into a venture like this.

The issue of trust surfaces here, pointing to how people's social networks change with migration. The migrants I met were still dependent on each other as friends and relatives in webs of exchange and of mutual help, but their economic situation had often changed dramatically and thus also the dynamics of their relationships. Moreover, these women's stories exemplify how work and trade in Portugal, although far from as regulated as in many countries in Northern Europe, is controlled in quite a different manner than these women were used to. This example stress a major difference between Angola and Portugal in this respect: in Angola the informal economy exists on a much larger scale than in Portugal. Keith Hart, who is acknowledged to have introduced the concept «informal economy» to the social sciences in the early 70's, defined it as what «people really do for themselves beyond the reach of state regulation» (see this volume). In his opinion, the so-called informal economy has become the mainstream economy in many African countries, and he today doubts the usefulness of the concept. Janet MacGaffey, on the other hand, sees it within a broader definition of economic practices. She uses the notion of «the real economy» which is meant to cover «the totality of all economic activity», to take account with the «limitations of the narrow range of activities that are reflected in the national accounts of the official economy» (MacGaffey, 1991, p. 1). However, I would argue

that in the comparison of the economic practices of Angolans in Angola and in the diaspora in Portugal, the concept is made relevant by what our interlocutors see as a «difference that makes a difference» between the economic rationalities of these two states and the people who live in these two locations. The concept «informal economy» is therefore not irrelevant in this context. Rather, it changes the balance between what MacGaffey terms the official economy and what Hart defines as the informal sphere. In other words, when the respondents to our questionnaire in Lisbon answered that they were not involved in the informal economy, my analysis would be that their answers reflect that in diaspora the main part of their income is not generated through trade that is «beyond state regulation». Based on the answers given to some of the other questions, I also imagine that informal exchange within their social networks is still very common, but that it does not fit their model of what «informal economy» is.

It is fair to say that the prevailing perception of the concept of informal economy in the Portuguese and the wider European context is overlapping with or consistent with 'illegal'. Here, I think it is necessary to acknowledge how the perceptions of 'illegal' and 'informal' vary according to the distinctly different models of governance the states in these two countries apply. This is crucial in terms of the degree of control they try to get over different economic spheres, but also in relation to how the labour market works (and works differently in Angola and Portugal). Although it is not within the scope of this article to discuss the developments in Angola, I think it is crucial to realise that the Angolan state is also increasingly trying to take control over the informal sector. This is clear from the data the other researchers in the group have gathered, and is something pointed out in the work of Cristina Rodrigues, Carlos Lopes and Samuel Aço (all in this volume).

CLASS, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Formal economic structures and social policies have been inadequately developed in Angola, and moreover, when these exist, there might not be a bureaucratic body in place to implement them; as a more or less effective state apparatus is needed to put such objectives into practice. The support and cooperation between relatives, friends and acquaintances is therefore very important, since the state does not contribute much in practical terms to the welfare of its citizens. These networks can also be transnational and prove crucial for migrants, who are trying to find create a space for themselves in a new society. Still, the options available to the actors within these networks in terms of economic choices and the labour market vary greatly between these two countries. Social capital does to a large extent explain the significance of these relations. Elsewhere, I have used social capital to describe the human and mate-

rial resources circulating within migrant networks (Øien, 2006). I define the social capital of migrants as the knowledge they have of institutions in the new context, their ability to 'switch' between different economic rationalities and bureaucratic systems, but not least their capability to both maintain and create new networks in diaspora (Øien, 2006). However, no type of capital is equally distributed, not even within families or a social network. The advantage of applying this concept from Bourdieu's approach to economy in analyses of this is kind, is his view economy is integral to social life and he argued that the various economic spheres are not strictly separated. He referred to it as «the economy of practices» (Bourdieu, 1984). With this notion of economy and social practices in mind, I suggest that kin relations and wider social networks are important resources both in the process of migration itself, but also for migrants' prospects on the labour market and in their efforts to acquire an income. Transnational migration can in itself be a generator of social capital, especially in comparison to the situation of those staying at 'home'. Carling (2002, p. 8) argues that «participation in transnational circuits can (...) become an important dimension of social differentiation», and that transnational migrants constitute strategies «for making the most of geographical differences», within specific economic and political constraints (Carling 2002, p. 38).

CONCLUSION

The data from the «Angola em Movimento» project demonstrate the importance of extended family and kin relations to informal economic transactions and practices. This becomes even clearer if we return to the data from the survey. When asked about their work situation only 20% reported to have directly contacted Portuguese employers themselves, whereas 49,6% of the respondents answered that they had obtained the job they were in at the time through friends. In this simple example, we can see in practice how migrants' networks (and others) are crucial to their success in the labour market, but also for the social reproduction of the diaspora.

NOTES

1. Here I do not give the name of this town because for those who are familiar with it, it might be easy to identify the women.
2. The fieldwork was part of my new project, which is called «The transnational networks of care of Angolan children in Portugal». This research is part of a larger project called «Informal Child Migration in Europe». For more information, see *http://www.sai.uio.no/forskning/child-migration/index.html*. Teresa Carvalho Costa worked as my assistant in this period, and I would like to thank her for our many stimulating conversations about migration, economy and gender.
3. Race was an important and complex marker of identity, often in unexpected ways. See Øien (2007) for more.
4. There are a number of publications that discuss African migrants in Portugal more generally, e.g., Bastos and Bastos, 1999; Gusmão, 2004; and Eaton, 1998. For work on Angolan retornados see e.g., Pires, 1984; Lubkemann, 2003; Ovalle-Bahamón, 2003. For Angolan refugees in Africa, see Silva, 2004; and Brinkmann, 1999, 2000. On gender and development in Angola see Grassi, 1998, 2000.

5. Some good examples of this body of literature are Fikes, 1998; Carling, 2002; Grassi, 2003; Batalha, 2004a, 2004b; Åkesson, 2004; Grassi and Évora, 2007. Sheila Kahn (2003) offers an interesting perspective on Mozambican migrants in Portugal and England.

6. Patrick Chabal's book **A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa** (2002) gives a comprehensive historical contextualisation of Angolan ethnography and migration.

7. The remaining 26,5% did not answer this question.

8. 36% did not answer.

9. Traditionally the Portuguese State has had a pragmatic approach to clandestine immigration compared to countries like France or Britain. Another difference from Northern European states is that in Portugal, immigrants are only granted status as refugees or asylum-seekers in rare cases, including citizens from Portuguese speaking – or PALOP countries in Africa emigrating during periods of civil wars and unrest (see e.g. Carvalho, 2007).

10. See Grassi (2003) for a discussion on economic spontaneity in Cape Verde.

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