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**The challenges of *making family*
at a distance. Some reflections on migrations
and family dynamics in Cape Verde**

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The challenges of *making family* at a distance. Some reflections on migrations and family dynamics in Cape Verde. The article addresses the relationships between migrations, gender, and family dynamics, focusing on the Creole society of Cape Verde. Based on field research data from Boa Vista Island, from which many women have emigrated to Italy to work as housemaids, I reflect on the constructions of family dynamics in a territorial and relational space that is not restricted to people who reside in physical proximity. In a process that I denominate *making family*, networks of support and solidarity to which people constantly turn, people come and go between the two localities. This is the result of long-term planning that obeys both the Cape Verdean logic that *to grow it is necessary to leave* and the adaptability of projects of mobility to the labor market and Italian immigration law.

KEYWORDS: migrations; Cape Verde; transnational families; process; anthropology.

Os desafios de *fazer família* à distância. Reflexões sobre migrações e dinâmicas familiares em Cabo Verde. O artigo aborda as relações entre migrações, género e dinâmicas familiares a partir da sociedade crioula de Cabo Verde. Baseado em dados de pesquisa de campo na Ilha da Boa Vista, na qual mulheres emigram para a Itália para o trabalho como empregadas domésticas, reflito sobre as construções das dinâmicas familiares num espaço territorial e relacional que não se restringe às pessoas que residem próximas fisicamente. Num processo que denomino de *fazer família*, as redes de apoio e de solidariedade são constantemente acionadas em um ir e vir de pessoas entre as duas localidades, que é resultado de planeamentos a longo prazo, obedecendo tanto à lógica cabo-verdeana de que para crescer é preciso sair, quanto à adequação dos projetos de mobilidade aos limites do mercado de trabalho e da legislação italiana para imigrantes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: migrações; Cabo Verde; famílias transnacionais; processo; antropologia.

The challenges of *making family* at a distance. Some reflections on migrations and family dynamics in Cape Verde

This article¹ looks at how Cape Verdean women who live between Boa Vista Island and the city of Naples, Italy, construct and strengthen their family relations through circulation and sharing. Based on fieldwork data, I reflect on the constructions of family dynamics in a territorial and relational space that is not restricted to people who live in physical proximity to each other. In a process that I denominate *making family*, networks of support and solidarity to which people constantly turn, people come and go between the two localities in a dynamic that represents the outcome of long-term planning. This obeys the Cape Verdean logic that *to grow it is necessary to leave*, while adapting projects of mobility to the limits of the labor market and Italian immigration law.²

By highlighting the histories of three women and their families, I analyze the successes, failures, tensions, and conflicts that arise from the migratory dynamics in the processes of constructing family relations in situations involving the emigration of some of their members. Special attention is paid to the drama and strategies of these women who experience the dilemma of being mothers, daughters, and companions at a distance. By reconstructing family histories that involve more than one generation we can observe these dilemmas as they unfold over time.

1 I thank Fundação de Empreendimentos Científicos e Tecnológicos – Finatec for the financial support toward the publication of this article.

2 The data analyzed here originate from a field study conducted on Boa Vista Island from 2004 to 2005 and from continued contacts with some of my interlocutors in new research conducted in 2012 and 2015. These data are complemented by the master's thesis of Claudia Bongianino (2012), who conducted field research with women from Boa Vista in Naples, Italy. For those interested in Italian migration legislation, see the works of Savi (2010); Laurent (2016). I emphasize that in recent years we have observed several changes in this legislation (and in European migration rules as a whole). Their monitoring is not within the scope of the argument presented here, however, since this would require the data to be updated.

My analytical paths have two main objectives. First, I seek to contribute to the debate on migration in the Cape Verdean archipelago by presenting the specificities and complementarities of female migrations from Boa Vista Island to the national scene. By reflecting on this particular ethnographic case, I believe it is possible to assemble elements that help us to understand the interfaces between family and migratory dynamics on the archipelago more generally.

Moreover, my research data prompt me to respond to a literature on the interface between migrations, gender, and family dynamics that has primarily worked with concepts such as “transnational families,” “global assistance chains,” and the “global circulation of care and affection.”³ As readers will note, this terminology differs from the analytical instruments that I use to consider these same interfaces. I opt for the concepts of project, process, and *making family* because these appear to me to best satisfy the task of describing what my research interlocutors experience in their trajectories of departures and returns, and help me to consider the family contexts in time, and beyond the migratory phenomenon.

Guided by these interests, the text is divided into three parts. I begin by presenting the departure of the women from Boa Vista island to Italy and inserting this movement within the more general context of migrations in Cape Verde and, more widely, female migratory dynamics in the second half of the twentieth century. Below I will present Donna Teodora, Bela, and Antônia. Through the trajectories of these women, I address the family dynamics and the challenges of maintaining relationships, affection, and belonging at a distance. I conclude with reflections about the dynamics of “living at a distance,” explaining my analytical options and affirming the importance of analyzing family and migratory contexts as processes.

WOMEN WHO EMIGRATE IN A LAND OF EMIGRANTS

Emigration is one of the identity markers of Cape Verde society. Influenced since its origins by flows and movements dating from the colonial period, and in a context of aridity and episodes of famine, the country, in addition to its commercial flows, developed a migratory flow with a dual character, both spontaneous and forced. In the former case, the origin can be traced to connections with North America that arose in the early nineteenth century while the slave trade was still active, through the arrival of whaling ships from New

3 On this literature, see: Bryceson & Vuorella (2002); Baldassar (2008, 2016); Baldassar, Wilding & Baldock (2006); Lyon (2006); Hochschild (1983).

England (where slave trading had been abolished) that stopped in Cape Verde and hired young Cape Verdean men to work on the boats. Given the subsequent local crises, these men took the opportunity to emigrate to the United States, opening a migratory network that even today is the preferred destination in various islands of the archipelago (Carling, 2001; Meintel, 2002).

Forced emigration took place in the 1970s, when Portuguese colonizers shipped hundreds of Cape Verdeans to São Tomé and Príncipe to work on coffee and cacao plantations (Carreira, 1982). Over time the migratory routes diversified, giving priority to European countries, particularly Portugal, but also France, Italy, Holland, and others. This led to a configuration that allows us to affirm that emigration is an organizing factor in this society, and that migratory flows have historically left deep marks on its social structure (Carreira, 1983; Carling, 2002; Trajano Filho, 2009; Vasconcelos, 2012; Lobo, 2014; Laurent, 2016; Defreyne, 2016).

The examples of emigration traced by some of these authors are conspicuously masculine. They primarily involve adult men who left their families on the islands, often leaving behind wives and children. According to the family migratory project, it is up to the man to seek a better life for the entire family, whether by sending back financial resources and goods, or by helping to continue the migratory project, making the departure of other relatives viable. The wife who remains behind is described in the literature as a woman who waits.

In one analysis of male emigration on the island of Santiago, Braz Dias (2000) analyzes the life of women who construct their family lives with the husband-father at a distance. From her analysis, we perceive a family structure that is considered by many authors as characteristic of the archipelago, one in which a woman and man can maintain a relationship without necessarily living together. The mother holds the central value in the family sphere, the mother-child nucleus is preeminent, presenting a true matriarchal focus, although this operates in conjunction with a patriarchal ideology (Meintel, 1984; Braz Dias, 2000; Grassi & Évora, 2007; Lobo, 2014; Fortes, 2015).

The work of Veiga (2013) has added to that of these authors. In a study conducted in the interior of Santiago, in the Pilão Cão region, Veiga presents us with the universe of the *white scarf widows*, women who married in the Catholic Church and who remain faithful to their husbands who have emigrated, despite affirming that they have no more hope of ever living with these men again. One of her interlocutors, separated from her husband for 29 years and aware that he has another family abroad, said: "I don't want to speak about my husband because I don't have one. He didn't die, but for me he is dead. I am one of those women they call a *white scarf widow*, have you heard of

them? I'm married in the church and happily respect my marriage: I didn't betray my husband in my youth or now (D. AA, 54)" (Veiga, 2013, p. 49).

The dynamic synthesized by this account is that of a family structure that combines a patriarchal model, based on the authority of the father, and a social practice based on a female centrality that is born from the relative and historic absence of husbands-fathers, first under the slavocrat model and later due to emigration, particularly of male family members. It reinforces the image of women who wait and who, in the migratory project, are destined to remain in the islands (Veiga, 2013; Braz Dias, 2000; Évora, 2003) or, if lucky, eventually be called to emigrate as part of a family regrouping (Laurent, 2016).

The situation of the young emigrant women from Boa Vista island⁴ makes this situation even more complex, given that it involves an autonomous emigration – that is, the migration of women who travel alone, leaving behind lovers/husbands, children, and other family members – and opens migratory networks that are renewed with the departure of other women, and, sometimes, men who are *led* by them. In a broader scenario, the departure of these women raises new perspectives and elements for us to consider as the interfaces between female migrations and family dynamics in the (re)configuration of migratory projects.

I argue that, like the men from the island, the women who I met share an ethos of emigration as something that is simultaneously natural and necessary. It is important to highlight this because, as Carling (2004) affirms, female emigration on the archipelago reached a significant level only in the 1970s, but within the deep historic context of migrations in this society. Men and women emigrate from Cape Verde, work, and have social responsibility for their families. Both have aspirations regarding life abroad, leaving in search of better living conditions, and this phenomenon influences local life in different manners (200, p. 117).

I add to the author's argument that the departure of women is not just a consequence of changes in the pattern of international migration. This dynamic is inserted in migratory projects that go beyond generations. Hence, this movement develops in the context of important transformations in this society and should not be analyzed as merely a variation in the diverse types of emigration. As part of the broader family dynamics in which emigration presents an opportunity for a better life, women and men emigrants have different

4 Also from São Vicente, Sal, São Nicolau, and other locations. The specificity of Boa Vista island is not in the exclusivity of the phenomenon, but in the demography of this migratory dynamics, as it is the only island in the archipelago from which women emigrate in greater numbers than men (Lobo, 2014).

attitudes or commitments to those who stay and nourish other networks and generate multiple impacts on the family situations. It is these dimensions that I wish to explore by analyzing the migrations between Boa Vista and Italy.

This study is based on fieldwork carried out on the island of Boa Vista in 2004 and early 2005 among the people of Vila de Sal-Rei, focusing on migratory flows and their influence on the transformations in the organization of local families from the standpoint of those who stayed behind. An important part of my knowledge derives from participant observation. During my fieldwork I took part in the daily lives of seven families in which more than one member had migrated. These family contexts included situations in which the interactions were constant and others in which they were broken, consequently affecting family relationships. In addition to participation in the daily routine of these families, I conducted over 50 open-ended interviews, visiting and befriending the inhabitants of more than 30 domestic units, all with migrant members. Between the months of July and September 2004, I had the opportunity to interview, observe, and follow migrants who had returned home for vacations on the island, which broadened my perspective for analyzing their relationships with those who “stayed behind.” This intensive fieldwork, which took place over an extended period (15 months), thus made it possible for me to gain access to domestic units in different social strata. These data were complemented by yearly trips to Cape Verde between 2012 and 2015. Continued contact with some families has allowed me to give an account of the trajectories of people and families, a fundamental feature for my argument concerning gender and kinship dynamics in migratory contexts.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the data, it is important to insert Cape Verdean women’s migratory movement into a broader theoretical context, namely that of female migration in general.

The collection *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, published in 2002, made important contributions to the systematization of discussions about contemporary contexts of female migration. The authors affirm that until then little mention had been given to the flow of women in migration theories, including the growing movements of millions of women from poor to rich countries to work as nannies, cleaners, and sex workers – migrant workers who cross the globe from South to North, often leaving their children in the care of grandmothers, sisters, or other relatives in their places of origin.⁵

5 After this initial diagnosis and observing the literature produced on the theme in the past 15 years, we can affirm that the situation has changed considerably. The criticisms made of migratory studies that, under the rubric of the term migrant, erased the dimensions of →

Conducting a historical retrospective of the migratory process from the global South to the North, the volume's organizers note that in contrast to the period from 1950 to 1970, the 1990s were marked by a "feminization of emigration." Although emigration patterns are different in each region, it was during this period that the number of women emigrants (to the surprise of many "sending" countries) exceeded the number of men in some contexts, a fact that triggered a series of theoretical and political discussions. The first question to arise concerned the specificities of this flow.

In a review article published in 2010, Helma Lutz develops an interesting argument that questions how this so-called feminization of migration has been presented by theorists. In her words, "from the perspective of today it would be easy to declare the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the 'era of mass migration' and – according to the main bulk of results – consider this a phenomenon in which men were the primary actors, then followed by the feminization of migration as a particular characteristic of the twenty-first century (Castles and Miller, 1993; Koser and Lutz, 1998). A critical review shows that this reconstruction is debatable." In her visionary work, Mirjana Morokvasic (1984) observes that "[r]ather than 'discovering' that female migration is an understudied phenomenon, it is more important to stress that the already existing literature has had little impact on policy making, on mass media representation of migrant women, but also on the main body of migration literature, where male bias has continued to persist [...] in spite of growing evidence of women's overwhelming participation in migratory movements" (Morokvasic, 1984, p. 899). Lutz questions the theories of the last decades, which, as in *Global Woman* (2002), effectively reinforce images that conceal more than they reveal about the importance, characteristics, and specificities of gender issues in migratory scenarios, the gendered nature of crossing borders and boundaries.

While the movement of women appears to obey the same logics and characteristics of male emigration (the majority travel from the global South to the global North, from poor countries to rich countries, and generally follow migratory flows typical of the places of origin) scholars also indicate that the departure of women causes large impacts and transformations in society: in gender relations, economic standards, demographics, processes of reproduction,

→ gender, race, class, and ethnicity, have shifted the interests of researchers, who now incorporate these dimensions into their treatment of the issue. In terms of discussions on gender and migrations, we can observe a proliferation of publications with multiple theoretical approaches. I mention here just a few references that may help readers navigate this vast bibliography: Donato et al. (2006); Alencar-Rodrigues et al. (2009); Calavita (2006); Lisboa (2007); Assis & Kosminsky (2007); Assis (2007).

the spheres of sexuality, and the universe of affection (Castles & Miller, 1993). These impacts have a profound effect, for example, on the life of children left in the country of origin and raised by other women (Parreñas, 2005).

Apropos the specificities of female emigration, many countries encourage women to migrate in search of work, based on the premise that they are more reliable than men when it comes to sending remittances home to their families. In general, women send back more than half of what they earn (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002). These remittances have a significant impact on the life of children, relatives, siblings, and relatives in general – and on the revenues of the governments of their countries of origin. Nevertheless, there is growing discussion about the psychological and social impacts that the departure of mothers-wives causes in the lives of children and young adults. This flow is associated by the “sending” countries with increasing rates of juvenile delinquency, poor school performance, and psychological disorders. Female migration is also blamed in some discourses for a supposed destructuring of the family, described by some states as a national concern (Parreñas, 2005; Lobo, 2012).

Despite their attempt to overcome the trend in migration studies until the 1970s (a perspective that was blind to differences of gender, class, and ethnicity), recent studies still face an ample number of challenges, perhaps the most significant being the need to overcome the overlapping of the categories of “sex” and gender, appreciating that a shift in approach involves more than just emphasizing women’s participation in migratory contexts. It also entails contemplating the gender perspective (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Lutz, 2010; Asis, Huang and Yeoh, 2004) from before the moment of departure the selection of who will emigrate, the reasons for migration, permanence or return are all decided in a manner articulated with networks of relations that involve gender, kinship, and generation. I believe that it is by starting from the relationship between these factors that migration studies can gain fresh insights concerning the people in movement. We return to reflect on this literature at the end of this article: for now I invite the reader to discover the ethnographic context that I explore here, located between Boa Vista and Italy.

According to Monteiro (1997), it was only in the 1980s and due to the increased flow of women since the mid-1960s that migratory studies in Cape Verde began to contemplate women within the framework of migratory development and to perceive that a growing number of them emigrated alone, with various motivations and objectives. These studies called attention to the fact that “female emigration is not limited to improving the level of family income, but to helping conduce [sic] certain aspirations for improving the conditions of women in the communities of origin” (1997, p. 382). In the author’s view, influenced by an initial flow that was still quite weak in the late 1950s, an

increasing number of women decided to emigrate, especial to Italy, beginning a process that has specific characteristics.

The earliest known emigrants to Italy coming from the island of Sal and were taken by employees of Alitalia Airlines to work as housemaids in 1957. However, the initial flux of migrants began in 1963 with the departure of young women from the seminary of São Nicolau, with the intermediation of Capuchin priests. In contact with persons in Rome and other cities, they arranged domestic work in bourgeois Italian homes for young women who attended the seminary and participated in the choir and catechism. The clergy thus helped a small group to leave their land in search of work abroad. In turn, the first emigrants soon began to call their sisters, cousins, and friends, creating a network of women linked by kinship or friendship ties (Monteiro, 1997).

Bongianino provides further insight into this situation by showing the dynamics of the *call*, an unregulated process of hiring foreign employees that was recognized and permitted by the Italian state in the 1960s. The *call* involved the opportunity to hire a future worker (domestic or other kind) using a contact network: in this case, the employer knew the foreigner to be hired or knew someone who could act as an intermediary with the foreigner.⁶ The priests served as intermediaries for the Cape Verdeans in the 1960s until those Cape Verdeans already living in Italy began to perform the same role themselves in the 1970s (2012, p. 33).⁷

With this dynamic and the resulting growth in the flows of migrants seen since the 1970s, women began to arrive from other islands, especially São Vicente and Boa Vista, and had a profile different from the women taken by the priests. Many of the women were already mothers, coming from families with few economic resources who sought work not only to support their parents, siblings, and other family members, but also their own children whom they had left in Cape Verde (Monteiro, 1997, p. 343). Bongianino (2012) found that the flow of Cape Verdeans in Italy reached a peak in 1978 and began to decline in 1981. Legislative changes provide clues to understanding these dynamics.⁸

6 There was also the option for a *numeric call*, or a contract agreed at a distance through agencies, without using known people as intermediaries.

7 “The hiring *notte e giorno* by a *call* implied that the foreigner’s stay in Italy was linked to the first employer, because a return air ticket was held by the *Questura* [the Italian civil police] to be used in case the employee quit or was fired” (Bongianino, 2012, p. 37).

8 The paths through which migratory projects have been built are not only related to Cape Verdean contexts: the Italian immigration legislation and the possibilities for family reunification also have a considerable impact on these processes. According to Savi (2010), the right to family reunification is recognized and established in many national laws (of European countries, for example) and international treaties. However, the exercise of this right has proven to be quite →

Bongianino reports that in 1973 a collective contract was introduced with domestic workers, regulating labor relations between these workers and their bosses and formalizing agreements that previously had been only verbal. Beginning in 1980 the Italian government instituted a series of actions to progressively curb the entrance of people from developing countries like Cape Verde. In any case, between highs and lows, “according to the data from the Cape Verde embassy in Rome, the Cape Verdean presence in Italy is constant and continues to be majority female” (Bongianino, 2012, p. 29).

Once in Italy, women worked and lived in the houses where they were employed (known as the *notte e giorno*).⁹ This domestic regime denied them the opportunity to seek other work or bring their children and companions to join them. Even so, Monteiro (1997) tells us of some women who were able to open the doors for male relatives who arrived in Italy on tourist visas issued by other European countries. Many sought a legalized partnership by which they could marry and regularize their situation.

Pregnancy was a problem for these emigrants. Some women emigrated when already pregnant and were not accepted by their bosses. There are reports that others needed to hide the fact that they were a single mother, or risk losing their job. Women who became pregnant in Italy, due to their lack of housing and the type of working arrangement in domestic services, were required to take their newborn children back to their country of origin, leaving them with family members in Cape Verde.

“At that time, Italian society, which still held certain deep prejudices, attributed a pejorative and depreciative connotation to the concept of *mãe-de-filho*.¹⁰ It was seen as a route to prostitution, while in Cape Verde, this was

difficult since, particularly in Italy, the legislation provides for the “interpretation of demand” by the state. Certainly, the regulation of such a right depends on what is understood as “family” by the receiving country, as well as on the political and economic interests of controlling migratory flows, which are increasingly restrictive. It is not part of the scope of this work to enter into the systematization of Italian legislation, but one of the points that calls attention when looking at this legislation is its subjective character. This generates broad possibilities for interpretation by the authority responsible for analyzing the demand, be it a request for family reunification or an application to acquire nationality. For those interested in this topic, see Savi (2010); Laurent (2016).

9 In Italy in the 1960s, women from Cape Verde and the Philippines assumed these functions, followed by women from Eritrea, El Salvador, Somalia, and Sri Lanka, in a process denominated as the ethnicization of migrant labor (Campani, 2000; Lyon, 2006; Lisboa, 2007; Caponio, 2008).

10 In addition to being used to refer to a man or woman with whom one has a child, *pai-de-filho* (father-of-child) and *mãe-de-filho* (mother-of-child) are categories that, in the Creole language, indicate a man or woman companion with whom one has a romantic relation of conjugality prior to “marriage on paper.” Only after this fact do the couple acquire the status of husband and wife.

and continues to be a normal personal situation” (Monteiro, 1997, p. 345). As we will see, the relationship between mothers and children is a central bond in the Cape Verdean context, and separating them marks the female migratory process very negatively, both in relation to the periodic or definitive returns, and in relation to the quantity and continuity of the financial remittances.

ABOUT TRAJECTORIES, SUCCESSES, AND FAILURES

Female emigration from Boa Vista island is shaped, therefore, in a situation in which migratory projects are constructed within a broad spectrum of opportunities, limitations, and arrangements that involve networks based on family and friendships. If the flow analyzed here began with an opportunity that established a relationship between the presence of the Capuchin priests in Cape Verde, the situations of the female labor market in Europe since the 1960s, and a shared perspective that home and children are the responsibility of women, in Boa Vista the more traditional expectation that “it is men who migrate” had to be quickly reconfigured to support the construction of migratory capital that would benefit the entire group.¹¹ The departure of wives-mothers in a family context that is generally matrifocal yet patriarchal, combined with restrictions on immigration in Italy, have shaped individual and family trajectories in Boa Vista and caused the case of this island to have some specificities, as expressed in the stories that I present below.

DONNA TEODORA

Donna Teodora travelled to Italy in the 1960s and spent more than 30 years there. She is proud of the fact that she was the first woman, indeed the first person, from Boa Vista to emigrate and initiated the route for all those women who now live in the European country. She emigrated with the help of a male cousin from São Vicente who, recognizing her struggles, promised to lift her from poverty. The connection was with a woman he knew in Italy who was looking for two Creole housemaids. This was how Donna Teodora and a friend from Boa Vista ended up making the journey to Naples. When she arrived, she met women from other islands (Sal, São Vicente, and São Nicolau) but she and

11 I was warned a number of times by people from Santiago Island that men on Boa Vista “exploit their women, because they send them to work as migrants abroad.” These claims are made in a critical moral tone: in other words, on the latter island, they say, behavior fails to match what is expected from men and women. On Boa Vista, in contrast, female emigration is valued, because women are more attached to family than men and are unlikely to abandon it because of the distance (Lobo, 2014).

her friend were the first from Boa Vista. At that time, she said, it was very easy to emigrate (“you just needed an identity card and that was it!”) and since her boss’s friends liked her work, they asked for more Cape Verdean women. One would call another and that is how the flow increased.

Donna Teodora thumped her chest with pride and declared: “I began all of this, it was me. I called Isabela and later we called all the others. First it was just Naples and Rome, now there are people from Boa Vista in every corner of Italy, even in Milan, where life is very hard because of the cold. The Cape Verdeans had a good reputation among the bosses and those who worked well had no trouble. For those with a good head on their shoulders, emigration was worthwhile. It’s hard, but if you work, you have a chance to build a good life.”

Donna Teodora and others emphasized how the migratory cycle in Boa Vista was initially influenced by female emigration from Sal and São Vicente, but later gained its own impetus through the networks of solidarity among women and their relatives. The reports tell how easy it was to emigrate in the 1970s, and the demand of Italians for Cape Verdean women.

Donna Teodora tells her story with pride, because she withstood the difficulties and returned to Cape Verde only after she had built a house and had guaranteed she would receive her pension. She highlights the fact that the majority could not handle the pressures and wound up returning without any legal benefits from their years of work. “I was different from most, I waited to get older, I had all my legal benefits and only now am I *settled*. I had my pension, I furnished my entire house with the best things from Italy and, moreover, even today I still help my people, because I will never forget how they remain in this life of poverty.”

Many of those who left during this period did not follow the initial project due to a series of difficulties in adaptation and wound up returning to Boa Vista without having fulfilled the initial objectives. This was not the case of Donna Teodora, who is an example of an emigrant who followed an ideal trajectory: she emigrated while she was still young and lived for nearly 30 years in Italy but without ever forgetting her family. Over the years, she built a home, accumulated goods, helped relatives and friends to emigrate, and returned only after acquiring all the entitlements for her years of work – that is, a retirement pension. In addition, she always stayed in touch with her homeland, she returned periodically on vacation, and took back gifts and items requested by her family¹² and friends. In her words, “I was always welcomed back with great festivity and joy.”

12 On the importance of requests for goods exchanged between emigrants and their families for the process of maintaining proximity at a distance, see Lobo (2014b).

The difficulties to which Donna Teodora refers (evident in the reports of other women) are related to issues of adaptation in the new country and to family problems in Cape Verde. The issue of discrimination because of skin color is an important factor, but the difference in the rhythm of life is also a considerable difficulty mentioned. To live in the same place that they work entails an excessive number of tasks. They complain that the bosses demand more working hours than contracted and, moreover, gave them only one day off per week, working Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. All of these factors are important difficulties for these women, who affirm that they make great sacrifices in search of a better life.¹³

During my fieldwork, I met many women like Donna Teodora. Despite their different trajectories, the common trait in their discourses is the provision of help to those who stay in Cape Verde, either by sending for them or by sending them money and other goods. Many, however, do not follow the ideal trajectory and return to Boa Vista without being able to “build something.” The reasons are manifold: a failure to adapt, homesickness, inability to obtain official permission to stay, problems in family members who stayed home, and so on. According to my data, many of these women who wind up returning to Cape Verde before planned do so because of the children they left behind. When the female and/or family solidarity network failed to operate for any number of reasons, the emigrated mother had three options: *send for* the child, return, or abandon the child. Each of these options is reflected in the migratory trajectories not only of the women themselves, but also those of the entire family.

Even when their projects are interrupted, the *returned* generally enjoy a higher standard of living than the local average: they live in bigger houses, equipped with things brought from Italy (known as the *kasa demigrant* – the emigrant house). Those who were able to *send for* a child, family member, or friend and build something material, enjoy for a long time the privileges of having once lived abroad as migrants. These privileges are also symbolic in nature and strongly present in the trajectories that the women build, in the way they speak, in the photos displayed in the living room, and in their memories. In those cases where they failed to attain the objective of accumulating wealth, women affirm that they left and now have *their eyes open* – in other words, they at least have the experiences accumulated by spending time in another country. This makes them different from those who never left: people with a closed mentality, with little experience, or as they say, with their *eyes closed*.

13 For more details on the daily life of these women in Naples, see the work of Bongianino (2012).

BELA

Despite the diversity of motivations and migration trajectories possible, escaping poverty is one of the classic reasons cited in Cape Verde to explain emigration. The lack of economic security is often mentioned by Cape Verdeans to justify the imperativeness of a migratory project. Bela's story is one such example. She comes from a family of many women. Her father was a sailor who worked on a boat that traveled between the islands and, when he died, left the mother with eight children.

We went to Italy out of need: our father died young and we needed to help mother raise our younger siblings. In Boa Vista we had no work, that's why we went. First it was Celina, then me, Dina, Tânia and Nilza, who could not handle even five months and left. It was good because that left the rest of us reassured, knowing that Nilza was caring for our mother and our children back here in Boa Vista. Life in Italy is a great sacrifice, but it's worth it because had we not emigrated, perhaps we would have all died of hunger. Emigration was our salvation and that of our children, before it was just misery! Thanks to emigration our children do not have to go through the difficulties we did.

This type of discourse is common among the first emigrants, some of whom have already returned, who associate emigration with necessity, as the only escape from the problems of poverty experienced on Boa Vista. The categories of hunger and salvation emphasize the strategic place occupied by the emigration of family members. In the discourse above, emigrating implies leaving a negative pole of total scarcity of possibilities expressed by the category of hunger for a world of opportunities and a reversal of the negative local situation. In contrast to a starving Boa Vista, the emigrant finds a world of possibilities.

The migratory project mobilizes the entire family, which is strategically organized to send some members and keep others at home. Analyzing Bela's discourse and comparing with the family genealogy, I found that the sisters' departures followed their birth order and that Nilza, the youngest daughter, emigrated but returned to take care of her mother and the children of her sisters who were out of the country. Thus, the departure of the women operates by means of strategies that seek to reproduce the family sphere. The decision about who emigrates and who stays should be made according to the interests and needs of the family group: the goal of emigration is not just to maintain the domestic group but also to maximize its potential.

In accordance with the family project, Nilza stayed in Boa Vista to take care of their elderly mother and the children of her emigrated sisters. Celina

had two children (Mariana and André), Bela had one (Fabio), and Dina had three (Ana, Vinícius, and Patrícia). Tânia, the only woman to have no children, said smiling, “I already have too many nephews to help.” Finally, Nilza herself, is the mother of Edson. In addition to the five women, there are three male siblings who live in Boa Vista, the youngest of whom (Justino) left for Portugal in 2004 to try to reach Italy and *be helped* by his sisters with some work. It was Tânia who *sent for him*.

In the next generation, Nilza’s son was the first for whom the aunts *sent*. Taking an opportunity to study in Portugal, he traveled to Naples to join his aunts and try to find a way to obtain legal residence. Little by little, the children were being taken to Italy. Mariana, Fábio, and Ana went before they were 18, making use of the opportunity provided by Italian family regrouping policy. Tânia had already returned to Boa Vista and in 2005 Bela was waiting for her son to finish his studies so she herself could return, feeling that she had already fulfilled her part of the *sacrifice* and achieved what she had wanted *abroad*: to help the family, have a home, and provide an education for her son.

I have already built my home, my family lives well today, we were able to *send for* many people who were not even in the family. As soon as my son finished studying, I came to *settle* in Cape Verde, because I have no more desire to stay in Italy. Were it not for him, I would have been back here a long time ago, but it would be unfair for me to see my son wanting to study but come to *settle* in Boa Vista and leave him without school. No, he and I have a very beautiful friendship and I will make every effort for him to become a man with potential (able to get on in life). For his sake, I have still not returned [Bela]

To understand the female migratory process in the context of emigration in Boa Vista generally, we need to understand not only why people emigrate, but how people organize themselves to leave. At first, the women sought work contracts guaranteeing that a tie existed before leaving the island. This type of strategy is now increasingly difficult and the women basically employ three strategies. The most common is to leave Boa Vista with a tourist visa and once in Italy try to obtain legal residence. A second option is to begin the process in Italy with a document that proves the emigrant has guaranteed work and income. The third is to comply with the rules for family regrouping. In all three cases, Boa Vistenses who have already emigrated provide the connection: they are the ones who try to obtain the necessary documentation from the Italian bosses and send the papers to relatives and friends in Boa Vista. It is also up to them to file the requests for family regrouping and they are often the ones who finance the travel, take in the recent arrivals, and help them in the new location.

It is worth remembering that in the first two cases, the aspiring emigrant must have approval of their emigration request from the embassy, a situation that is always difficult today. In an attempt to influence the process, people in Boa Vista use relations based on friendship and sponsorship to influence the analysis of their case. The aim is to find someone at the embassy with good relations with embassy workers who can facilitate the internal procedures so that that case is perceived as something special. It is important to advance beyond anonymity and ensure that one's name is associated with someone of influence who can provide good references or inform embassy employees about the "special nature" of the case. Once again, the family and friendship networks are essential to success in the visa request.

Obtaining a visa is a complicated process. People invest time, money, and contacts to meet the requirements stipulated by the embassies. Despite this, no one knows if their request will be approved or not. I often heard that it is a question of destiny. One interlocutor, Isabela, said that she had submitted all the documentation needed to leave and never received permission. She tried more than once, at different embassies, and was never successful. Meanwhile, her sister obtained permission on her first attempt. Why? Isabela's explanation was that it was not her destiny to emigrate.

The idea of destiny was not limited to obtaining a visa. To emigrate is a life project shared by many women in Boa Vista. Nevertheless, emigration would not be everyone's fate. Destiny appears here as a moral category that explains why, within a universe of women who theoretically have the same conditions to leave, some are successful and others not.

In the case of Bela's family, four sisters were able to emigrate, but one of them returned, alleging she had been unable to adapt. The fact is, though, that it was not strategic for the family for all the women to be away, since their mother was already elderly. Also, her other children were male and many grandchildren had been left behind. Nilza's return ensured that the others could remain as emigrants.¹⁴ Thus, the emigration projects of the women in Boa Vista do not appear random. Deciding which family members will emigrate is part of a set of family strategies aimed at the reproduction of the group. It is interesting to note that something belonging to the domain of strategy appears in

14 Bourdieu's analysis (1980) of family strategies for the reproduction of the Bearnais house helps us to understand, through similarity, the case of Boa Vista. This includes marriage strategies, in which those who marry locally, those who leave, and even those who stay at home as dependents (married or not) are all involved in arrangements that guarantee the reproduction of the *maison*, in the case he studied, and that depend on factors like the number of children, sex, age, birth order, and so on.

the discourse of the actors as destiny, something inevitable that escapes their control or will. In my analysis of the family structures cross-referenced with the members who emigrate, a pattern can be identified: more women leave than men; the first-born have priority, as do those with no children. Within this universe, there is always a woman who remains home – in most cases, the youngest, known as the *codé*.

Continuing the migratory project in Bela's family, in the next generation every effort was made for Nilza's son to be *taken*, although she herself did not emigrate. Since his case did not comply with the requirements for family regrouping, the strategy used was to achieve an opportunity for him to study in Portugal and from there try for a life in Italy, with the support of his aunts. Meanwhile, the other children of the emigrants were able to be *taken* before they were 18, thereby gaining an advantage from the legislation by formally obeying a logic of family regrouping under Italian law. Nevertheless, the family did not, in fact, regroup entirely given that, as Bela said, once she was able to ensure that her son was stabilized in Italy, her intention was to return to Boa Vista because the migratory capital would be assured and the continuity of the family project maintained.

For the women involved, the emigration strategy is temporary and the constructed projects combine the dream of departure and the desire to return. The latter is just as desired as the former and both have a similar characteristic: the uncertainty of realization. Equally important to the decision to emigrate is the choice of the moment to return. Undoubtedly, this is a tricky decision that depends on a set of factors that determine whether or not the emigration was worthwhile. The collective character of the project, the family dynamics, and the individual trajectories of the women are all factors determining its duration. The broader objective is to guarantee that the family's migratory capital is maintained for generations (Laurent, 2016).

For this reason it is important that a woman's departure leads to the circulation of others. Among friends and family members who can be *taken* to live abroad as migrants, children have priority both under Italian legislation (because they can be *called* before they turn 18) and in the desire of the mothers to have them close by and provide them with good opportunities in life. In her work with women from Boa Vista living in Naples, Bongianino (2013) presents various reports of emigrants who went through the dilemma of whether to keep their small children in Italy, send them to Cape Verde, or send for them so they could live together. The suffering caused by distance, the fact of "not being able to see their children grow," is experienced intensely by these women, who make a wide variety of calculations when making decisions that

imply *maintaining*, *taking*, or *sending for* children so that they can be raised by their biological mothers.

I think that this dilemma can be comprehended only within the context of the family dynamics in Cape Verde. As I have argued in earlier works (Lobo, 2010; 2012; 2014), we can apprehend these migratory projects only when we situate them within the universe of kinship relations, understanding the meanings of family, maternity, paternity, and conjugality that operate beyond these projects, but connected to them in a dialectical process.

With the current work, I add to this initial argument the importance of understanding the dynamics of how immigrants are received in their countries of destination, since these also shape, limit, or give potential to these projects. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, given the characteristics and increasing restrictions of Italian law on family regrouping and acquiring nationality, the possibilities for the family to be reunited in Italy are quite scarce, a fact that can interrupt the trajectory of emigrants in the country and lead to a return to Boa Vista. In cases in which the women opt to call and are able to receive their children and husbands in Italy, their presence undoubtedly makes the woman's relationship with the country of destination less provisional and the tendency to delay any definitive return becomes a reality.

How the resources obtained from the work abroad are managed is another important factor in deciding when to return. There are many reports of women who are unable to administer the financial gains in order to construct something enduring: they are dazzled by the huge range of objects, clothes, and goods readily available in the countries of emigration and end up spending everything they have. To return with nothing is shameful for the emigrant and her family, and if they find themselves in such a situation, some women may decide to break ties with the native land. Despite all these efforts, sometimes things do not always go as planned, and among the countless difficulties and sacrifices in the life of a migrant, we find stories permeated by pain and marked by the stigma of failure. We look now at the case of Antônia, taken from the work of Claudia Bongianino (2012).

ANTÔNIA

The trajectory of Antônia and her daughter Federica adds further complexity to the situation seen in the stories of Dona Teodora and Bela, pointing to an element given scant attention in the literature on migration: the interrupted trajectories, the stories of "failure," when the difficulties inherent to these projects make their realization impossible, or when the individuals comprising the network are unable to maintain and continue the ties with success.

Here I reproduce the history of these two women as reported by Bongianino (2012, p. 163). Antônia went to Naples with a work contract in 1980 when she was 26, leaving her daughter Maria, then 1 year old, with Antônia's mother. In Italy, Antônia began a relationship with the father of her second child, Federica, who was born in Italy and lived there with her mother her entire life. Maria, the daughter born and left behind in Cape Verde, never went to join Antônia.

Antônia was employed as a housemaid in various homes and affirmed that she was treated like a slave, especially by the third family for whom she worked. Without the right to adequate food, days off, or holiday breaks, and with a small child (Federica) to raise, factors meaning that she could not risk losing the job and look for something better, she continued to work there until she became ill, and was diagnosed with stress and poor nutrition. Although unemployed and in medical recovery, Antônia was unable to obtain compensation for her illness because, as she discovered, her boss had not paid her social security contributions. The process of legalizing her situation was time-consuming, and as a consequence, Antônia and Federica lived without documentation in Italy for two years.

This time interval was enough to complicate access for the two of them regarding their right to live and work in Italy because, with the loss of her job and her boss's failure to pay her social security contributions, Antônia lost her authorization to remain, classifying her as "clandestine" or "illegal," and consequently also forfeiting her right to retirement and other benefits to treat her poor health. Federica, in turn, although born in Italy (from where she had never left) and although she had grown up to become an adult with her own children, found herself in an irregular situation due to the two years as an undocumented resident, which prevented her from requesting Italian citizenship. With few economic resources, unable to cope with this situation, and living in a relative degree of isolation, the mother and daughter helped each other as best they could to raise Federica's two daughters.¹⁵

Although she does not describe all the elements involved in the process of constructing this isolation, Bongianino concludes that both Antônia and Federica were unable to nourish a network of relations and support in either Italy or Cape Verde. Antônia went to Naples with a work contract under the *numeric call* system. In other words, she was hired at a distance by an employer and not *taken* by a relative. In her years in Italy she did not *send for* any relative in Cape Verde, given her economic situation caused by her illness, and did not return

15 For example, they take turns caring for the children and divide their working hours – Antônia works during the day and Federica works in a bar at night.

periodically to Cape Verde on vacation. We can conclude, therefore, that she did not regularly help her family or her daughter, Maria, whom she left in her home country. As can be expected, neither did she build a house in Cape Verde or circulate the wealth associated with emigration (presents, requested items, and so on). All of this led Bongianino to conclude that, “there is a failure in the family migratory strategy of Antônia and she found difficulties maintaining and creating emotional relations with Cape Verde, even with her parents and her older daughter who lived in the archipelago” (2013, p. 170).

We can thus observe a rupture in the ties that, when nourished, as in the cases of Donna Teodora and Bela, allow the creation of strategies to stay close even at a distance, which is what *makes a family* in Cape Verde. In a migratory process, there are two levels that are essential to cultivating these ties. At a more structural level, it is important for emigration to be an *affair* of the family: in other words, even if it has individual dimensions, the departure is expected to generate returns for the entire family group. In this sense, it is essential that new people be *called* or *taken* to live as emigrants.

Beyond the circulation of people by generations, the family relations at a distance also need to be nourished by daily practices of exchange, sharing, and care. The maintenance of contact at a distance – through the swapping of information, presents, objects, money, visits during vacation, photographs, and so on – is essential to the process of *making family*, creating and maintaining the ties and sense of belonging among family members who are geographically and temporally separated (Lobo, 2014b).

In the case of those women who emigrate and leave children behind, as in the example of Antônia, this expectation is even greater. In a society in which the ties between mother and child are central, a child who remains at home creates a network of debts and gifts through which objects, information, affection, and people should circulate. The child who stays, therefore, functions as a strong link that maintains the woman who left in a relationship of proximity. In turn, by sharing a notion of family that also perceives the mother-child relation as a strong tie, the Italian legislation allows for the possibility of immigration for children. Likewise, the departure of the wives-mothers – as part of the project for the construction of the family’s migratory capital, dependent on a continuous circulation of objects, affections, and people over generations – would, in theory, be guaranteed since both locations supposedly provide the conditions for those who stayed behind to be ready to leave and for those who left to perform their role of strategically *calling*, *sending for*, and *taking* other members of the family and community.

Nevertheless, as Bongianino affirms, Antônia was unable to contribute to this network and continue a migratory project that over the years failed,

not even supporting the network of circulation of people or the circulation of goods and affection. The author does not tell us about the conditions under which this break took place, but it is possible for us to infer how Antônia's trajectory was classified by the family who remained in Cape Verde through the signs of ingratitude and abandonment.

These were the categories used by my research interlocutors from Boa Vista when they referred to women emigrants who failed to meet the expectations described above and who, in their words, had *forgotten* their families. In the case of those children left behind, the bitterness of having been abandoned pervaded the accounts of their trajectories. In the absence of circulation, family projects are broken, and family relations undone.

Conversely, the fact of not *making things circulate* caused Antônia and Federica to experience the consequences of these ruptures in Italy too, because, as studies of immigrant communities have shown, it is also within family networks that immigrants find the support needed to live in countries marked by discrimination and racism in relation to the other. As Antônia herself said, "it's a problem when you have no family nearby" (Bongianino, 2013, p. 166).

MAKING FAMILY AT A DISTANCE: FINAL REFLECTIONS

The stories of Donna Teodora, Bela and her sisters, Antônia, and Federica appear to complement each other to the point of presenting readers with all the complexity of the family and individual trajectories involved in the process of construction and maintenance of migratory projects. For these women, emigrating as part of a broader network implies security, but also responsibilities. While these dimensions are inherent to any and all types of migratory project, in Cape Verde or elsewhere, in the case of female migration from Boa Vista island we can observe some specific elements that contribute to the debate.

The first of these is related to the local family configurations. In a society that perceives the ties of filiation between a mother and her children as the center of family relations and ties of affinity as looser and more fluid, the departure of women presupposes a family structure based on a strong network of female solidarity. It is thanks to this network, therefore, which operates locally, nationally, and internationally, that these women circulate and, in turn, make people, things, resources and information circulate.

As I present in the cases of Donna Teodora and Bela, the female network operates to provide the support needed so that women can depart leaving their children behind thanks to a notion of maternity that is shared among the women (Lobo, 2010). It also operates in the processes of *taking* and *sending for* other family members. It is through this network that things and affections

circulate in daily practice. Finally, it is this network that allows them to return. Antônia, in turn, shows us the conditions under which this network breaks down and how the break in circulation can ruin the migratory project, generating immobility on various levels: of the daughter Maria who stayed in Cape Verde, of Federica and her sons who were unable to recuperate their relations with the family of origin and use them at a moment of need (to send the children to Cape Verde for example), and of Antônia herself who, tragically, had nowhere to return to.

We can note that the departure of these women is made possible, therefore, by a family structure that sustains their emigration – a structure that, in turn, is reproduced thanks to them, which allows the women to remain close even if they are distant in space and time. By contrast, the male condition, already entailing a relative distance from family and conjugal contexts, does not appear to undergo major changes, even though the man is also a link for this woman who has departed, especially if he is the father of her children. Contrary to what may be expected, then, the systemic combination of matricentrality and patriarchal ideology does not necessarily change with the departure of these women to live as emigrants – under new molds and new balances of power,¹⁶ the same basic structure appears to be reproduced (Trajano Filho, 2009; Lobo, 2014).

There is one more specificity to which I would like to call attention: the migratory routes of these women to Italy. If the local contexts make viable and support the departure of these women, it is also thanks to the dynamics of Italian society that this flow has highs and lows. As was demonstrated here, the migratory projects of these women are opportunely shaped to a dynamic that stimulates and restricts them. As Laurent emphasizes, when comparing the flows from Fogo Island to the United States with those from Boa Vista to Italy, the dynamics of “making family at a distance” are also shaped by the processes in course in the receiving countries. It is thanks to the power of adaptation, the plasticity of these families in Cape Verde, that the migratory projects are maintained and that *making family* is reproduced (Laurent, 2016).

To conclude, I wish to connect these reflections concerning the specific case of Boa Vista (and Cape Verde generally) to the literature dedicated to understanding similar contexts: women who emigrate from poor to wealthy

16 It is certainly the case that the women who emigrate enjoy a new status and a differentiated social role, as emphasized here in various passages. Thanks to the migratory projects, they acquire greater economic power, symbolic capital, and a relative increase in their power of decision in the family sphere. However, the patriarchal molds of the family system are not broken. In my view, they wind up being reproduced.

countries, work as housemaids (or sex professionals, care-givers, and so on), leaving children and companions/husbands in their societies of origin.

The assessment that women's participation in international migratory flows has increased and that this flow raises significant questions for migration theories is reflected in the proliferation of studies on the issue over the past 15 years. We have thus left behind one situation – in which migratory studies traditionally failed to problematize the question of gender and produced crystalized and homogenized views of the migrant as an amorphous category without internal distinctions relevant to considering the processes of insertion in the receiving countries – to encounter a new one.

Since the early 2000s efforts have been made to include gender as a classificatory principle that permeates migratory movements and that – together with other categories such as class, generation, and ethnicity – shapes the opportunities available to female and male migrants. This shift is observed in the growing number of studies, research centers, and scholarly congresses that analyze and debate the flows of women, foregrounding discussions about the re-articulations of family and gender relations in these processes. In this sense, the circulation of women at a global level, beyond influencing the societies involved, has generated deep alterations in those migratory studies that not only incorporate gender in their analyses, but curiously (and despite feminist efforts to separate the feminine from the family) reveal a growing interest in understanding the interface between family and mobility.

It is in this kind of situation that studies of so-called transnational families have been carried out and theories about transnational care, the circulation of affection and co-presence have grown in volume as analytical alternatives in recent years (see Baldassar, Wilding & Baldock, 2006; Baldassar, 2008, 2016; Lyon, 2006; Hochschild, 1983; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). The authors of these perspectives link the increase in migrations over recent decades directly to the rise of transnational families and the need for these emigrants to care for those who stay behind. The concept of transnational family gains strength when, in evaluating theories of care, these scholars ask, “how can we consider care at a distance?”

According to Baldassar, Wilding, & Baldock (2006), studies about care-giving suppose that the act of care requires proximity, denying the possibility of care at a distance, with geographical proximity a presumption for the construction and maintenance of family ties. In their effort to question and go beyond this perspective, these authors are supported by theories concerning transnational migrations (Basch et al., 1992) that perceive migrations as processes of complex interactions between individuals at a distance. This analytical perspective allows scholars of care to explore family relations as social fields

in which geographic distance does not impede the care practices. (Baldassar, Wilding, & Baldock, 2006; Lyon, 2006; Baldassar, 2008, 2016).

In this situation, the new technologies are perceived as powerful tools that make possible and influence the exchange of transnational care and the construction of co-presence. Thus, the democratization of telephone calls, the internet, and smartphones that allow people to communicate online by sending messages via SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook, Viber, Messenger, and the rest is intimately connected to the possibility for creating and maintaining daily care practices among family members who comprise transnational networks through which people, things, and affection circulate.

In full agreement with the authors cited here, I emphasize that care at a distance permeates the life of families with migratory projects. People, money, objects, presents, information, and affection circulate within these families along diverse paths. The cases I report herein are no different and I have had previous opportunities to write about the circulation of things between Boa Vista and Italy and its importance for *making family* (Lobo, 2014b). As Laurent affirmed in an unfinished work about Cape Verde families at a distance, the circulation of care in this migratory context is evidence of – and thus an important facet for understanding – family dynamics at a distance.

Nevertheless, I perceive some limitations to the analytical paths that place explanatory centrality on the family dynamics of migrants by emphasizing the production of co-presence and care at a distance. The first limitation relates to the order of things. By focusing on daily care practices in transnational family networks, I believe that the structural dimensions of family life remain confined to the background. These practices give life to and revise deeper long-term structures that span generations and are at the heart of family projects. I have referred to the case of Cape Verde, where a deep history of emigration has a structural quality. Emigration is seen as a value, a destiny, and an imponderable. In this context, daily practices involving the circulation of affection and care are indices of a phenomenon that must be understood more processually rather than focusing on just the phenomenon itself.

To account for these dimensions it is essential to study the family dynamics beyond the migratory contexts, comprehending the universes of kinship and incorporating local daily family life into the analysis in order to understand family processes across time, along with their practices and values. Looking more processually at these families now living at a distance can reveal that while it is true that family relations are contextual and constructed in arenas of negotiation and flexibility, as Miller (2007) emphasizes, these relations are also composed of normativity, formalization, and fixity – and these spheres should not be allowed to disappear from our analytical perspective.

To escape from theoretical formulations that, although inspiring, can wind up generating relations of cause and consequence that simplify the ethnographic realities, I have examined the interfaces between gender, migrations, and family dynamics by considering the processes and not by applying adjectives to family forms (whatever adjectives these may be: transnational, alternative, hegemonic, etc.). I do so as I believe that accompanying such processes allows us to access both the daily practices of *making family* and the deeper structures that inform such practices.

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