

Interwoven migration narratives: identity and social representations in the Lusophone world

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an exploratory analysis of the life narratives of migrants in the Portuguese-speaking world. By interweaving the life experiences of eight participants in three thematic clusters – ‘shared past’, language and sense of community – we propose a critique of the deep-seated idea of the Lusophone space as a community constructed by the harmonious conviviality of different countries and people. Drawing on contributions from cultural studies, social psychology, anthropology and sociology, we first aim to give voice to the human subjects who embark on migrations and then to understand how the engendered process of identity construction is framed by their social world, simultaneously reframing it. Thus, we aim at shedding light on the ways in which aspects of the political discourses on Lusophony are used (and are instrumental) to the migrants’ identity narrative (re)construction.

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Between space and ‘community’ or the contemplation of the Lusophony discourse

In this article, we examine the micro perspective on the discursive construction of Lusophony. We undertake this complex matter by analysing how migrants in the Lusophone space construct their own sense of identity in relation to the prevailing social representations of Lusophony. Thus, we will analyse the social representations brought about by interactions in intercultural contexts. Social representations are images and ideas that sustain narratives of the world constructed through social practices, communication and belonging (see László 1997; Moscovici 1984). Thus, it is the interconnection between the subjective and the political imagination of a common past, which is claimed to bring the Portuguese-speaking countries together, that

we will examine through the experiences of migrants within the Lusophone space.

Our common ground is the notion of 'Lusophony' that is put forward by political organizations, such as the political and economic bloc formed by the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. The concept of Lusophony is founded on the idea that the Portuguese-speaking countries share a common past and are consequently tied together by shared cultural values and language. Needless to say, Lusophony is used in overlapping and contradictory ways alongside ideas of national identity by the different parties involved (including the former colonial power and former colonized territories). The scope of the concept is not only limited to political economic interests, since civil society also takes part in this debate (see Martins 2015). Debates about the meanings and value of the idea of Lusophony are plentiful in the Portuguese-speaking scholarly milieu. These discussions move in very uneven directions, from the affective exaltation of the linguistic and historical ties to a contestation of its focus on Portugal as a continuum of a colonial legacy (see Cahen 2013; Castro Rocha 2013). This latter idea may lead to the denial of Lusophony, as a word that needs 'to be forgotten' (Baptista 2000, our translation), as if it were a dissembled tool of domination. However, it is still an important notion that might be easily manageable if translated into a theoretical concept (Castro Rocha 2013). Morier-Genoud and Cahen caution us that in order to evoke the Lusophone as a category in itself, we need to know if the people involved in such migrations 'believe there is such a commonality' (2013, 10). Despite considering this as important, this article will neither cover the grounds of this question, nor will it provide a full review of the theoretical debate about Lusophony.¹ Nevertheless, we will focus on three discursive understandings of Lusophony as being constructed by holding a shared past, a common language and a sense of community (marked by hybridity and by deep cultural ties).

It is important here to distinguish between the discourses on Lusophony and the use of 'Lusophone' as an adjective that allows for the delimiting of a space for our analysis. In this article, we will use Lusophone as an artificial analytical tool that enables us to examine the interviewees' experiences. Specifically, we will focus on the life experiences of migrants across five Portuguese-speaking countries: Angola, Brazil, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique and Portugal (the 'home' and 'host' countries of our interviewees). From a data sample of 52 interviews² covering different political phases, personal circumstances and motivations, and an extensive age range, we decided to explore the life stories of 8 interviewees in order to enable an exploratory juxtaposition between identity construction and social representations. Thus, in the following section, we will provide a brief overview of the theoretical debate over the Lusophone migration

system; then, we will present our sample and the general results of our analysis.

Considering the importance of globalization in current migratory flows, we should recognize the mutability of the concentration of economic and political power (Cohen 2008). However, we agree with Morier-Genoud and Cahen (2013) that the historical configuration of empire should not be disregarded as an important factor that influences migration flows. It is in this complex paradox that we situate our analysis, focussing on the new and long-standing representations of the world and its power dynamics.

Migration within the Lusophone space: restoring the subject's voice

Debates over transnational migration seem to have dominated the media and the political scene from the last decades of the twentieth century until the present. Migration issues have animated political agendas, provoking numerous reactions from academics as well as from broader society. In this article, we understand migration as an activity integrated into a system that is constructed on a macro and micro level. Hence, we will use the term 'migration' instead of 'diaspora' to emphasize the diversity in how people move, return and settle in, as well as to respect their own lexicon of their experience. We recognize 'diaspora' as an important analytical tool with which to understand migration experiences; however, those experiences are generally surrounded by a discursive apparatus, and as Cohen (2008, 16) suggests, we need a time frame that allows that experience to be categorized as a diaspora. Thus, 'diaspora' does not apply to our enquiry since: (1) we are dealing with a wide range of discursive constructions of the migration experience (circumstances, motivations, desires, financial situations, etc.) and (2) our time frame comprises the 1940s–2012; therefore, our analysis includes new processes of migration in which we cannot establish a 'diasporic nature'.

In order to frame our understanding of the migration experience, we will acknowledge the Lusophone migration as a system, despite the fact that some authors reject this construction. For instance, Morier-Genoud and Cahen contest the idea that the Portuguese empire created an 'autonomous space of migration' (2013, 1). They base their arguments on the weak political action of the Portuguese Government during the late colonial period in creating a dynamic flow of people from the metropolis (Portugal) to the colonial territories – the currently denominated *Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa* (African Countries with Portuguese as the Official Language) (PALOP) (Morier-Genoud and Cahen 2013). However, for Ishemo (1995), Baganha (2009), Tolentino et al. (2011) and Góis and Marques (2009), it is possible to identify a

migration system within the Portuguese-speaking countries that arose from the colonial relationship established between Portugal and its former colonies, especially the PALOP and Brazil. Castelo's (2007) statistical analysis revealed that the entry and exit movements of the Portuguese 'settlers' in Angola and Mozambique were a consequence of both a political effort to boost these territories and the growth of their economies (the latter sparked spontaneous migration, especially to Angola, as she also points out).

Notwithstanding the persistent effects of colonization, there are many interconnected factors that underpin current migration flows. In addition to the other migration systems that coexist with the Lusophone system (see Góis and Marques 2009), there have been notable changes in the financial and political systems of the Portuguese-speaking countries. The political and economic factors are also connected to the imaginations and aspirations of the migrant subjects. According to De Fina (2003), agency should be reconsidered to better consolidate our understanding of migration phenomena. Actors desire, expect, imagine, interact and re-signify their experiences. They use socially constructed ideas to formulate their thoughts and inscribe their identity construction on a meaningful discursive world. This article does not attempt to provide an extensive account of the historical and social changes in the Lusophone migration system over the last 70 years; rather, it provides accounts of the migratory experiences that might reinforce or contradict the expectations of the migrant profiles, motivations and sociability that are framed by historical contingences.

We used semi-structured interviews to reinstate the migrants' agency, grasp their motivations for migrating and learn from how they make sense of their experiences, which allowed their narratives about their migration to come together. Our methodological approach is based on the understanding that through narrative, we '[enable] the openness of life to make sense in meaningful ways' (Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin 2007, 5). Thus, narrative is then understood as a way to explain, organize, frame the world and make sense of our own identity (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001). Hence, narration is at the core of the connexion between the individual and the collective. As De Fina (2003) explains:

Beyond the interaction at hand narrators establish intertextual connexions not only with other stories such as other narratives about migration, but also with other 'discourses', such as dominant images about immigrants circulated through institutions and media. While responding to interlocutors, narrators also respond to discourses that are not necessarily uttered in their presence, but that are being socially circulated. (30)

In light of these ideas, we examine singular accounts of migrants to understand the interplay between the ideas that support the political and

hegemonic Lusophony discourses and the identity narration process of the participants.

Interwoven migrant narratives in the web of Lusophony(ies)

In order to develop our exploratory thematic analysis, we will provide a brief overview of our methodological process and the context in which our research is founded. The sample definition criteria included the following: (1) geography – the migratory experience should encompass at least two Portuguese-speaking countries, as the objective of the project is to analyse the representation of the Lusophone space understood as a geopolitical community; (2) temporality – different time periods and duration of the migration experiences to include a broader social and historical context and (3) diversity – whether the sample is able to encapsulate different kinds of migratory situations.

In view of Góis and Marques's (2009) remark about the Lusophone migration (sub)system being integrated into a larger set of migratory flows, we limited our sample to individuals of Portuguese-speaking origin who had or were having a migration experience in another Lusophone country. This offered a way to define the object of study, thus obeying an analytical criterion by circumscribing a real phenomenon through an artificial model.

The sample was designed to be varied in terms of migration trajectories, the period of migration, duration of the migration experience, age group, family situation, occupational activities and so on. With regard to temporality, we took into account the distinction between *ongoing* and *ceased* migration. Regarding ceased migration, we interviewed migrants who had returned to their country of origin and migrants who decided to remain in their host country.³

Although we sought to represent as many sectors of activity as possible through the snowballing technique, a majority of the respondents was connected to education (eight students, nine teachers). Indeed, the network of relationships and time constraints plus the type of migration experience conditioned our sample. Nevertheless, it was possible to integrate into our study respondents whose professional practices revolve around quite distinct areas and occupation (e.g. the arts, management, non-governmental organizations, civil service, homemakers, retirees and people between jobs).

Within our sample, it is possible to identify some historical milestones that oriented and were important parts of some migrants' stories, ranging from colonization to the liberation wars and the re-democratization process of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (see Arenas 2003; Chabal et al. 2002; Macqueen 1997). The historical facts and their explanations were often bound to their life experiences, becoming part of their own stories. For

instance, some of the interviewees had lived through the African national liberation wars. Some tried to escape the consequences of war, while others were active in political movements in Lusophone countries. Additionally, the boundaries between history and memory seem to be blurred in their life narratives. Even the most remote historical events, such as colonization, were entwined in their individual memory and their own sense of identity.⁴

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Brazil, Mozambique and Portugal from 2010 to 2012 by a team of eight researchers (from Brazil, Mozambique and Portugal); they followed a common open-ended script to systematize the analysis while allowing for a more fluid dialogue. Due to the number of interviews, we do not discuss all of the steps of the interview procedures and analyses in detail. Instead, we will knot the participant narratives into three thematic clusters – (1) the tales of a shared past: colonial imagination; (2) language as a (dis)unity and (3) political imposition or an ‘imagined community’? They aim at shedding light on the points of interface between the migrants’ account and the ideas propagated by the Lusophony discourses. We will focus on the following eight interviewees’ narratives⁵:

- Anna is a 65 years old woman, born in Angola, from a Portuguese family. She moved to Portugal when she was 11 years old. She is a journalist and sociologist.
- Sarah is a 56 years old woman, born in Angola from a Portuguese family. She lived in Angola until she was 17, and then moved to Portugal. In 2009, she ‘returned’ to Angola, where she has worked as a dentist and a lecturer at a private university.
- Paul is a 34 years old man born in Mozambique. Since 2000, he lives in Portugal, working as an actor.
- Maggie is a 33 years old Brazilian woman with a Portuguese ancestry. She lives in Portugal since 2011, where she has been a theatre producer and a postgraduate student in performing arts.
- Jane is a 29 years old woman from São Tomé and Príncipe. She lived in Brazil from 2004 to 2010, where she completed a bachelor’s degree in psychology. From 2010 to the present, she has lived in Portugal, where she came to be reunited with part of her family. She is currently a social worker.
- John is a 37 years old Portuguese man, who moved to Angola due to the economic crisis in Portugal. Trained as a journalist in Portugal, in Angola he is an information technology lecturer at a private university.
- Earl is a 37 years old man born in Portugal from a Mozambican family who had acquired Portuguese citizenship. When he was around 17, he had to move to Mozambique with his family. He holds a degree in physics.

- Emma is a 31 years old woman, dual Mozambican and Portuguese citizen. She lived in Portugal for about 11 years, in two different periods of her life. She moved back to Mozambique to be reunited with her fiancé.

The tales of a 'shared past': colonial imagination

One of the cornerstones of Lusophony is the idea of cultural proximity brought about by a 'shared past'. As we mentioned before, the 'common past' evoked in the hegemonic Lusophony discourses is the colonial past. The topic of colonial representation should be considered by first introducing an important set of ideological representations of the role of the Portuguese in overseas expansion. We need to look back to the 1950s, a time of increasing international pressure over decolonization. Portugal was facing a dictatorship supported by the ideal of a grandiose colonial past. During this decade, a theory proposed by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre started to be adopted as support for the Portuguese state's rhetoric regarding its empire. Freyre had brought together a theory to explain the Brazilian position in the world and make sense of the Brazilian identity. However, his (quasi) theory, denominated Lusotropicalism, conveyed the idea that the Portuguese had a natural capacity to mix with those then considered to be of 'inferior races' and, therefore, comparatively a 'mild' colonization took place in their overseas territories (Freyre 1940; [1933] 1956, 1958). Evidently, these ideas were aligned with the Portuguese state's desire to maintain its colonial enterprises in Africa. Currently, many authors point to the political appropriation of Lusotropicalist ideas to maintain the status quo (e.g. Castelo 1998, 2007; Matos 2013; Vala, Lopes, and Lima 2008).

As we saw, some of the widespread ideas in the Lusotropicalist ideology were often reproduced by the participants. Nonetheless, not everyone felt that the Lusophone space was nourished by racial equality. Anna, who was born in Angola in 1947 and moved to Portugal in 1958 for family reasons, was a daughter of a high-ranking employee of a transnational company in Angola. Despite her beautiful memories of her past in Angola, she was aware of the privileged life she had had because she was white. So, in 2009, she went as a tourist to Angola, attempting to come to terms with her childhood memories. She noted:

[Black Angolans] think that common history should promote cooperation. 'Why were [the Portuguese people] there [in Angola] when they wanted to explore but they hadn't returned to help, now that people [Angolans and Portuguese, black and white] can be equal? (Anna's interview, Portugal, June 2012)

When talking about the local population of her homeland, Anna felt they held a dual position about Portuguese colonization – on the one hand was the racial oppression she saw being exerted on others; on another was the value ascribed to the infrastructure built by the Portuguese (hospitals, roads, etc.). Therefore, when compared with Angolans, attributes of ‘competence’ and ‘efficiency’ are seen to be held by the Portuguese, notwithstanding the acknowledgement of racism. This view is deeply embedded in notions of development and progress, which is a discursive device of colonization and imperialism.

Other interviewees corroborated this ambiguous view about colonization. As an example, we mention Sarah’s account. She is a 56-year-old woman who was born in Angola when it was still a Portuguese overseas province and came to Portugal when the struggle for power subsequent to the national liberation war intensified in Luanda, in around 1975. She was 17 years old when she came to live in Portugal. She is a descendent of a Portuguese family but considers herself an Angolan woman. Since 2009, she has been living in Luanda because of the difficulty in finding a job in Portugal in her field of work. She believed that:

[Angolan] people can say: ‘Ah, this road is still right because it was constructed during the colonial period. It is well-constructed and is not full of holes like the roads built by the Chinese or the Brazilians.’ But after that, they may say, ‘because these *tugas* [a mocking nickname for the Portuguese] come here to steal our jobs’. (Sarah’s interview, Portugal, January 2012)

Once again, the ambivalence towards the role of the Portuguese in Angola is notable, with a nostalgic feeling towards the past and a sharp critique on the maintenance of white privilege in the present.

Language as a (dis)unity

Language was a focal point of our interview script, since we make sense of the world through language (Bakhtin 1986; Hall [1997] 2013); thus, it is an essential element of the narrative through which culture is transmitted. Within the ‘imagined’ Lusophone space, we are dealing with one language with different variants, spoken by dissimilar percentages of the populations within each Portuguese-speaking country (considering that in some countries, such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, the Portuguese language was adopted more as a top-to-bottom political–economic strategy). Language is another cornerstone of the political and hegemonic discourses of Lusophony, being considered ‘a common language’.

The question about language issues was often initially brought up by the interviewee and then explored in great detail with the support of the interviewer. Problems regarding the academic discrediting of language

(Portuguese variants) were especially important to the Cape Verdeans and Guinea-Bissauans in Brazil and Brazilians in Portugal. The tone of the accounts varied considerably, but in general it was considered a decisive factor in the well-being of these migrants in the host community, causing them to feel inadequate and/or to resent the host society. Other issues involving language misunderstandings were referred to by some Angolans, Guinea-Bissauans and Mozambicans in Portugal; Portuguese in Brazil; and Portuguese in Africa. These accounts varied from narrations of sarcastic remarks towards accents or certain word usages, to the recognition of cultural differences. In sum, there seems to be a language 'barrier', although as we mentioned before, one of the arguments in favour of the idea of Lusophony is the power of the Portuguese language to unite people.⁶

As an example, we can quote one excerpt from the account of a 34-year-old Mozambican participant whom we are calling Paul. At the time of the interview, he had been living in Portugal for 12 years, where he was working as an actor. When asked about his life in Portuguese society and whether he felt that the differences in language interfered with his social interactions, Paul answered that although his accent had never posed a problem for him as an actor, he described some difficulties he had encountered when socializing. He explained that he had been misunderstood and that he felt looked down on for the way he spoke Portuguese (with a Mozambican accent and vocabulary):

[...] Then other things happened, such as [this issue with] language. This sort of thing, of course, the way someone looked at me too, and sometimes how someone imitated me talking and then I was like 'hadn't I said it right?' I had, but with a different accent [so] they imitated the accent, and this sometimes embarrassed me a bit, especially when they were not friends, right? (Paul's interview, Portugal, February 2012)

In this excerpt, the interviewee reported being mocked due to his accent as the main cause of distress during social interactions. During his report, he also mentioned the suspicious 'gaze' due to his skin colour (black), although he avoided emphasizing the 'racial' aspect in this part of his account (we will come back to this issue in due course). In his opinion, his accent is part of his identity; therefore, for him, the loss of his accent would be the loss of his identity. His accent functions as an identity 'marker', which he is reluctant to lose.

Maggie, a 33-year-old Brazilian migrant working as a cultural producer and actress in Portugal and completing a master's degree in the performing arts, also reported some situations in which she was mocked because of the way she spoke. According to her, the worst experiences she could remember happened in rehearsals or during her master's degree acting class. The

interviewee said that the differences between the two ‘types’ of Portuguese languages (Brazilian and European) affected her work: ‘We [Brazilians] speak a kind of Portuguese which is said to be wrong; we use [in oral speech] some colloquial conjugations that are really wrong according to the formal normative Portuguese rules’ (Maggie’s interview, Portugal, January 2012). Later on, Maggie said that some of the grammatical constructions in the Portuguese from Portugal seemed ‘wrong’ to her as well. Although her problem was similar to Paul’s, Maggie’s strategy was a different one: ambiguous, in accepting and denying the arguments used to ridicule her way of speaking Portuguese (not only her accent but also her syntax and lexicon). She agrees that the Portuguese she speaks is ‘wrong’, and at the same time, she questions what seems wrong as also being culturally acquired. In this example, the participant explained the differences in language connected to the different cultural traits she observed between Portuguese and Brazilians. She says, for example, that Brazilians are a ‘less uptight version of the Portuguese’ (Maggie’s interview, Portugal, January 2012). During her interview, she constructed and deconstructed stereotypes in an ambivalent narrative that highlights identity politics and the reinforcement of prejudices to reacquire a positive sense of identity.

Another interviewee, Jane, a woman from São Tomé and Príncipe, had been, at the time of the interview, living in Portugal for 2 years (from 2010 onward). She was 29 years old and also had a previous migratory experience in Brazil (from 2004 to 2010) to complete her undergraduate studies in psychology. Regarding her first migratory experience, Jane said that her integration into the university in Brazil was difficult, as some of the lecturers and professors were less aware of the differences among the Portuguese languages spoken in different countries. She said, ‘I had great difficulty in writing because I remember a lecturer once said I wrote badly’ (Jane’s interview, Portugal, July 2012). According to the interviewee, the professor had problems accepting the way she used accent markers, vocabulary and even phrasal constructions, since she followed the European Portuguese variant. Jane explained that the professor was not aware of the different types of Portuguese and consequently considered everything that was different from the normative rules and lexicon of Brazilian Portuguese wrong (a narrative that we heard repeatedly from Cape Verdeans and Guinea-Bissauan students in Brazil). This episode and the general difficulty in being accepted within the Southern Brazilian academic environment had a great impact on the interviewee’s narration of her life in Brazil. Throughout the entire interview, Jane made clear that she resented the way the host community treated her.

Notwithstanding, John, a 37-year-old Portuguese migrant, gave us an account that provides a way of understanding how language is connected to culture, focussing on the cultural praxis that was unveiled to him. He had

been living in Angola for about 4 years at the time of the interview, working as a university lecturer within the field of communication sciences. He stated that in Angola:

... there is a certain ritual that you have to follow in the way you treat people; no one ever taught me because I wasn't born there. I don't know. And since I'm very frank and direct with everyone, I think people sometimes get offended by how I treat them, and I can never quite understand how the [interpersonal] treatment has to be and how to effectively get into the 'good graces' of the people. ... One has to have a lot of patience because a person really has to follow some steps and may not want to pass over anyone, so one cannot be practical and solve things [one's own problems], because doing that is taking a job from someone else, and this offends people. (John's interview, Portugal, July 2012)

What the interviewee says in this excerpt denotes his vision of Angolan society. He later develops his view, stating that Angola is a place with a lot of institutionalized and everyday corruption. John explained that people were used to being charged money to solve the smallest problems and to 'find[ing] excuses for not doing their jobs' (John's interview, Portugal, July 2012). Curiously, this representation calls to mind the images from travellers' accounts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, written during Portuguese colonialism, in which corruption and laziness were the attributes of the 'inferior' groups of people (Africans or even the Portuguese, in the narrative of British travellers) (see Matos 2013; Williams 2013). John's narrative is formulated on a very delicate arena of power relationships, in which the colonial imagination seems to have left some ingrained social representations.

The examples provide a complex picture of the interconnections between language and the social interactions in the context of migrancy. The accounts about the language similarities and differences often overlapped with racial/ethnic issues, classism, xenophobia and gender discrimination (as was consistently reported by Brazilian women in Portugal during the interviews). Importantly, although many of the respondents referred to the language divide, this cannot be read only as a problem defined by the different variants of Portuguese languages (variations in semantics, morphology and lexicon) in the Lusophone countries (Carvalho and Cabecinhas 2013), since language proficiency (and style) is also a matter of education that is often associated with (or restricted to) social income, social status or even group identity (see, e.g. Shankar 2011). However, classifications such as correct and incorrect Portuguese and the mocking of different accents are real problems the migrants face in their sense of integration, or, in other words, the level of cultural understanding and empathy that they can develop with the host 'community' and vice versa.

Political imposition or an 'imagined community'?

Some of the participants' narratives denote the deeper historical relationships among the Lusophone countries; others show the desire to have a better life (in terms of finances, education or safety) or even a different life (e.g. adventure, less stress). Nevertheless, this experience of geographical mobility results in conflicting feelings.

Among the accounts, we heard words such as 'intermittent' and 'ambiguous' to describe people's lives and their sense of belonging. For instance, John said, 'When I am in Angola, my life feels interrupted, and when I am in Portugal, it feels like my work doesn't develop' (John's interview, Portugal, July 2012). Yet, Emma, a 31-year-old dual citizen, said that she felt partially Mozambican and partially Portuguese, but this was an ambiguous feeling, since it depended on the circumstances (Emma's interview, Mozambique, February 2012). Many of the respondents stated that they felt or feared feeling 'in between' two cultures, which could result in a simultaneous feeling of displacement and attachment either to the 'origin' or the 'host' country, as a non-essentialized identity in which the ideas/categories of belonging are constantly negotiated (Bhabha 2003). Certainly, as some authors point out, this sense of hybridity is not only a consequence of the migratory process or a postcolonial belonging. All identities must be seen as part of a constant process of transformation (Hall 1987, [1997] 2013). However, the migration experience undeniably amplifies the ambiguous sense of belonging, destabilizing the subject's fixed notions of self-identity.

Perhaps as a consequence of this disruption to the possibility of a fixed identity narrative, we observed a resilient reaffirmation among some respondents of their belonging to one of the countries – either the host or the origin country. Of course, we understand that this definitive need to assert their identities categorically might be triggered by the interview itself (Atkinson and Coffey 2002; De Fina 2003) and that their 'national' belonging might not always manifest in the same way. Indeed, considering that identity is always unfinished (Hall 1987, [1997] 2013), it seems likely that some of the respondents reconstructed it during the interview.

An example of a strong affirmation of national belonging is seen in Earl's interview. He was born in Portugal 37 years ago and now lives in Mozambique. Earl moved to Mozambique when he was still a child, and he acquired Mozambican citizenship because both of his parents were from Mozambique. He asserts his Portuguese identity even when he describes some cases of racism he experienced in Portugal due to the colour of his skin (black) and his phenotype. He also does not seem to see any conflicting identities; even if he must constantly 'prove' his Portuguese identity to people he has just met. When directly asked about his belonging, his answer is affirmative, saying that he is Portuguese and he believes he is perceived as

Portuguese by ‘the others’. However, his speech sometimes creates ambiguities – for instance, when he referred to Mozambique, he often used the first person plural ‘we’:

Everything that we [Mozambicans] do, we copy from Portugal. ... It’s good because it’s never anything that has to do with Italian or Spanish, no! Always with the Portuguese! [For instance] we like to know how the Portuguese people dress! The Portuguese dress themselves very well ... although they don’t take much time looking in the mirror. (Earl’s interview, Mozambique, 2012)

Despite asserting his feeling of belonging to Portugal, in this excerpt, Earl denotes a distinct position, implying that he is part of the Mozambican group that admires and copies Portugal.

The sense of belonging that is believed to nurture ‘communities’ has direct links with racial/ethnic identification. The topic of racial/ethnic relationships was important to the narratives of many respondents. It was sometimes spontaneous and at other times directed by the interviewer. Although the non-racist discourse still prevails in some imaginations of the racial relationships in the Portuguese-speaking world – due to the heritage of Freyre’s Lusotropicalist theory (Freyre 1940, [1933] 1956, 1958) – many academic studies and social movements are prominent in revealing the (often-veiled) racism and the difficulties that black and racialized groups have in ascending socially (see, e.g. Araújo and Rodríguez Maeso 2012; Cabecinhas 2007; Cahen 2013; Matos 2013; Vala, Lopes, and Lima 2008). Despite recognizing racism, many of the interviewees interpreted it in an ambiguous manner, admitting that there was racism, but failing to recognize it in daily interactions. Paul, for instance, was very cautious in making blatant affirmations about racial discrimination during the interview. Later in his interview, he mentioned more openly some circumstances in which he suspected that the colour of his skin influenced people’s reactions towards him, such as in the shops or when he walked in the street, and also regarding the roles that were given to him in the theatre plays in which he acts (Paul’s interview, Portugal, 2013).

The positions of the respondents regarding racism and race relations were quite comprehensive, from blatant to subtle expressions of racial stereotypes.⁷ We heard more socially engaged perspectives as well, such as that of Anna, who demonstrated an interest in understanding the historical imbalances that resulted in racial inequalities. However, it is a sensitive issue that was often preceded by the affirmation of a non-racist attitude or ‘nature’, such as ‘I am not racist but ...’, followed by a racist statement (Cabecinhas 2007; Vala, Brito, and Lopes 1999). Often the ‘racism’ is difficult to separate from the ‘cultural’ or the ‘national’, demonstrating how intertwined these notions are. In the case of John, he does not usually employ

racial categories to divide 'us' and 'them'; on the contrary, he generally uses the national nouns 'the Portuguese' and 'the Angolans' to create this divide. However, 'race' sometimes appeared intermingled in his discourse, denoting that Angolans are associated with blackness and thus interweaving the (both arguably abstract) categories of nationality and race.

Communities are defined in the interviews both in terms of what is thought to unify a certain group of people (nationality, language, ethnicity, etc.) and as what differentiates oneself or one group from the 'others'. Interestingly, the 'fear of the other', which is present in many narratives, appears to be a factor that defines the group borders. Some people told us that they did not relate to or were afraid to relate to local people because they were 'false' or 'self-serving people'. For instance, John told us that the other Portuguese he met in Angola were really careful about the relationships they established because they thought Angola was 'in general a country of people [who were] very self-serving' (John's interview, Portugal, July 2012). These ideas about 'the others' enable the interviewees to consolidate their group belonging, redefining the imaginary borders of their communities.

Conclusion

Lusophony as a political discourse has been fostered to weld political and economic projects together. In its idealized form, it means a project to consolidate the Portuguese language in the world, assuming values such as the 'unity' of the people in the Portuguese-speaking world. In the political imagination, Lusophony is supported by ideas of a shared past, a common language and a sense of community. Much has been discussed in the academy about the historical and social aspects of this political project. However, little qualitative research has been done to give voice to the social actors who circulate around the Lusophone sphere.

By attempting to understand the identity negotiations that migrants in the Lusophone space undertake in order to make sense of their own experiences in an intercultural exchange scenario, we aimed at unknitting the multifaceted micro-mechanisms involved in the construction of the 'Lusophone imagined community'. Therefore, within this paper, we sought to demonstrate that the political imagination of Lusophony can vary considerably from the migrants' narratives regarding their sense of community. Although the harmonious conviviality during the Portuguese colonization seems to be extensively debated (both in academic theory and in the societal sphere), it is still part of many migrants' narratives. This is not to say that the migrants who use Lusotropicalist ideas in their narratives blindly believe in the non-problematic coexistence of people in the Lusophone world. The degrees to which they accepted or abided by the political and

hegemonic ideas of Lusophony seem to be related to a tactical identity politics, intertwining their identity construction within disputed meanings assigned to the Lusophone space (its existence or a denial thereof).

In this regard, we noted that in the migrants' narratives, even among people from the former colonies, there is an ambivalent feeling towards colonization. They often subscribe to the discourse that colonization brought development and progress to the colonies, hence, (often unwittingly) aligning with the lingering belief in the intellectual and technical superiority of the (white) Europeans. Yet, the perception of privilege and race oppression is also present in the entwinement of the historical past and their current life stories.

Language appeared as a focal point in many of the interviews and as an important feature in the perception of the 'Lusophone community'. Language was connected to the interviewees' ways of interacting with other people, as well as how they expressed themselves and understood the world. It mediates how people construct representations, which informs their attitudes and worldviews. In this article, we presented some views that challenge the idea that language is an element that unites the so-called Lusophone community. This does not mean that the interviewees refused to see some similarities or the ease with which a sort of communality provides the migratory experience (especially for work or study purposes). However, we saw that language cannot be dissociated from specific social representations, and some of them seem to endure from the colonial imagination. Nor can language be detached from social class, gender, 'race', education or place of origin (in this case, the country of origin). Through the migrants' narratives, we saw that language delimitates some borders in this so-called community by bringing accents, lexicon and phrasal constructions to the surface as markers of difference.

Indeed, the migrants' delimitation of the Lusophone communities is in fact a volatile one, based not only on what they perceive *they are* but also on what *they are not*. This fluidity of the 'borders' between *we/us* and *they/them* reinforces the flexibility of their sense of belonging, as well as their imagination of the Lusophone sphere. Evidently, we saw some migrants sustaining certain 'national identities' more firmly in order to avoid an undesired external representation from being imposed upon them. Nevertheless, despite the efforts to fix their place of belonging, the ambiguity in which they positioned themselves in the Lusophone sphere emphasizes the complex network of identity categories that are dialogically enacted (race/ethnicity, gender, social class, education, nationality, etc.).

Overall, by connecting identity theory in the specificity of the Portuguese-speaking historical context to a qualitative analysis of migrant narratives, we examined the ways in which these dialogical identity constructions were materialized and what ideas of the Lusophony emerged

when making sense of their own experiences. This approach holds the relevance of giving voice to the migrants and understanding how some ingrained Lusotropicalist ideas legitimize their self-representation and simultaneously produce new forms of power relations. On many occasions these ideas were used to establish a positive self-image, hence to negotiate cultural differences and make sense of the position of the interlocutor in the world. Therefore, we argued that some hegemonic ideas of Lusophony result in a repertory strategy whereby the migrants negotiate their position in their current social environment. While this 'strategy' is important for the social well-functioning of the migrants, such as for their well-being, identification and intercultural relationships, it perpetuates and recycles Lusotropicalist ideas, recreating conflicting ideas of Lusophony.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive review of the theoretical discussion about Lusophony [*Lusofonia*], see Cahen (2013) and Martins (2015).
2. The total number of interviews during the research project was 52, encompassing participants from all Portuguese-speaking countries. However, in this article, we will focus on eight interviewees who had their migratory experiences circumscribed to the already mentioned countries.
3. Regarding the ongoing migrations, two of the interviews (for John and Sarah) when the interviewees were on holidays in Portugal.
4. The events that were most referred to in the interviewee's narratives were: (1) the colonial history (in an indistinguishable 'unity' – that is to say, not specifying); (2) the national liberation wars (especially in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique) from 1961 to 1974; (3) the end of the dictatorship (Estado Novo) in Portugal in 1974; (4) the national liberation/independence of the African countries in 1974 and 1975 and (5) the conflicts that succeeded the national liberation wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.
5. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, so in this article, we used pseudonyms to protect their privacy.
6. This question is extensively discussed in theoretical political and media debates about Lusophony. It draws on (misinterpretations of) Fernando Pessoa's illustrious phrase 'a minha pátria é a língua portuguesa' ['my homeland is the Portuguese language'] (see Cahen 2013; Martins 2015).
7. For more references about the racial stereotypes in Portugal and in the Lusophone world, see Cabecinhas (2007); Matos (2013) and Vala and Pereira (2012).

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