

Managing work and family life through religious participation. A comparative approach between Muslim, Hindu and Christian migrant women in Lisbon, Portugal

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the influence of religion on the reconfiguration of work-family relations promoted by three groups of migrant women to deal with the Portuguese economic crisis and labour market contraction whose effects have been more marked than in many other E.U. countries. Comparative ethnographic research has brought to light how female religious participation generates social capitals and converts them in material and work-family reconciliation resources thus mitigating vulnerabilities or triggering beneficial results that affect the lives of families in both the short and long term. Despite the differences in mobilizing religious resources to manage work and family life within the three groups, the achievement of such a balance depends on a similar religious construction of female self which is developed against an individualized notion of personhood.

Keywords: work-family balance, religious participation, gender dynamics, social capitals, Portugal

1. Introduction

International research has increasingly shown that migratory processes compel migrants to rethink and reconfigure their strategies to manage work and family responsibilities in a changing world in which migration is mostly transnational and social inequalities become amplified by the current context of the economic crisis (Baldassar *et al.* 2006; King *et al.* 2006; Grillo 2008; Zontini 2010; Goulbourne *et al.* 2010; Kraler and Bonizzoni 2010; Dyer *et al.* 2011; Evergeti and Ryan 2011, Bonizzoni 2014). Besides being shaped by the opportunities, constraints and inequalities they encounter within different receiving societies to develop accessibility to some form of reconciliation or balance between the two spheres, migrants' capacity of reorganizing their work-family lives stems from an intersection of gender with class, education, ethnicity and religion (Kamenou 2008; Özbilgin *et al.* 2011; Trovão *et al.* 2014).

Accordingly, the available literature focused on work-family issues for ethnic minorities of migrant background has stressed how integration problems and social isolation, combined with the aggregated effects of discrimination and prejudice (in terms of gender, race, culture and religion) can make it harder for migrant women to manage work and family responsibilities (Wall and São José 2004; Bradley *et al.* 2005; Kamenou and Fearfull 2006). Comparative research has also identified several conflicting dimensions between migrant women's cultural values of reference and their workplace cultures (Kamenou 2008), namely the tensions generated by different sets of expectations at work and non-work related spheres which may extend beyond child care responsibilities and often include additional care commitments to fulfil community and religious demands (Yang *et al.* 2000; Dale 2005; Bradley *et al.* 2005, Roehling *et al.* 2005; Kamenou 2008). While addressing the diversity of migrant women's family dynamics and the wider range of their non-work responsibilities, work-family balance debates tend to neglect the various resources that may be available to them through their

participation in religious groups and activities. The relevance of migrants' religious associational lives in the formation of social capital resources and other benefits (material, informational and emotional support, jobs and opportunities for social mobility, mutual help in child-rearing, civic skills, etc.) has been largely recognized (Foley and Hoge 2007; Levitt 2007; Furseth 2008; Goulbourne *et al.* 2010; Trovão *et al.* 2014). However little systematic attention has been given to the interactive effects of religion participation (combined with other salient analytical categories) in producing unequal work-family outcomes and experiences (Ölzbilgin *et al.* 2010).

Engaged with such debates and supported by three ethnographic case studies, this article aims to discuss the influence of religious participation on the reconfiguration of work-family relations promoted by Sao Tomean and Indo-Mozambican migrant women to deal with the Portuguese economic crisis and labour market contraction whose effects have been more marked than in many other E.U. countries. Its guiding questions are: to what extent does religious participation provide migrant women with values and networks to face unfavourable socio-economic situations? How do these potential resources rooted in religion impact on their work-family managing strategies? Can they become a conduit for changes in roles and responsibilities between genders and across generations within family relations?

The concept of religious participation used in this article involves several intersecting dimensions that underlie the conceptualization and performance of religion shared by Christians from Sao Tome and Principe, as well as by Hindus and Ismailis of Indo-Mozambican origin: faith and believing, identification with religious values, performance of religious rituals, involvement in religious networks and group activities, and situational uses of religious resources. Further, for these women, religious participation is not experienced as a compartment but rather as a way of life that structures their family and social responsibilities. These include the provision of food, basic health, safety, education, emotional nurturance, faith and social values for dependent children, as well as the caregiving for the ill, elderly, disabled, less dependent adults, and even themselves. In order to undertake these caring duties, they may actively participate or leave the labour market. Invoked here to highlight the strategies and meaning-making processes through which they negotiate paid work and caregiving, the

very concept of «conciliation» also needs to be understood as a capacity for action which is religiously mediated. As we show ahead, the achievement of such a «balance» depends on a similar familial self-conception which is developed against an individualized notion of personhood.

The comparative design will enable us to explore which aspects of religious participation can be deemed relevant to deal with the economic crisis, as well to discuss which specific aspects of work-family managing practices are influenced by religious participation in each of the three case studies. Nevertheless, rather than interpreting the ethnographies separately, comparative analysis uses the concept of social capital as a heuristic device to highlight the dynamics through which we might better understand their similarities and differences. In this perspective, social capital is understood «as the values that people hold and the resources they can access, which both result in, and are the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships» (Zontini and Reynolds 2007, 262). The adjectives bonding and bridging associated with the concept of social capital are mobilized as analytical dimensions to compare different forms of social capital (Putman 2000, 23). Following Bourdieu's approach, we have also interrogated the tensions between the social capital reality as a source of belonging, equality and reciprocity, and one of multiple power dynamics (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000; Furseth 2008; Thieme and Siegmann 2010).

Along the three ethnographic sections, we wish to sustain that religious participation not only generates social capitals but converts them in material and work-family reconciliation resources thus mitigating vulnerabilities or triggering beneficial results that affect the lives of families in a time of crisis. More precisely, we hope to validate the following arguments:

i) In the first case-study, we suggest how social capitals created by religious moralities of mutuality and networks of solidarity potentiate female social activism in situations of economic precariousness. Consequently, understanding work-family conciliation practices requires looking beyond a dyadic relation. It implies, instead, to consider a triangular relation in which religious mobilisation for caring complements family obligations and substitutes the reduced services provided by Portuguese social care programs.

ii) By contrast, the second case-study leads our attention to several negative effects of bonding religious ties associated with female work-family managing strategies triggered by male labour crisis. In turn, it emphasises how a religious conception of personhood capable to negotiate the taken-for-grantedness of the distinction between the self and the other enables to build bridging social capitals further allowing transformations in the traditional work-family balance of gender responsibilities.

iii) The last case-study highlights several intertwined dimensions through which religious participation may be used to face unfavourable pressures, as well as to adjust family-work performances to new environments. Accordingly, we go on to argue how a strong religious orientation to interact with other people combined with an obligation of intra-community solidarity, together with a long-standing ethic of overlapping family and work relations sustained by differentiated gender responsibilities operate as generators of bonding and bridging social capitals determining successful social mobility pathways.

2. Methods

These arguments are developed on the basis of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted in distinct comparative research projects which we have undertaken on migration and family dynamics. Family, work and religious experiences have featured in all. Although they have been worked through a variety of conceptual lenses (Trovão *et al.* 2014; Trovão and Batoréu 2013; Trovão 2012 a; Trovão 2012 b), our intention here is to apply cumulative findings to specifically question the role of female religious participation to achieve appropriate work-family balances in a context of economic crisis which makes these negotiations more problematic.

The comparative analysis relies on empirical data provided by biographical interviews we conducted with fifteen women from Sao Tome and Principe, thirteen Ismailis from Mozambique and another fifteen with Hindus from the same origin. Intentionally, we have selected contrasting groups of migrant women in terms of migratory paths, socio-economic and cultural integration processes, class background, density of social capitals, productive and/or reproductive labour, types of family

dynamics and religious belonging. We have also aimed to de-homogenise each migrant segment (see Tables 1, 2, 3) by ensuring varied profiles in terms of migratory goals, age, education, employment, family dynamics and availability of ties and resources.

Comparison was guaranteed by the following major topics: migratory processes; opportunities, pressures and vulnerabilities of migrant families in the host society; constructions of self, family, care, work, and religious identity; social reproductive practices, labour market participation and accessibility to care programs; tensions and strategies in the reconciliation of paid work with caring responsibilities; impacts of religious beliefs, values and networks on the understanding and performance of work-family negotiations. A multi-sited research design carried out in Portugal, United Kingdom and Angola has allowed to interpret (in *locus*) situational uses of female religious participation to create and adjust work-family managing strategies to diverse immigration, employment and care regimes (Bonizzoni 2014).

3. Managing work and care through religious-civic activism

During the colonial period Sao Tome and Principe was an important platform for the circulation of plantation workers especially from Mozambique, Angola and Cape Vert. Students and civil servants were then part of a privileged group of people who could travel towards Lisbon, the colonial metropolis. Fifteen years after its independence (in 1990), the economic crisis and the change to a multiparty political system promoted the restart of postcolonial migratory flows to Angola, Portugal, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. This movement of people has stimulated the circulation of values, practices, goods, emotions and memories between transnational households. According to national statistical data, since 2001, the flows towards Portugal have been mainly performed by women (Seibert 2002; Ramalho and Trovão 2010).

In their contexts of origin, our older Sao Tomean respondents were trained to cook and to take care of the younger brothers and other children in the *quintal* [backyard]. Along their lives they have developed multiple responsibilities in the sphere of care, in particular as providers of children's emotional and material needs. Given the volatility of conjugal relationships, these women could hardly subsist with the inconstant

economic contributions of the *pais de filho* [fathers of son]. Their experience of paid work was then previous to migration. As noted in other *creole* families (for instance, Cape Verdean and Caribbean), co-parenting (by grandmothers, aunts and godmothers) and child shifting (Rodrigues 2007; Zontini and Reynolds 2007; Chamberlain 2009; Åkesson *et al.* 2012) between different caretakers (including friends and neighbours) were considered usual work-family conciliation resources in Sao Tome. As Nazaré recalls: «We all give birth, so we are all mothers of that child».

They came to Portugal looking for work, healthcare and a degree of social mobility they believed would be within their reach. However, their labour trajectories were restricted to domestic service in private homes or in firms, to staff assistant in nursing homes and hospitals, and to the food sector, often in very precarious conditions (Wall and São José 2004). In a medium term, they have achieved mother-children reunion. Managing the uncertainty of everyday reality was especially difficult for women with babies or very young children without close family around, but also for those who had to deal with the consequences of a long-term separation. The pre-migratory child-rearing strategies were partially reconstructed in a residential area marked by social exclusion where other recent African communities were also gathered. Moreover, caregiving brought them new challenges: keep their children away from crime and equip them with what Collins (1991, 51) designates «a powerful tool for resisting» racism by working to ensure their self-esteem through a project of community development (Kershaw 2010) driven by religious values.

Already promoted in Sao Tome, their civic participation as Christians was re-contextualized this neighbourhood. Isabel (one of the founders) together with a small group of catholic women have invested in several activities related to their gender and family roles (Shin 2007; Wu and Wang 2007) in the name of the wellbeing and protection of the local community. Visiting and helping the elderly and sick people, sharing meals, supporting house cleaning, collecting clothes, disseminating information for job opportunities, interchanging informal rotary child care were part of their civic-religious activism. In parallel, they instilled in the emergent generations a Christian-spiritual repertoire oriented by ideals of gift, mutual responsibility and personal sacrifice for the well-being of others.

The recent imposition of austerity measures on the part of Portuguese government has severely affected the migrant families of African origin living in their neighbourhood-community. According to them, low-income levels, unemployment, criminality among youths are increasing due to the economic and labour crisis. Reducing the distance between the broader public sphere and the community spaces, our respondents take on roles which complement the scarce local care services by negotiating with several organizational structures (frequently led by institutional agents belonging to Christian and Muslim religions) which act as intermediaries with national government care programmes. Simultaneously, the informal multi-ethnic religious networks in which they participate have proved to be vital to migrant families who depend on social welfare (and whose members are the most affected by chronic and long-term illnesses) as well as to young mothers of African origin who arrived in the latest years with a temporary visa and fear that their children might be taken away from them because they are jobless and have no documents.

«I was helped by many people who were not my blood family. They were the brothers of Jesus Christ sent by Our Lady of Fatima who made this bridge, and I'm fine» (Purificação).

«When I see a person in need, they approach me and say they need some support, and I can't just say no. In my home, at times there's so many people, sometimes, we go to eat, and the food has run out, but well, I'll keep on like this until God calls for me» (Francisca).

Assuming the primary responsibility for both nurturing and educating the children, Sao Tomean respondents (regardless their age) instil the importance of academic and professional training in their offspring. However, the dearth of scholarships forces students to add work as cleaners (as well as babysitters, restaurant staff, and in call centres) to their studies. Those who complete their degrees trust that they will achieve

professional status, skills recognition and social mobility through a new migratory project (mainly to the United Kingdom or to Angola) given the rising unemployment rate among qualified youth, the decrease of salaries, and the racial discrimination they perceive in Portugal.

As it happened with their mothers when they arrived to Portugal, younger respondents who migrated to UK (after the changes in the nationality law in 2006) are now dislocated from familial and community networks. The majority travels with their children encouraged by the social and healthcare programs offered by UK to single mothers. The work they find is temporary and low-paid so they use part-time and shifts to negotiate child caring with partners (Dyer *et al.* 2011), relatives and friends in the same circumstances. Helped by the mother, a sister or a cousin at the arrival, occasionally they also count with transnational care carried out by mothering persons who are considered to be *trustful for babysitting*. Nevertheless, children's provision and upbringing (without the collaboration of the children's father and other family members) are seen as a central aspect of their individual identity.

In the absence of emotional consolation, material support, and worship networks, the strong identification with their mothers whom they recall as images of incomparable strength and generosity constitutes an important resource for self-caregiving when gender-conflicts, economic difficulties, injustice feelings and discrimination perceptions emerge.

4. Deconstructing the otherness of the other: shifting boundaries to negotiate work and family

Originating from Diu (part of the old Portuguese state of India), the forefathers of our Hindu women respondents migrated to Mozambique during the nineteenth century. Following decolonization, the nationalisation process implemented in Mozambique and the civil war that ensued in the mid-1970s led to a peak in Indian emigration in the early 1980s. Most Hindu families from Diu chose Portugal as their destination. The economic strategies developed in the new migratory context were similar to those deployed in Mozambique. Men soon became active in the construction industry.

Reconstructed in Lisbon, the Hindu family relations involve reciprocity and hierarchy. Parents invest work in their children, and instil into them the moral responsibility to ensure (in their old age or times of need) economic support and hierarchical respect. Men have the charge of the material sustenance of their family and the protection of their women. Reproductive work, care of the husband and other family members are the main responsibilities attributed to the women. All members of the extended family share the responsibility for the upkeep of the 'reputation' associated to the family name.

The entry of women into the labour market, especially in the cleaning and care work sector, was an adaptation strategy to the unemployment or the precarious professional situation of men as a result of the labour crisis in the Portuguese construction industry. The pioneers began to work as housemaids for 'richer' Indian families. They rapidly realized that this was the 'most underpaid' and 'humiliating' option. Religious community did not (initially) approved the role reversal they have introduced within their families nor provided them ethic guarantees against exploitative mechanisms by co-ethnic peers. Encouraged by inter-ethnic neighbourhood networks, they began to prefer *bagli* [white] female employers, or 'the doctors' as they call them.

The religious repertoire they internalized was crucial for their integration within the domestic and caring services. In Mozambique and Portugal (until the late nineties), religion was relegated to the female sphere. Women learned and performed rituals which are traditionally carried out by male specialists. Dedicated to the Hindu mother goddess, the first Hindu temple resulted from the personal initiative of one of our respondents and was sustained by her well-known ritual skills. In parallel, they also maintain specific female traditions (linked to caste and lineage) for rites of passage, while recreating *vratakatha* practice and direct means of communication with the Hindu goddess through possession. Emphasising the incorporative, metamorphic and porous nature of all beings, as well as the fluid, mutable and reversible relations between them, their religious beliefs propose a contra-ethnicising logic (Bastos-Trovão 2005) that has legitimated the process of crossing boundaries as an acceptable construction for the Hindu female self.

While avoiding confronting their male partners with the current failure of their gender-based responsibilities, our respondents are the first to recognize that female productive work can introduce ‘confusions’ in spousal relations. Some couples become more united in the face of economic difficulties but others begin ‘to fight’ since husbands resent the economic autonomy of their wives and try to reinforce male authority. Further conflict often occurs because husbands tend to look to their wives to fulfil their traditional roles of handling everything around the house even after a full day’s work, which can evoke further resentment on the wife’s part.

Although highly valued by their husbands, delegated care (of children) to mothers-in-law instils ambivalent feelings in the mind of our respondents. In line with the conflictual framework daughter-in-law/mother-in-law, they are afraid that the latter becomes the main focus of the emotional investments of their children. At the same time, they are very committed to the integration of their offspring, thus aiming that children socialize with Portuguese peers on a daily basis. Recognizing that husbands do not dare oppose to their mothers, they actively negotiate to grant children’s access to Portuguese-language state services. Spousal income, however, is not enough to pay the nursery and to rent an independent house. Subsequently, they spend more and more time within their husband’s family which increases conflicts with female in-law. In situations of extreme dissatisfaction, the material autonomy obtained enables some women to separate from their husbands (without pursuing a divorce) and to become the head of their domestic groups.

In fact, these women gain an increased negotiating agency against the constant pressures of the kin, caste, and ethno-religious community networks. The way they sacrifice themselves to provide material comfort and a prolonged education to children, their accumulated responsibilities for securing family’s wellbeing, as well as their exemplary behaviour in terms of religious performance have progressively changed the pejorative attitude of certain community networks about female paid work outside the household. Anju and Ratan’s words provide us a personal reflection on this:

“When my mother in law and my sisters in law poison my husband against me, I can answer back. I say it quietly, to avoid creating resentment. I bring the bread you all eat. Do not mess with my life.

At first, I did not tell people in our community. They’d think that I was less than them just because I needed to help my husband. They were quite vocal in criticizing anyone who worked outside, talking behind the back. Today, I realize that this gave them a feeling of moral superiority which is false.

Influenced by some of the values of the Portuguese middle class, some mothers have been promoting a less-differentiating gender pattern regarding their offspring’s work-caring balancing performances. In parallel, some efforts towards multi-referential cultural subjectivities have been integrated into their caregiving practices enhancing children’s capacity to participate in multiple group membership practices and relational settings.

Given the increasing rate of youth unemployment, a significant number of their adult children have migrated to the United Kingdom attracted by opportunities for economic advancement. They often concentrate in certain areas of West London and in Leicester where many Gujarati Indians from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi have settled since the late 1960s and 1970s. The tendency among East African Hindus is to see the more recent arrivals as ‘others’ as indicated by the statement that there exists ‘a huge gap’ between them and the ‘portuguesiá’ the name by which Portuguese Hindus are known (Trovão 2012 a).

The majority of men became employed in construction, factories, warehouses and restaurants. Women often find jobs in the caring and servicing sectors while assuming their traditional caregiving and domestic responsibilities. Female part-time work, or more rarely its combination with a small component of (paid) delegated care (by choosing non-kin English speakers nannies of Sikh religion) were noted. However, the negotiation of care within the nuclear family through shift work appears to be a more sustainable option, periodically reinforced by transnational care (mostly provided by mothers to daughters at the birth of a child, in case of illness or serious marital conflict). Equally significant, mothering caregiving for identity instils in the minds of children a

sense of pride affiliation with their Indian, African and Portuguese cultural heritage guarding them against denigrating images that brand them as less valuable. Experiences of discrimination by larger ethno-religious networks and the very temporary nature of locally delegated care on familial ties may explain the differentiated strategies of Portuguese Hindus concerning caring while working, comparatively with other low-paid migrant workers in UK (Datta 2007; Dyer *et al.* 2011).

5. Reconciling family, business and religion: old strategies for postcolonial crises

The forefathers of our Ismaili respondents migrated from Gujarat and settled in the British colonies and protectorates of East Africa, South Africa and Mozambique during the nineteenth century. Under Aga Khan III's guidance from 1893 onwards and continued through the twenty century a new ethics became a religious duty within Ismaili communities. While inculcating the religious principle of political loyalty to the host nations, Aga Khan III gave *firman*s (edicts) to his followers to practice an inner-wordly asceticism which made hard work, rational adjustment and success in material affairs meritorious attitudes and a major virtue in the eyes of God.

Since the commercial sector had diversified both in British and Portuguese colonies of East Africa, the major economic interest of the Ismaili firms lay in trading operations developed by family enterprises. Business was clearly something to be taken care of by men. Mothering and family relations constituted the fundamental work of women. During the 1960s, due to several reforms promoted by Aga Khan III (ban on the veil, investment in women's education, gender equality in the *jamats* [religious communities]), several interviewees began attending secondary school education in private and public schools. Exceptionally, some of them had benefited from higher education and training for certain professions. Mobilizing Aga Khan's *firman*s they have negotiated dominant ethnicized values within their own families. Before de-colonization, some have actively participated in their family enterprises. However, the major investment of Ismaili women became the academic education of their children.

De-colonization processes inflicted times of great socio-economic insecurity upon

Ismailis. A business culture which knew precisely how to circulate capital, people and knowledge was decisive in implementing their decision to quit African territories in the 1960s and 70s. The exodus confirmed the potential of the family business model as a response to critical situations. Some of the triggered strategies, namely the dissemination of the extended family in various countries and the regular mobility of family members to make import/export processes easier, were very similar to the ones deployed by their grandfathers when they migrated to Africa in the late 19th century (Trovão 2012 a).

The option to reterritorialize the family business and reunify the extended family in postcolonial Portugal, the most frequent among Ismailis, who were living in Mozambique, proved to be a fortunate one. The discretion with which some families sold their assets and transferred their capital outside Mozambique, the business and professional opportunities they found in Portugal, as well as the national and international political and economic contacts of their leadership enabled them to sustain generally ascending integration processes.

Nevertheless, the economic difficulties that marked the Portuguese context in the last decades have led some families to explore opportunities in Angola. A drawn-out war, destructive to most of the scarce national production, has increased the need for imports and promised rapid profit to potential importers. This configured a unique opportunity for Ismaili businesses specialized in international trading. The legalization of private initiative and the gradual expansion of the banking and financial system have allowed Ismailis to emerge as a new power, recognized by the state, in the private sector of the Angolan market economy (Trovão and Batoréu 2013).

Although the family business has been partially deactivated during the Ismaili settlement in postcolonial Portugal, the economic investment in Angola renewed the need for reconcile business and family life. The old business model - fathers and sons (now qualified) to work together for family prosperity - as well as the long-standing strategies of family transnationalism were rapidly revitalized. As emphasized by Mina:

õBack then, our firms were almost 100% family-based, generation after generation.

When decolonization happened and we came to Europe, our children gradually

took their distance from the family business. They went to work in big firms in their area of expertise. Our return to Africa had an interesting effect. Our qualified children were able to come and manage the family business.

Concomitantly, family reunification has been promoting the complementarity of gender roles underlying the family business model that prevailed during the colonial period. In fact, women's economic participation in Angola is still limited due to legislation. When they enter the country under family reunification, wives are bound to their husband's three-year work visa, and cannot hold a job of their own. Those who reside along with husbands and children in Luanda invest in their primary gender responsibilities. They closely follow the academic performances of their sons and daughters (in international schools), develop their moral, cultural and religious identifications, manage transnational marriages and family relationships, and devote themselves to the religious community. Many other women move up periodically between Portugal, Angola, UK and Dubai, ensuring that their children (and sometimes grandchildren) receive academic training in demanding and prestigious schools and universities, providing simultaneously (pragmatic and emotional) care to family members.

While familiarized with the 'double shift' of productive and reproductive work (Crompton *et al.* 2007) typical of the middle class Portuguese women, Sharmina and Dina recognize that Ismaili women 'feel very comfortable' when they prioritize motherhood and family caring duties at the expense of a professional activity. It is not that a career does not offer them significant personal satisfaction; but this needs to be overwhelmingly connected to how it reflects on the family.

'I did have a professional career. (...) Now, my main task is preparing my sons to continue the business their father has developed. Therefore, I have to grant them the best and most demanding education, and to monitor their studies daily. I and my Ismaili friends, we are able to be many different kinds of persons in different situations.'

We are very malleable, we have a skill for adaptation that is the reason behind our success (...). The spirit of sacrifice is also very important. I made a pause in my professional life. I stay three or four months here and then I return to Lisbon to take care of my parents. I'm their only child.

Their narratives reveal how Ismaili agency is shaped by a familial self in which the consciousness of belonging to a family group and the responsibilities to assist family members in their *din* (spiritual and faith) and *duniya* (education, health, material, etc.) well-being constitute a religious duty. By identifying themselves with a living *Imam* who guides their followers through personal example and dedication, these women make personal sacrifices for their children, family and business. Further, they also have to extend what they daily practise through the voluntary support of religious peers outside immediate kin-group.

Helped by their families and other friends of the community, hundreds of Ismailis have migrated to Angola to work for a company (usually from Ismaili patronage) or to promote a small business. The decision of how to manage work and family obliges them to consider several variables. On the one hand, child (and elderly) care at distance depends on migrant's caregiving resources provided by family ties in Portugal, as well as on migrant's economic resources to limit the emotional costs entailed by family separation. Conversely, family reunification can bring a lot of emotional stability. Still, this option implies a careful deliberation due to the extraordinarily high cost of living in Angola. Migrant's capabilities to guarantee a quality education for their offspring and a satisfactory material standard for family members in Angola have to be balanced against other factors such as children's age and academic pathways, the professional situation of women and certain conditions (security, health services, etc.) which they enjoy in Portugal.

When it happens, family reunification tends to occur when children are very young or, already adults, they consider Angola as a medium or long term life project which must be managed on the ground. However, the most common strategy for those who work in Angola consists in delegating care (of children) to close relatives (mothers, husband's mothers, married sisters) while mobilizing all their resources to create a

work-life model of in-betweenness. As witnessed by Chena: «For us, Lisbon is the tenth region of Angola. We work here but we have everything there: children, family, house, doctors, shopping. All we live in between».

6. Transforming religious capitals, remaking family-work relations

As Christians and familial-persons, Sao Tomean respondents take on greater caring responsibilities (material, educational, moral, emotional) in the development of the family-community, as well as within their own homes and extended families. Economic poverty, physical and psychological aggression in family relationships, guilt feelings related to the children they couldn't reunite or save from criminality, conjugal and family abandonment among other contingencies are part of their everyday life and collective socio-historical memories. The new demands they have placed on themselves and their religious networks to compensate the loss of social rights and welfare benefits reveal how religious participation provides various types of resources and forms of social capital through which migrant women can precariously balance their double roles as care-givers and breadwinners.

The religious repertoire through which Hindu women respondents constructed their own selves proposes an alternative mode of resolution of uncertainty with respect to identities. Facing a precarious economic situation, they have manipulated typical Hindu beliefs that emphasize how ethnic and racial boundaries are only apparently intrinsic or irreversible to build bridging social capitals and, by extension, to turn them into the economic capital required by their families. Concomitantly, they have promoted a less asymmetrical gender pattern to negotiate productive and reproductive responsibilities while fostering the intergenerational elaboration of cross-cultural identities.

Through a religious communal participation driven by the *firman*s of a living Imam, Ismaili women respondents have accumulated different types of religious resources which they used and capitalized upon as a bridge towards middle class segments of their postcolonial receiving societies. Among them, the religious merit assigned to personal sacrifices for the achievement of material and caregiving responsibilities inside family and outside kin-group, together with the tendency for norms of the host societies to

prevail over the religious ones (whenever any potential conflict between the two exists) produce a non-uniform work-family balance model with potential to address new pressures and changing environments.

7. Concluding Remarks

Revisiting previous research on work-family issues for ethnic minorities, our findings do not support the contention that ethnic minority women necessarily experience high levels of segregation and opposition between work and non-work spheres (Kamenou 2008, 107). For Sao Tomean women, and similarly to what has been outlined for Afro-Caribbeans and Cape Verdeans (Duncan and Irwin 2004; Chamberlain 2009; Åkesson *et al.* 2012), mothers are providers in a broad sense. Work hard to achieve material resources is then perceived as a major component of a good mothering which simultaneously constitutes a central dimension of female lives and individual identities. In parallel, current research also suggests that South Asian migrant women are expected to prioritise family and children's needs over productive work (Dale 2005). Nevertheless, the narratives of Hindu and Ismailis women of Indo-African origin reveal that their professional and economic activities are performed and conceptualized as an integral part of their self-constructions as familial and mothering persons. Rigid borders and oppositions between work and non-work spheres seem to be insufficient to understand lives which are not captured in those terms.

Another aspect of divergence concerns the statement that ethnic minority women present high levels of bicultural stress (Kamenu and Ferarfull 2006) as an additional constraint to manage family, community and work. Despite the existence of more important factors - such as the experience of racism so as to understand the process of differential insertion of African migrant women and their families in Portugal - comparative ethnographies highlight how migrant women are active participants in fostering various forms of cross-boundary moves and attachments, negotiating at the same time what counts as specific cultural and religious resources with what constitutes multi-cultural and hybrid resources to build opportunities and benefits for both their families and themselves.

Answering a final question of how work-family managing resources created by religious participation may improve women's ability to renegotiate family asymmetries, our findings reveal that Sao Tomean religious activism does not alter important differences in the caregiving aspects of motherhood and fatherhood. Allowing transformations in gender traditional responsibilities within family relations, the productive and reproductive work of Hindu respondents does not necessarily fit into a gender equality logic. The fact that Ismaili respondents continue to prioritise caregiving duties over the fulfilment of individualistic objectives confirms that they construct themselves as familial subjects, even though they may invest on their professional careers. Despite the differences in profiles and strategies to balance paid work and caring responsibilities, what seems more meaningful is the way our three groups of interlocutors use religious resources without subverting specific constructions of self, gender and family, which remain socially significant, maybe even more for migrant families.

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