

Doi: 10.4025/psicoestud.v20i2.25634

---

---

## Resilience Processes in Migrants: Biographical Narratives of Brazilians in Portugal<sup>1</sup>

Sandra Roberto<sup>2</sup>  
Carla Moleiro  
*Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal*

**Abstract.** Studies on migration have focused on the difficulties, barriers and obstacles upon arrival and stay in the host country. Recognizing the existence of these adverse processes, just a few studies have been turning their attention to the way that migrants overcome the difficulties they encounter. Moreover, a small number of studies have been investigating the migration process as a whole, starting in the country of origin. Based on the resilience theoretical perspective, this study sought to understand the adversity contexts and the resources mobilized by Brazilian migrants in Portugal, throughout their life trajectories, observed on the link between the country of origin and the host country, through 12 biographical narratives. The analysis of the narratives revealed the diversity of resilience processes amongst those migrants. It revealed that the adverse context arose by means of devaluation and rejection relationships with the Portuguese, stressing the importance of affective ties, sense of belonging, as well as the role of the Brazilian diaspora in Portugal, as meaningful resources. The article also discusses the clinical implications of the analysis of the narratives, from a resilience perspective.

**Keywords:** Resilience, human migration, narratives.

## Processos de Resiliência em Migrantes: Narrativas Biográficas de Brasileiros em Portugal

**Resumo.** Os estudos sobre as migrações têm focado as dificuldades, as barreiras e obstáculos na chegada e permanência no país de acolhimento. Reconhecendo a existência destes processos adversos, poucos estudos se têm dedicado ao modo como os migrantes superam as dificuldades com as quais se vão deparando. Mais ainda, poucos estudos dedicam atenção ao processo migratório como um todo, com início ainda no país de origem. Partindo da perspectiva teórica da resiliência, este estudo procurou compreender os contextos de adversidade e de recursos dos migrantes brasileiros em Portugal, ao longo das suas trajetórias de vida, observados na ligação entre o país de origem e o país de acolhimento, por meio de 12 narrativas biográficas. A análise das narrativas revelou a diversidade de processos de resiliência entre os migrantes. Revelou ainda que o contexto de adversidade surgia por meio das relações de desvalorização e rejeição com os portugueses, salientando-se a importância das vinculações afetivas e do sentimento de pertença, bem como o papel da diáspora brasileira em Portugal, como recursos significativos. Neste artigo, são ainda discutidas as implicações clínicas da análise das narrativas, numa perspectiva da resiliência.

**Palavras-chave:** Resiliência, migração humana, narrativas.

## Procesos de la Resiliencia en los Migrantes: Narraciones Biográficas de los Brasileños en Portugal

**Resumen.** Los estudios sobre la migración se han centrado en las dificultades, las barreras y los obstáculos de la llegada y permanencia en el país de acogida. Reconociendo la existencia de estos procesos adversos, pocos estudios se han dedicado al modo cómo los migrantes superan las dificultades que se les presentan. Aún más, pocos estudios dedican atención al proceso de la migración como un todo, con inicio todavía en el país de origen. Partiendo de la

---

<sup>1</sup> *Support:* Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Bolsa de doutoramento SFRH/BD/60693/2009, Portugal.

<sup>2</sup> *E-mail:* sandragasroberto@gmail.com

perspectiva teórica de la resiliencia, este estudio buscó comprender los contextos de adversidad y de recursos de los migrantes brasileños en Portugal, a lo largo de sus trayectorias de vida, observados en el enlace entre el país de origen y el país de acogida, a través de 12 narraciones biográficas. El análisis de las narraciones reveló la diversidad de procesos de resiliencia entre los migrantes. Reveló aun que el contexto de adversidad surgió a través de las relaciones de desvalorización y rechazo con los portugueses, destacándose la importancia de los vínculos afectivos y del sentido de pertenencia, así como el papel de la diáspora brasileña en Portugal, como recursos significativos. En este artículo, son discutidas también las implicaciones clínicas del análisis de las narraciones desde la perspectiva de la resiliencia.

**Palabras clave:** Resiliencia, migración humana, narraciones.

---

Studies on migration are commonly centered on the negative impact and on the hard difficulties for those who migrate, due to innumerable barriers and obstacles encountered when they attempt to adapt or to integrate into the host societies. What is more, several losses (family ties, language, cultural reference, among others) take place from the moment one leaves his or her country of origin (Boss, 2006). Generally speaking, the impact that the contact with societies of the host country has on the migrants is referred (Berry, 1997).

Even though these processes are present and possibly cumulative, a few studies have turned their attention to the resources mobilized towards the overcoming of such difficulties, and a small number of studies have been developed with the aim of comprehending the dynamic processes involved in the interaction between adversity and resources. Concerning migration courses, investigations tend to focus on the period of arrival and settlement in the host country under the perspective of social and cultural differences and contrasts (Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2010).

The theoretical approach on resilience presents a proposal, perhaps not contrary but rather complementary to this perspective, rooted in the difficulties, in the risk. The basic notion of the concept acknowledges the existence of adverse contexts, but is centered on the resources mobilized for the overcoming of adversities in processes of positive adjustment (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

Based on this general context, this study seeks to articulate theoretical contributions on resilience for the comprehension of the life journeys of Brazilian migrants in Portugal, through biographical narratives. However, the theoretical articulation aimed at this general objective finds certain tensions of conceptual, epistemological and methodological level.

### ***Resilience and migration***

In an attempt to clarify existing tensions between the main concepts of this article (resilience, migration and biographical narratives), but also considering the possibility of setting bridges between them, we sought to go through the conceptual and epistemological foundations of these approaches. The resilience theme has been little studied comprehensively and, as pointed by Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000), we deem important that the investigation produced about resilience makes clear the starting point of theoretical and epistemological assumptions in face of the several existing possibilities, as in the last few decades more than twelve theories on this theme have been produced (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

The concept of resilience emerged from the knowledge organized around positive psychology, epistemologically founded on a positivist perspective. Studies in this area have been sought to assess the way that individuals activate certain resources before adverse contextual determinants. In this sense, a possibility to define the concept, which is used in empirical investigation (despite the existence of other perspectives, namely, an understanding as a trait or result of a process) refers to resilience as a dynamic and circumstantial process, observing a positive adjustment or adaptation in face of the action of protective or promoting factors in adverse circumstances or conditions (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000).

Most of the quantitative studies on resilience derive from this definition, which aim to investigate the impact of certain variables (protective factors) on risk factors and the mensuration of positive adjustment results. In these studies, risk factors are understood as events or conditions that increase the probability of an undesired fact, and protection factors as those that have a moderation effect on

the influence of risk factors, such as the reduction of the impact of the risk, the reduction of chain negative reactions, or the access to new resources that allow dealing with risk factors (Riley & Masten, 2005). This understanding relates to the predictive power of factors that constitute the concept, in a search for causality relations. In this study we have adopted the designation of adversity and resources, exactly due to the detachment from this positivist attitude in face of the concept.

Relinquishing the predictive value of the concept, we adopt the proposal by Yunes (2003), warning as to the need for studies that approach the subjective dimension of resilience and that capture the meanings attributed by people to their individual experience. This idea opens a door to the communication with other epistemological foundations. Regarding the object of interest of this study, we seek to comprehend resilience as a dynamic and circumstantial process based on the construction and sharing of socially built individual meaning. Ungar (2008) also adds the concern with a certain hegemony in studies about resilience and this is how he seeks to include the cultural dimension in the definition. He defines resilience as follows:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways. (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).

Through this definition we highlight the importance of cultural specificity, a constituting element and integral part of each one individually.

The study of resilience in migrants produced in the last few decades has essentially approached the negative conditions associated with migration processes. However, the possibility of immigrating represents, before anything else, a set of new and different opportunities for those who immigrate, despite the difficulties inherent to leaving the country of origin and to arriving in the host country (Coll & Magnuson, 2014). Thus, the investigation about resilience processes in migrations emerges due to the need to move beyond the focus placed on the deficit and to look for a new comprehension about the strategies and resources used by migrants. We seek to complement this approach, adding the need to comprehend this process through the meanings and senses attributed by the migrants about their migration trajectories and routes.

The idea brought by the notion of trajectory, “temporally ordered reciprocal permeation of social and subjective processes” (Schütze, 1981, p. 94 cited by Apitzsch & Siouti, 2007), arises aligned with the assumptions of organization of this study, in a constructionist logic (Lock & Strong, 2010), and with the common thread of abduction (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). We additionally sought to comprehend migration processes through the lenses of the concept of transnationalism, defined as “the process by which migrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. 81). The core idea is the existence of a product resulting from the interactions of the migrants in their past and present experiences, referring to the social and cultural contexts of both countries.

These interdisciplinary bases and the epistemological foundations about resilience and migrations clarify the objective of this study that seeks to comprehend the life trajectories and the meanings attributed by migrants to resilience processes. That is, through biographical narratives it intends to learn about the adversity contexts and the resources of Brazilian migrants throughout their trajectories in life, observed in the linking between the country of origin and the country of settlement.

### ***Brazilian migrants in Portugal***

The arrival of migrants in Portugal became more expressive at the end of the 1990s, being relatively recent when compared to the history of other countries with greater tradition in hosting migrants. Brazilians in Portugal represent the largest population (a total of 91,238), accounting for around 25.3% of the total foreign population in the country (Foreigners and Borders Service, 2013). Brazilian migration with this country as destination had essentially two great waves with different characteristics. The first wave, in the 1980s and 1990s, was composed of qualified professionals, with

liberal professions linked to management, technology and scientific investigation. The second wave, taking place between 1998 and 2002 mainly, brought to the country young migrants with low and mid-level qualifications, integrated into the Portuguese job market in little differentiated segments such as civil construction, domestic jobs and cleaning, in general (Malheiros, 2007). The Brazilian migration flow, among those that have consolidated in Portugal, was that with the greatest changes over time, exactly because of the transformation of the characteristics of migrants.

Due to the recent history of migration, studies on Brazilian migrants in Portugal are not very abundant. Only in the last ten years it was possible to see the production of works on Brazilian migration in Portugal, mostly master's dissertations or thematic studies of restrict publicizing (Malheiros, 2007). The produced knowledge concentrates on socio-demographic and labor descriptions or on processes of identity construction. Some qualitative studies have been gradually providing a broader knowledge about this community concerning the level of labor conditions, as well as the level of processes of integration into the Portuguese society. There is also a few studies on gender and migrations, specifically on the prejudice against Brazilian women (Miranda, 2009). For the scarcity of publications, the present study intends to contribute to the understanding of the migration trajectory of Brazilians in Portugal, particularly of the resources mobilized towards overcoming adversity, through biographical narratives.

## Method

The biographical narrative method is part of a specific type of investigation that resorts to narratives. The investigation about migrations with autobiographical narratives has been using several methods that allow the study of the experiences and meanings in the context of each individual, including the reconstruction of cases method (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 1993). The approach of this method is based on the idea that, by reconstructing each case, it becomes possible to comprehend the interaction between the individual and the institutional aspects of social reality, without losing sight of the perspective of the narrative as a whole (Gestalt). As referred by the author, the objective of the method:

is the reconstruction of the biographical meaning of experiences at the time they happened and further the reconstruction of the chronological sequence of experiences in which they occurred. The purpose of the analysis of the narrated life story ... is the reconstruction of the present meanings of experiences and the reconstruction of the temporal order of the life story in the present time of narrating or writing (Rosenthal, 1993, p.60).

### *Participants*

The biographical narratives of this study were collected from Brazilian migrants that had been living in Portugal for more than two years, making up a total of 12 participants, being 7 women and 5 men. The participants were aged between 29 and 50 years old and resided in the urban or bordering areas of the city of Lisbon. Most of them had completed high school or technical-professional education, and 2 had college degree. As for professional activity, the participants had positions in little differentiated jobs, especially in the construction and domestic work areas, except for two participants who had open their own businesses: one linked to body beauty and the other one to civil construction. All participants had their names kept anonymous and were given fictitious names.

### *Procedures*

In this study we have adopted the theoretical considerations about the way to conduct the interview in the classical sense of the formulation adopted by Schutze (1983, cited by Apitzschi & Siouti, 2007). These authors suggest an open introductory question that starts the autobiographical narration and that allows the narrator to tell spontaneously his or her life story until he or she concludes the narrative. Avoiding pre-defined questions or whys allows a spontaneous narrative for the narrator's own reasons

and for the order that configures his or her individual experience. The figure of the interviewer should be that of a listener interested in and empathetic about the narrator's story, encouraging thus the development of the narrative (Rosenthal, 1993).

The interview was conducted in order to integrate the abovementioned theoretical considerations. Thus, the opening question for this study was formulated as follows: *I would like to ask you to tell me your life story, all experiences and events that you remember. You can take the time you want. I will not interrupt you. Only at the end I will make some questions.* After the conclusion of the narrative, as the narrator indicates, some questions were presented as to the need for the clarification of the reported content, particularly ambiguities, gaps, hesitations or contradictory information (Schutze, 1983, cited by Apitzsch & Siouti, 2007).

The participants of this study were initially contacted through the participants of a previous study, using the snowball technique. These people were asked to appoint somebody from the Brazilian community that had been in Portugal for more than 2 years.

The meeting and the development of the narratives occurred in places chosen and suggested by each participant. Thus, some narratives took place in the houses of the participants, others in cafés they used to go to, or intended to this end. At each meeting the objective of the study was explained, as well as the dimensions of voluntary participation and the guarantee of the protection of their confidentiality and anonymity in information treatment, and each participant signed an informed consent form. This study complied with the principles of the code of ethics of psychologists in Portugal (*Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses* [Order of Portuguese Psychologists], 2010).

The narratives were conducted by the first author of this study and voice recorded. Subsequently, this information was transcribed by an investigation assistant, and the voice-recorded information was used again in the process of analysis of the narratives, simultaneously to the text of the transcriptions. The narratives had durations varying between 25 minutes and 2h45m; the full transcription of each interview and the respective notes were followed by the method of analysis of narratives known as reconstruction of cases. This method is the result of the articulation between hermeneutics – procedure for the analysis of texts – and thematic analysis (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 2004). It differs from other methods as it is based on the assumption that there are two levels of analysis in each narrative: the life story as it has been lived and the narrated story. Through the distinction between these two levels, as well as of the analysis of the relationship between them, it was possible to reconstruct each case in a way that aimed at the process.

The analysis of the narratives of reconstruction of cases complied with the five starting stages systematized by the authors (for a detailed description of each of these stages see Fischer-Rosenthal e Rosenthal, 2004): 1) Analysis of biographical data. 2) Analysis of the texts and of thematic areas. 3) Reconstruction of the life story. 4) Detailed analysis of the segments of individual texts. 5) Contrasting the life story as it has been narrated with the life as it has been lived. These stages seek to find the formation process of the narrative and of the current life, without losing sight of the reciprocal relationship between both of them and simultaneously the unity of the case.

## Results

The biographical narratives were grouped (similarly to the proposal by Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, chapter 6) through a common and more evident characteristic in the form of contact with the host country, congregating at the same time other aspects of the country of origin and of the decision to migrate. This proposal of grouping the narratives raises some difficulties to the way of treating the amount of information that constitutes the story of a life, in this case, of 12 stories. On one hand, there is the need to respect the biographical specificity of each one of the cases; on the other hand, the usefulness in grouping common characteristics in order to condensate and communicate the information is accompanied by the inevitable loss of that which is singular and exclusive to every person. Despite this ambivalence we have opted for the grouping of common traits in the meanings attributed to the life trajectories that stand out in the narratives, for providing this perspective of that which intersects each group created, without losing the expression of the meanings attributed by the

migrants. Then four groups were formed, characterized by Brazilian expressions: “*Correr atrás*”; “*Segurando as pontas*”; “*Pairando*”; “*Quebrar o galho*”.

### “*Correr atrás*”

Broadly speaking, the expression of the Brazilian slang “*Correr atrás*” is used to refer to a process towards a goal. This first group was composed of four people: Bruna (32 years old), Ângela (26 years old), Carlos (38 years old) and Sílvio (50 years old).

The socio-economic context of origin stood out among the common traits since the participants were underprivileged as a result of poor economic resources and of the low level of education of their family nuclei, and for residing in the outskirts of large cities like São Paulo and Curitiba. This context marked by scarce economic resources caused these people to have to “*correr atrás*” [to run after] what they wanted from an early age, that is, still very young they had to articulate labor demands with school investment. Ângela reported this past:

*Então ia todos os dias de manhã (à escola) e voltava a correr ... e ia toda suada, transpirada, corria para lá, apanhava o ônibus e dormia no ônibus claro ... tinha as aulas todas até à meia-noite e meia. Depois vinha embora. Chegava na minha cidade 1h30 da manhã e depois no outro dia, 8h da manhã, trabalhar e tal... [So I went every day in the morning (to school) and ran again and again ... and got all sweaty, running back and forth. I took the bus and always slept on the bus of course ... I had all classes until 12:30 a.m. Then I came home. I arrived at my city 1:30 a.m. and then, on the other day, at 8 in the morning I went to work].*

The meaning of childhood and the beginning of adulthood were both related to the concern of adults with economic resources, leading to an early insertion into the labor world. However, the expression of affectional bonds with adults who are meaningful in the nuclear family was portrayed as being quite reduced, and perhaps for this reason little addressed. The incursions into this relational past had little expression in the narratives and ended up being a theme approached synthetically, as if being avoided. “... *eu não tinha um apego muito próximo com a minha família ... para você ver, nunca se estabeleceu uma relação de amizade com o meu irmão. Vim a ter uma relação com ele, agora*”. [I had never been really attached to my family ... you see, I had never been friends with my brother. It happened to have a relationship with him just now (Sílvio).

There seems to have been a clear investment in the desire and aspiration of mobility and social ascension through the academic and professional pathway. However, this desire collides with the weak opportunities of the socially stratified Brazilian society. As Carlos said, “*Na altura, o Brasil estava assim, se não tivesse um padrinho, não valia a pena*” [Brazil was just like that at that point, if you did not have somebody influential on your side you were done]

The confrontation with the impossibility of realizing social ascension was followed by the decision of leaving the country with the aim of breaking with the past, with what was hard and negative. The representation of Portugal, where everything would be good, emerged by contrast with the country of origin, starting a new cycle of desires and aspirations. Sílvio and Bruna (respectively) approached this representation of migration in a complementary manner and under this point of view of contrasts between countries: “*Como eu não sabia o que me esperava, não esperava muita coisa, sabia das dificuldades mas acima de tudo era deixar para trás o que era mau, então a partir dali eu achava que ia ser bom*.” [Because I did not know what was ahead of me, I was not expecting much, I knew of the difficulties but above all else I wanted to left behind all that was bad, so from then on I thought it was going to be good.] (Sílvio). “*Vir para Portugal foi em busca disso, foi em busca se calhar do sonho americano, sonho português neste caso, foi um bocado isso, quis vir buscar a minha independência*”. [I came to Portugal searching for this, searching for that American dream, a Portuguese dream in this case, it was pretty much it, I wanted to come and search for my independence] (Bruna).

In Portugal, these four people resumed the “*correr atrás*”, that is, again they made an investment in the academic and/or labor dimension. Ângela and Sílvio, little after arriving in the country, built businesses on their own. Bruna went to college and worked at the same time, and Carlos had a professional activity in the business sector. Regardless of the professional area in which they were

inserted, what matters, above all else, is the great investment in this area of their lives and the way that they have established contrasting comparisons between Portugal and Brazil at the level of their current social and economic situation. In this sense, Carlos highlighted his attitude:

*Foram dois meses à procura de trabalho porque entrei no país ilegal e não tinha visto, entrei primeiro num lugar, me legalizei lá e aí eu pensei vou dedicar-me à carreira, tirei o curso e aí fui tirando lucros disso. [I spent two months looking for a job because I entered the country illegally and had no visa. First I went to this place, legalized my situation, then I thought, I will dedicate myself to my career. I attended this course and took advantage of it.]*

Upon the arrival to the country, the relationships with Portuguese people were felt as being hostile, promoting a feeling of isolation, but gradually changed with time. In this sense, there was a simultaneous detachment from Brazilians in Portugal, particularly from those who did not ascend to a professional, academic or economic position as favorable as that of theirs, and, also for this reason, the relationships with Portuguese people are privileged.

The dimension of the contrasts was also evidenced from a criticism of and from an aversion towards Brazil (or what it represents). “*O único defeito do meu país, infelizmente é a falta de cultura, a falta de inteligência, é uma percentagem muito grande de ignorância ainda*” (Ângela). [The only flaw of my country, unfortunately, is the lack of culture, the lack of intelligence, there is still a really big percentage of ignorance] (Ângela). About Brazilians, Bruna said “*nós os brasileiros, temos uma coisa, nós ganhamos hoje para gastarmos hoje e amanhã logo se vê ... o brasileiro é muito preguiçoso e para ganhar alguma coisa é muito falso ... eu não confio em brasileiros.*” [We Brazilians have this thing, we get money today and spend it today, and wait to see what tomorrow brings ... Brazilians are very lazy and is always deceiving to achieve things ... I do not trust Brazilians.]

### “Segurar as pontas”

“*Segurar as pontas*” is commonly a synonym for handling pressure or pain, depending on the context, but, in general, refers to the way that somebody in a hard situation manages to make an effort to deal with it. The idea conveyed by the expression “*segurar as pontas*”, in these narratives, seemed to reflect the effort to be in the present in the relationship with the past and with the country where these migrants have chosen to live. This group was composed through the narratives by two people: Juliana (28 years old) and Rogério (25 years old).

Juliana was born and raised in the interior of Brazil, in the state of Paraná, in a markedly rural environment of scarce economic resources, and has a large family. Rogério, in spite of being born in an unfavorable socio-economic context, was born nearby a large city in Santa Catarina in a large family too. This detail of having a numerous family was meaningful as the various elements that compose it could be important affective resources, something that was not observed and that they missed. “*A minha história é muito complicada, muito mesmo, tive muitas perdas, das pessoas mais importantes... nós somos uma família muito separada, não há união...*”. [My story is very complicated, a lot, I had many losses, of the most important people... we are a very detached family, there is no union...] (Rogério). Rogério’s case points out the dimension of the loss for the death of several family members, including his father and mother. In the life of Juliana, the abandonment by her mother during childhood and the lack of attention of her father to his children made explicit the feeling of loneliness as well.

Still about unfavorable socio-economic contexts, a clear lack of perspective of a better life in the country of origin stood out. Effectively, Brazil seemed to be the place of multiple losses, whether loss of meaningful affection relations, whether loss of social and economic perspectives. Juliana and Rogério found in migration a way out to these difficulties. However, the life in Portugal presented big issues in the establishment of new relationships, particularly with Portuguese people. The relational and social context in Portugal was felt as hostile, marked by episodes of devaluation and associated with a feeling of great vulnerability and isolation,

*A gente sofre um pouco de preconceito no início, as pessoas nos tratam mal, não sei se é por agente não estar forte o suficiente... Não tem um imigrante, pelos menos os brasileiros, que chegou*

*aqui e pode dizer “eu gostei”, nunca ouvi ninguém dizer isso, todo o mundo chora, quer ir embora... [We suffer a bit of prejudice in the beginning, people treat us bad, I do not know if that is because we are not strong enough... There is no migrant, at least Brazilians, that come here and can say “I like it”, I have never heard anybody saying that, everybody cries, wants to go home... (Juliana).*

Simultaneously the permanence in Portugal was appreciated due to the basic dimensions of organizations of societies, whether when it comes to education or to health. Juliana and Rogério stress the possibilities offered to their children regarding public schools and a national health system that do not require insurances to guarantee access to services. In the same sense, they underscored the physical safety dimension for feeling the absence of violence and physical aggression present in Brazil. *“No meu caso, eu fiquei por causa da minha filha e da minha sobrinha porque aqui o estudo é muito melhor, a educação, tudo... e por elas eu aguentei e vou aguentando até onde der...”*. [In my case, I stayed because of my daughter and my niece, because here studying is much better, education, everything... and for them I stand anything and will keep standing as far as I can...] (Juliana).

### **“Pairando”**

This expression relates to the idea of observing the course of events without a great active investment in the direction they might take. On the contrary of the other groups, this expression includes only one participant but whose life story distances itself from the other ones, to the point that this (des)aggregation is justified.

Cristina (28 years old) was born and raised in the interior of Brazil (Maranhão). The story of her life has always been closely linked to her relationship with her mother, with specific characteristics of great closeness. This relationship was marked by the demands of health issues in childhood, such as respiratory infections of greater or lesser gravity, requiring more maternal care: *“Como eu tive aqueles problemas todos de saúde, eu fui a mais doente, na minha casa a minha mãe sempre estava ali do meu lado, sempre muito apegada”*. [Because I had all those health issues, I had always been the weakest one, at home my mom was always there by my side, always very close]

The choices that Cristina made in the course of her life seem to be closely linked to the meaningful relationships she nurtured, between the love and the maternal dimensions. *“Lá no Brasil fiz o ensino médio e o vestibular para Direito mas não comecei por causa do namorado, tive que ir para o Rio de Janeiro por causa do namorado...”* [In Brazil I completed high school and applied for college to study Law, but I did not start the course because of my boyfriend, I had to go to Rio de Janeiro because of my boyfriend...].

The decision to migrate to Portugal was made within a similar context, at the level of love relationships. At the same time that it appears to have represented a break in the relationship with her mother, *“ele era apaixonado por mim e sempre tinha vontade de me trazer para cá e eu saí com 23 anos da barra da saia da minha mãe, como se fala lá”*. [He was in love with me and always wanted to bring me here, so when I was 23 I set myself free from my mother’s apron strings, as we say there].

About the life in Portugal, the only reference to other contexts beyond the love relationship revealed a nearly-disconnection from the social and cultural Portuguese context, as if it was a continuation of Brazil.

*Quando eu cheguei disse, gosto! Para mim não teve problema nenhum, foi normal. Conheço muita gente, muito brasileiro, português é assim pouco, é que no meu trabalho só tem brasileiro. A gente brinca quando não estamos na hora do trabalho, quando não tem clientes ali a gente está rindo, depois de uma noite a gente bota a música, o pessoal começa a dançar e essas coisas.* [When I arrived I said, I like it! I found no problem myself, it was normal. I know a lot of people, a lot of Brazilians, just a few Portuguese people because at work there are only Brazilians. We joke around when we are not working, when there are no customers there we laugh, after one night we put some music, everybody starts dancing and stuff].

This brief reference to the migration process emerged from the transition to another theme, being the only reference to the change of countries, to highlight the love relationship she keeps since she arrived in Portugal, which oscillates between the maternal relationship and the love relationship. *“E aí*



*ele falou que queria casar comigo, que me amava,.... Eu fiquei surpresa. Fiquei muito surpresa porque eu amo ele, sabe um amor que eu fico pensando... o amor de mãe e filha é diferente.* [And then he said that he wanted to marry me, that he loved me.... I got surprised. I got very surprised because I love him, you know, a love that gets me thinking.... the love of mother and daughter is different]

### **“Quebrar o galho”**

The term is used in situations in which, before a difficulty, something or somebody appears to assist and to allow the overcoming of this difficulty. This group was characterized as the one with the largest number of narratives, five in total: Luana (35 years old), Nora (29 years old), José (41 years old), Mateus (29 years old) and Marco (34 years old).

The life stories of these five people presented common characteristics. In a first moment, each one of them approached the past linked to family members and friends, specifically during childhood, which was lived in the outskirts of large cities in the interior and in coastal regions of Brazil (Teresina, Belém, Osasco, Jarú, Linhares, Parnaíba), where living conditions were economically little favorable. As José reported, *“A família era muito grande, com muitos irmãos, havia um pedaço de terra, onde se criava animais para comer e colhiam outros alimentos. Ninguém passava fome! Não era muito mas chegava para todos.”* [My family was very large, with many siblings, we had a piece of land where we bred animals for us to eat and reaped food. Nobody starved! It was not much but was enough for everybody]. Schooling did not seem to have had a very significant investment in Brazil. However, there was a desire to improve the economic conditions of origin through several simultaneous jobs or through the attempt to create small businesses. Nevertheless, some frustration used to prevail in the relation between the received gains and the energy put into increasing economic possibilities and resources.

The possibility of coming to Portugal followed this balance. These people had a more or less defined plan of temporary migration, that is, the stay in Portugal would only last enough time for them to raise the economic capital they needed and then return to Brazil.

*E aí eu tive uma amiga que me convidou para vir para Portugal. Todos os meus amigos diziam que ganhavam 1000 e tal euros. Pô isso é um bom dinheiro no Brasil, dá para juntar e fazer alguma coisa aqui.* [I had this friend who invited me to come to Portugal. All of my friends said that they were making like 1,000 euros. Man, this is a lot of money in Brazil, you can save it and do something here] (Mateus).

Regardless of the time of permanence in Portugal (between 4 and 11 years), the return to the country of origin was kept open. In some cases, like those of Luana and José, the balance between gains and losses was more favorable in Portugal, showing some inclination for this time of permanence to become definitive. For the other ones, the return plan remained viable and a goal to achieve, even though its realization was undecided. *“Tenho plano de voltar ao Brasil porque Portugal já não anda, nem a minha cabeça está aqui, no lugar onde tem que estar”.* [I am planning on going back to Brazil because Portugal is not as it used to be and my head is no longer here, where it should be] (Nora). In any of the cases, the balance between gains and losses evidenced, on one hand, how much they missed their cultural references and meaningful people, in addition to the weather and the landscapes in Brazil; on the other hand, the life in Portugal enabled the acquisition of more economic resources, the establishment of friendships with Portuguese people and with many Brazilians living in the country, where the environment is safer and the weather mild.

## **Discussion**

This study sought to comprehend resilience processes in the dynamics between resources and adversities and through meanings attributed by the migrants to their life trajectory in the country of origin as well as in the host country. The biographical narratives and the methodology of analysis proposed by Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1997) allowed this approach.

Globally, the meanings attributed to migration processes were an integrating synthesis between past, present, desires, investments, affections, relationships, economic contexts and social structures, reacquiring different meanings and expressions in each of the life stories (or groups of narratives), just as each social and cultural context introduced specific nuances and characteristics. With this perspective we sought to deconstruct the tendency to homogenize migration processes by considering the origins of the migrants (Ungar, 2008). Opposing to this tendency, we stressed the variability existing between Brazilian migrants, supported on solid meanings under a constructionist perspective (Lock & Strong, 2010).

The analysis of the narratives by the migrants participating in this study evidenced the relationship between the dimensions of resilience processes. In the country of origin and at the level of adversities it was possible to identify essentially two dimensions: the socio-economic reality and affectional bonds. The first dimension refers to the scarcity of economic and academic resources, as well as to the lack of perspective and desire to make their estate grow in Brazil. In these cases, immigrating to Portugal was part of the resources available to these migrants with the aim of changing the condition under which they used to be, referred, by the way, by several authors (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996) that emphasize the unfavorable economic condition as adversity and reason for migration. However, the second dimension refers to the lack of affectional bonds in the country of origin (or dysfunctional affectional bonds), whether due to real losses of meaningful people (death or abandonment), whether due to little satisfactory relationships between family members. What is interesting about these cases is the fact that this specificity of the affectional bonds stays in the host country, boosted by the Portuguese social context, globally felt as being hostile, based on the interactions with Portuguese grounded on feelings of devaluation (rejection and prejudice). This particular aspect of affectional bonds is worth of attention for the fact that many studies have revealed the dimension of the losses (real and symbolic) of migrants upon the arrival in a new country (Boss, 2006). However, in this case, this dimension is prior to the migration project, resumed (or increased) later by difficulties felt in interpersonal relationships established in the host country.

The way that the migrants of this study settled in the host country highlights different perspectives, out of which we underscore two main dimensions: the feeling of belonging and affectional bonds.

Through the first group of migrants we comprehend the dynamics existing between the establishment of meaningful relationships with Portuguese people and the feeling of belonging. As Sroufe and Waters (1977) state, it is about the possibility of establishing relationships of proximity with others that enables a feeling of basic safety, of being emotionally linked to people and places, as well as the feeling of being accepted in the social and cultural context. It seems that the greater this need the sharper the contrasting dimension between contexts, that is, in this case, the gap that opens between countries, where Brazil and Brazilians are represented from devaluing and negative perspectives. What is more, as Baumeister (2012) stressed, the need for belonging is so important that, when individuals lose certain ties they look for others that can lessen the impact of this loss and that keep on satisfying the need for belonging.

About the feeling of belonging, it is possible to add the association between the existence of institutional and cultural ties, underscored by the second group of participants (suggested by authors like Lewicka, 2011). In the case of these migrants, the education and health dimensions in Portugal serve as a link and as a means to stay close to the country, as they benefit from these systems, taking equal advantage of opportunities and circumstances in relation to Portuguese people. Though little frequent, the relationship between resilience and belonging in migrants has been studied by some authors, namely, Baskin, Wampold, Quintana and Enright (2010), pointing the importance of belonging as a resource against isolation and loneliness.

In the third group it was also highlighted that affectional bonds can be so intense that they have a potential analgesic effect in face of the difficulties imposed by the break in the context, in this case, due to departure from the country of origin.

Lastly, in the fourth group, we revisited more clearly the notion of belonging associated with the concept of diaspora. These migrants stressed the dynamics between gains and losses, the positive aspects of the permanence in Portugal, the affectional bonds created here but, at the same time, those that stayed in Brazil, which are meaningful and needed. Tsolidis (2013) points out this exact dynamic

dimension between gains and losses that characterize the diaspora. The author refers to the simultaneous existence of the loss of the intimate historical, traditional and family bond and of the customs of the country of origin, and to the gains on many levels in the new country. The loss seems to be possible only through a certain myth or illusion that there will always be a return to the homeland. A double loyalty is then developed, whether relating to the country of origin, whether relating to the host country. As the migrants integrate elements of the new country, said elements gradually sediment on the representations of the country of origin as a place of return.

This analysis of the narratives reinforces the understanding of resilience processes not as a result but as a process that is complex and that inter-relates conditions and contexts, in agreement with authors that underscore this interest in resilience concerning this dynamic and complex aspect (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), centered on the contributions of cultural specificities (Ungar, 2008). The resilience process of the migrants of this study takes on several roles and several configurations, namely, the annihilation of the impact of adversity, developing alternative possibilities or overcoming the adversities by integrating them into their life journeys and trajectories.

### Final Considerations

This study sought to bring to light the dimension of migrations observed in the continuation between country of origin and host country, according to the logic of (re)construction of meanings. This integrated approach centered on subjectivity has been little frequent in investigations about migration process in Psychology; there is a prevalence of perspectives that consider only the conditions of adjustment in the destination (Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2010).

At the level of the implications of the clinical work with migrants the way that aspects related to the country of origin might be of great importance, given that many migrants had life trajectories marked by adverse conditions even before migrating. In this sense, these conditions might be related to the difficulties lived in the host country, where they are stressed and recreated and require, for this reason, the attention of clinical professionals. On the other hand, we have highlighted in this article the dimensions of belonging and of affectional, social and cultural bonds related to the need to be accepted. In this sense, the therapeutic relationship constitutes a possibility for the development of important affectional bonds. The bonds established between therapist and patient allow the development of a therapeutic alliance that enables the emotional regulation, confidence and dependence necessary to this process (Diener & Monroe, 2011).

When it comes to social policy and intervention we underscore that the comprehension and the knowledge of resources in the resilience process shall not have as implications or practical consequences the dismissal of social interveners and political decision makers at the level of migration policies (Seccombe, 2002). The core issue remains, since, in face of the adverse context associated with migration processes and in spite of the capacity of many migrants to navigate through and negotiate existing resources, not all of them managed to do so and, to others, these resources are still insufficient, leading them to situations of fragility and social exclusion. As Gilligan (2004) understands, the intervention in a resilience perspective cannot focus only individual factors but also structural deficiencies in society, aiming at making people stronger, more competent and more functional amidst adverse situations.

Among the limitations of the study we point out the fact that, given the diversity of the narratives and the interest in each trajectory, the individual specificity is diluted in the small groups created and some meanings are lost or do not receive the worthy highlight due to the need to agglutinate information from several narratives (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). However, in terms of gains, the option for grouping the narratives allowed understanding some common traits that stood out among the individual trajectories and simultaneously those that are distinct in each group. In any way, the analysis of the narratives as suggested by the authors (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 2004) always has a hypothetical and temporary character. This means that this possibility of analysis will certainly change throughout the time the migrants stay in the host country, since the importance of this temporal dimension has been studied at the level of the transformations occurred in the migrants.

Finally, we reinforce the specificity of the migrants interviewed, in the sense that all of them resided in the capital of the country, Lisbon, where the majority of the Brazilian migrants are concentrated and where it is possible to observe some confluence of cultural diversity that results from the concentration of migrants coming from several places. This social context, geographically located in a large city (55% of the total of migrants live in Lisbon), will certainly be different from that of other cities or from a rural environment of another region of the country.

## References

- Apitzsch, U. & Siouti, I. (2007) *Biographical Analysis as an Interdisciplinary Research Perspective in the Field of Migration Studies*. Frankfurt am Main: Research Integration, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, University of York.
- Baskin, T., Wampold, B., Quintana, S., & Enright, R. (2010). Belongingness as a protective factor against loneliness and potential depression in a multicultural middle school. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 38(5), 626-651.
- Baumeister, R. F. (2012). Need to belong theory. In P.A. M. Van Lange, A.W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 121-140). London: Sage Publications.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5-34.
- Boss, P. (2006). *Loss, Trauma and Resilience*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Coll, C. G., & Magnuson, K. (2014). The psychological experience of immigration: A developmental perspective. In C. Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, M. & D. Qin-Hilliard (Eds.), *The New Immigrant and the American Family: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the New Immigration* (pp.69-110). New York: Routledge.
- Diener, M. J., & Monroe, J. M. (2011). The relationship between adult attachment style and therapeutic alliance in individual psychotherapy: A meta-analytic review. *Psychotherapy*, 48(3), 237-248.
- Fisher-Rosenthal, W. & Rosenthal, G (2004). The analysis of narrative-biographical interviews. In U. Flick, E. Von Kardorff & I. Steinke (Eds) *A Companion to Qualitative Research* (pp. 259-265). London: Sage Publications.
- Fletcher, D., & Sarkar, M. (2013). Psychological resilience: A review and critique of definitions, concepts, and theory. *European Psychologist*, 18(1), 12–23.
- Gilligan, R. (2004). Promoting resilience in child and family social work: Issues for social work practice, education and policy. *Social Work Education*, 23(1), 93-104.
- Hollway, W. & Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing qualitative research differently - free association, narrative and the interview method*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lewicka, M. (2011). Place attachment: How far have we come in the last 40 years?. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 31(3), 207-230.
- Lock, A., & Strong, T. (2010). *Social constructionism: Sources and stirrings in theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Luthar, S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work. *Child Development*, 71(3), 543–562.
- Malheiros, J. (2007). Imigração brasileira em Portugal – a síntese do que sabemos. In J. Malheiros (Org.). *Imigração brasileira em Portugal*. (pp. 11-37). Coleção Comunidades, 1, Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.
- Miranda, J. (2009). Mulheres imigrantes em Portugal. Memórias, dificuldades de integração e projectos de vida. *Estudos OI*, 35. Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural.
- Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses (2010). *Código Deontológico*. Regulamento n.º 258/2011, Diário da República, 258, 17931-17936.
- Portes, A. & Rumbaut, R. (1996). *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rosenthal, G. (1993). Reconstruction of life stories: principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews. *The narrative study of lives*, 1, 59-91.
- Riley, J. & Masten, A. (2005). Resilience in context. In R. D. Peters, B. Leadbeater, & R. J. McMahon, (Eds.), *Resilience in children, families, and communities: Linking context to practice and policy* (pp. 13-25). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Secombe, K. (2002). "Beating the odds" versus "changing the odds": Poverty, resilience, and family policy. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(2), 384-394.
- Schiller, N. G., Basch, L. and Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 645, 1-24.
- Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (2013). *Relatório de Imigração, Fronteiras e Asilo*. Recuperado em 20 de Outubro de 2014, de [http://sefstat.sef.pt/Docs/Rifa\\_2013.pdf](http://sefstat.sef.pt/Docs/Rifa_2013.pdf)
- Sroufe, L. A., & Waters, E. (1977). Attachment as an organizational construct. *Child Development*, 48(4), 1184-1199.
- Tsolidis, G. (2013). Introduction: Does Diaspora matter when living cultural difference? In G. Tsolidis (Ed.). *Migration, Diaspora and Identity: Cross-national Experiences* (pp. 1-15). London: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across Cultures. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 218–235.

Yijälä, A., & Jasinskaja-Lahti, I. (2010). Pre-migration acculturation attitudes among potential ethnic migrants from Russia to Finland. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(4), 326-339.

Received: Nov. 10, 2014  
Approved: May 20, 2015

Yunes, M. (2003). Psicologia positiva e resiliência: o foco no indivíduo e na família. *Psicologia em Estudo*, 8(spe), 75-84.

---

*Sandra Roberto*: master in Clinical Psychology from the Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada, Lisboa; doctoral student in Psychology from the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, ISCTE-IUL, CIS, Portugal.

*Carla Moleiro*: PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, USA; assistant professor and investigator in Psychology at the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, ISCTE-IUL, CIS; president of the Associação Portuguesa de Psicologia e Psiquiatria Transcultural.