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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Connection in Transnational Families. Face-to-Face and Digital Spaces in Portuguese Emigrants

Carlos Barros[1]

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Abstract

The use of new communication technologies promotes dynamics with presence between face-to-face and digital ways in transnational families. Relationships are perceived by migrants in these families as enriching, but also as points of contradiction and paradox. This study aims to explore, through the dimensions of the intergenerational solidarity (IS) model, how emigrants perceive the interaction with their parental figures in their country of origin and how the digital space impacts family dynamics. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young Portuguese adults emigrating in the European space ($N=22$), and thematic analysis was performed under a constructivist perspective, with the support of the *N-Vivo* software. The results suggest the need to understand family cohesion in a continuum between solidarity-conflict-ambivalence and, above all, how family dynamics are altered by the challenges of transnational dynamics. It is important to consider the experience of family rituals in person and digitally. Digital communication mitigates differences and isolation, since it promotes more contact, leading to less cultural shock, which can promote more connection.

Keywords Intergenerational solidarity · Transnational families · Digital communication · Migrations

Introduction

Systematic Perspective: Between Individual and Collective Dynamics

Migrations constitute a phenomenon that challenges the well-being and adjustment of those who migrate and their household—even if they reside in the country of origin. The emergence of digital contact as a way of promoting support and

✉ Carlos Barros
cbarros@ucp.pt

[1] Research Centre for Communication and Culture, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Palma de Cima, 1649-023 Lisbon, Portugal

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establishing dynamics in transnational families not only allows intensification, maintenance, or rejection of family patterns present in intergenerational relationships so that emigrants adapt to the country to which they migrated but also allows for the creation of new perspectives on well-being (Bacigalupe & Parker, 2016; Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of development conceives the ecological environment as a series of concentric structures containing, inside it, the developing subject constantly influenced, directly and indirectly, by the different levels of the surrounding environment, in a symbiotic and bidirectional relationship—between the human being and the changing properties of the environments in which he/she moves, and the wider contexts in which these environments are inserted. Given the inclusion of multilevels that refer to contexts and the environment, this conceptualisation becomes a relevant framework for the present research as it contemplates intergenerational family relationships. Especially when the model becomes bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and involves particular forms of interaction between body and context, that promote human development, but that varies from person to person.

In the bioecological model, proximal processes take place according to four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2006). The microsystem is the most influential and consists of direct interactions with other individuals (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2006). Bronfenbrenner and colleagues (2006) suggested that an individual's characteristics are shaped by "parents, family members, close friends, teachers, mentors and tutors, peers, partners, or others who participate in the developing person's life in a relatively constant way over a long period of time" (p. 796). In the mesosystem, different microsystems interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the exosystem, proximal processes include public policies, social programmes, media, and institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The macrosystem is the less formalised system and consists of cultural norms and values (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem are the "concrete manifestations" of the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Finally, the dimension of time constitutes an essential unit of context for the analysis of properly framed perceptions and was added more recently to provide the model with greater precision (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

For this reason, it is important to focus on the family and its social, political, economic, and cultural relativisation that such a group entails for research (Barros, 2022; Esteves et al., 2005). This group is considered to have a direct impact and an adaptable behaviour, endowed with a set "of flexible and dynamic strategies that transform themselves in the presence of different needs and economic contexts" (Massey, 1990, p. 9). On the other side, decisions taken in a family context do not have to result in a benefit for all its members.

Especially the geographical distance promotes the absence of presence-negotiation of what are the differences of each member, the different interests, motivations, and activities, may conflict with each other (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). The analysis of intergenerational relationships in transnational families must be understood without neglecting the separation between members by the country of origin and destination, and taking into account variables that refer to aspects of integration and adaptation

to new social, professional, political, and cultural contexts (Leme et al., 2016; Villas-Boas et al., 2017; Walsh, 2016).

Solidarity: from the social to the family sphere

In a transdisciplinary way, solidarity can be defined as a union of interests, objectives, or sympathies between members of a group. Such synergy contributes to the integration of society and prevents the anomie that results from the struggle for individualisation and autonomy (Coimbra & Mendonça, 2013).

In the most classical and tendentially macrostructural models, solidarity is divided into four sub-types: mechanical, organic, traditional, and modern. This paper will focus only on the modern one since it is the branch of the construct that is found to be predominant in contemporary societies (Coimbra & Mendonça, 2013). That is, the elements become aware of their unique character and their actions are governed by the awareness of free will, their decisions being autonomous, but framing the action within a concept of the common good. However, it is important to consider social policies' impact on the individual since they intervene in the perception of risk and act as a clear buffer in individual, family, and professional well-being (Coimbra et al., 2013).

The question of the relevance of studying solidarity, and the growing interest in the concept, is not unrelated to the issue of ageing, in which people are living longer and therefore new demands for support are arising. The growing awareness that in Western societies more people are living to later ages, but that there might be fewer people available for the necessary care, has made it necessary to consider attitudes and behaviours regarding ageism and cooperation with the most immediate network: the family (Albert & Ferring, 2013, 2018). Such concerns are also seen in the creation of various intergenerational support networks that assist throughout the life cycle, especially in the stages where adjustment challenges may arise, such as the transition to adulthood, emigration, or retirement as moments of particular psychosocial adaptation (Mendonça & Fontaine, 2013; Villas-Boas et al., 2017).

Solidarity, initially more macrosystemic, gains microsystemic contours and applications to family relationships (Roberts et al., 1991). The model suitable for analysing solidarity relationships between parents and adult children is intergenerational solidarity (IS) and is conceived as multidimensional, integrating six distinct dimensions (Bengston & Oyama, 2007): (a) affectual: satisfaction with affective ties; (b) associative: time and frequency of contact between generations; (c) consensual: proximity of opinions, values and orientations across generations; (d) functional: receiving and providing support; (e) normative: expectations concerning filial and parental obligations, as well as norms of family importance; and (f) structural: reflecting how geographical proximity among family members may underlie intergenerational interaction. Each of these dimensions has been empirically tested and shown to be distinctive (Bengston & Oyama, 2007).

Subsequently, the dimension of conflict was also added since it was considered impossible to understand dynamic relationships without this aspect, which can lead to family crises and situations of ambivalence (Albert & Ferring, 2018; Barthassat, 2014; Lowenstein, 2007). It is also important, as Bengston and colleagues (2000)

indicate, to understand that the two dimensions of solidarity and conflict do not represent a single continuum from high solidarity to high conflict. Intergenerational solidarity may exhibit both high solidarity and high conflict, or low solidarity and low conflict, in varying combinations, depending on family dynamics and circumstances (Bengston et al., 2000). These authors' view is grounded in the basic assumption that conflict is natural and inevitable in the lives of all human beings. Social interaction, such as that experienced within family units, always involves harmony and conflict; groups do not exist in total harmony, or they would be completely static and inert (Klein & White, 1996).

Thus, Bengston and colleagues (2002) suggested that the concept of solidarity becomes more sensitive when ambivalence is incorporated as a function of the "disjunction or disconnection between any of the six dimensions of solidarity". They conceive of ambivalence in addition to the solidarity-conflict framework, which is conceptually suitable for exploring mixed feelings, namely "from the intersection of solidarity and conflict comes ambivalence, psychological and structural" (Bengston et al., 2002, p. 575).

The use of this model in studying transnational families is an important aspect to this paper, to the extent that the change in the dimensions of structural and associative IS—time, form of contact, and intention to share space—which are experienced between the digital and the face to face, may change not only the remaining dimensions, but may also act as catalysts for the perception of conflicts, specific to each dimension (Albert & Ferring, 2018; Barros, 2021). Most recent studies have indicated not only the importance of combining dimensions in typologies but also, above all, the study from a qualitative perspective, bringing visibility to various dynamics in these families with a greater diversity of realities (Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema, 2019; Barros, 2021).

Portugal: Context and New Forms of Contact

Emigration is a historical and social constant in Portugal, and the country currently has one of the highest emigration rates in Europe (Pires et al., 2022). Still, the profile of migrants has substantially changed over the decades. The Portuguese who emigrate today are, in comparison to those who emigrated until the end of the twentieth century, people with more human capital, with higher qualifications, and who build migratory projects based on professional recognition and investment, as opposed to what the country of origin has to offer them for their development (Gomes et al., 2015; Neto, 2003).

Although these new motivations for migratory movements can reframe the migration process in imminently individual variables and related to opportunities in the destination country, it is limitative to situate this process only in individual contexts and in issues intrinsic to the destination country. The psychosocial impact of this process is of utmost importance and especially involves the household of origin in Portugal, since the family tends to be the first source of social support in migration support (Coimbra et al., 2013), and should be considered in a multisystemic context (Gomes et al., 2015; Rodrigues, 2013).

The effects of emigration on the internal family structure (Dumon, 1989) can be examined in a processual effect where the presence can be vital. It seems essential to address the use of information and communication technologies, as it gives a new space to forms of contact and presence for intercultural relations, leading to a blurring of the existing difference between the *Global* and the *Local* in today's societies, creating a greater transfer between values and norms of groups, where the family and the migratory processes are no exception due to the experience of diversity (Mateia, 2018).

Thus, nowadays in Western societies is very difficult to live without the use of new technologies, so it is difficult to study populations and/or relationships without considering the use of digital communication (Ganito, 2018; Mateia, 2018). With the rapid processes of globalisation, studying cultural development and technological change is no longer an option but a necessity, as space is mediated and managed between the face to face and the digital (Matusitz & Musambira, 2013).

The use of new information and communication technologies had a rapid expansion in Western societies due to the proliferation of broadband internet packages, which facilitated contact with the virtual world in a virtually unlimited way. Factors such as the reduction of time for connection with groups; proximity between people, services, and spaces; reduction of expenses to keep in touch with their interests; and, also, the information available in various points of the world, enhance its use as an asset (Ferreira, 2009; Mateia, 2018).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the use of these technologies underwent a major transformation when the internet started to be associated with mobile phones—*smartphones* (Kraemer & Katz, 2009)—and may affect the relationship between ease of access and perception of connection to the world. Also, we cannot forget the importance of the digital ecosystem—the variety of devices, services, and forms of access to the digital world is a possible limiting form of equality between elements, groups, and generations. Access to various tools, applications, and mechanisms may amplify the perception of the person in the digital space (Ganito, 2018). These facts are important when we reflect on the Portuguese context, marked by emigration and the need for transnational families to follow the life and trajectory of their members. These families need to reinvent contact (and communication) in order to meet the diverse needs of their members, as well as their intercultural belonging where the need for lifelong learning is not exempt (Mateia, 2018; Ramos, 2013).

Just over a decade ago, Ferreira (2009) has characterised the perception of cultural identity among the Portuguese population immigrating to the USA and considered the following about the importance of the World Wide Web: "the internet is seen by most of the respondents as a tool which allows an easier contact with the culture of origin, thus being able to provide a remediation of their cultural identity" (Ferreira, 2009, p. 150). That is, we can see the internet as a kind of incomplete tool which allows contact with the Portuguese culture but it does not allow being part of it. However, this reflection is important, since we can define/reflect cultural identity as a perception of belonging between self and culture, which are influenced by norms and values at all levels of social interaction and can encompass how individuals feel integrated into (inter) national cultures (Correia & Watkins, 2023; Gamsakhurdia, 2019; Tseung-Wong et al.,

2022). The digital context enhances transculturality, leading to more fluid processes in the migration project (Barros, 2021; Mateia, 2018).

In Portugal, according to data from the National Statistics Institute [INE], the use of communication technologies has increased over the last decade: in the period between 2011 and 2021, the number of fixed users rose from 2,184,985 to 3,921,763 users (Pordata, 2022).

With the exponential increase in personal use of the internet, as well as in the post-pandemic context, it is essential to analyse how new technologies interfere with the perception of presence and creation of dynamics in transnational families, changing their family rituals (Barros, 2021). It can be a way of empowerment, integration, and intergenerational communication, in a more ageing resident population that uses social networks as a connection to combat isolation (Roberto et al., 2014).

This paper aims to explore how the presence of the digital space can contribute to communication, contact, and presence in transnational families, since understanding the dimensions of the IS model can be a way to observe and analyse the dynamics of digital and face-to-face connection between generations.

Through a study carried out specifically with young emigrated Portuguese adults with parental figures in Portugal, we want to understand:

What are the connections between emigrated young adults and their parents in Portugal?

Methodology

In this study, we used data collection through qualitative analysis, since seek to access the knowledge of social interaction which, duly anchored in the literature review and aware of the multiplicity of human interactions, explores meanings for the process of interpretation of social interaction to which we will add knowledge (Charmaz, 2009; Ratner, 2002).

To assess the analysed and explored interactions in this work of the integration of individual and social dynamics, it is necessary to frame the work within a paradigm for understanding interactions and patterns (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Silverman, 2005), as prisms of a collective truth with various perceptions of individual interaction (Birks & Mills, 2011).

To study the perception of experiences, meanings, and expectations in a constructivist perspective, we have chosen a post-positivist paradigm (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006), with thematic analysis based on previous and subsequent categories (Charmaz, 2009; Guerra, 2006).

Participants

The participants in the study were young Portuguese adult migrants ($N = 22$). According to their self-identification, most of them were female ($n = 17$) and some were male ($n = 5$).

Their ages ranged between 23 and 33 years ($M = 28.90$; $SD = 2.44$) and they had lived outside Portugal between 2 and 14 years ($M = 4.81$; $SD = 2.83$).

All of them were from mainland Portugal and emigrated to European and Schengen area countries, with at least one parent residing in Portugal. Data were collected between the years 2018 and 2019.

The distribution of participants by countries can be seen in Table 1.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview script was designed for individual interviews, which was previously tested as to its perception and content in two groups: researchers ($n = 4$) and people with profiles similar to the one studied ($n = 4$).

The script consisted of five thematic blocks, preceded by an initial presentation block. The thematic blocks were (i) characterisation of the family (e.g. *Who are the people you identify as close/ nuclear relatives?*); (ii) migration experience, well-being, and motivations (e.g. *What has been most beneficial for you in this process of migration?*); (iii) maintaining affective relationships (e.g. *Which means do you use to communicate?*); (iv) support network between generations (e.g. *Do you provide any support to your parental/caring figures?*); and (v) transmission of values between generations (e.g. *Can you give me concrete examples of what you share with your family members?*).

To the application of the interview script, informed consent and a sociodemographic questionnaire were first collected.

Table 1 Distribution of participants by countries

Host country	Number of participants
Belgium	2
Denmark	1
France	4
Germany	2
Iceland	1
Luxembourg	1
The Netherlands	1
Sweden	1
Switzerland	3
Spain	2
UK*	4
Total	22

*As for the latter, it was integrated given that Brexit had not started

Procedures

In accordance with the research ethical principles, with project approval by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Lisbon, in compliance with the code of the American Psychological Association (2018), all interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and later destroyed, and the participants' names and sensitive data were changed to ensure confidentiality.

The following inclusion criteria were considered for participation: (i) being a young adult of Portuguese nationality (18 to 35 years old), (ii) being an emigrant in a European country; (iii) having at least one of the parental figures living in Portugal; (iv) having emigrated for at least 1 year.

With the support of the Portuguese communities abroad, parish councils/municipalities in Portugal, the media, emigrant associations, entities associated with the diplomatic institute, as well as the creation of a website and social networks for the research project, the study was disseminated for the recruitment of participants.

It should be noted that, in addition to the methodological metrics, the *N* exceeded the expected, considering that it was determined by the theoretical saturation of data and that it is a convenience sample, built concomitantly to a data analysis that allows interrelating data for perceived collection completion (Charmaz, 2008).

The interviews were conducted in person, or through digital media, safeguarding the identity and confidentiality of the devices. The duration of each participation was 50 to 70 min.

Data Analysis

Considering the simultaneity between data collection analysis and dynamic social relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the first approach to the interviews was done through data familiarisation (reading, rereading, making the data intimate) to proceed with the analysis in three units of meaning. First, open coding: allows for creating and verifying core categories and concepts; sequentially, axial coding: where we proceeded to the analysis of the relationships between categories. Finally, selective coding: allows for theoretically saturate the central categories (on relationships and intergenerational solidarity) in order to regroup and relate coding for the organisation and emergence of new social data.

From a constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2009), using a priori and a posteriori categories of analysis, in order to include the researcher's interaction with the data, we searched for themes between categories (Charmaz, 2006, 2008).

To avoid bias in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006) data analysis was carried out and perspectives were debated within the research team, who participated as consultants, giving reflexivity to a constructivist perspective. Aware of the issues of linguistic richness, the translation of the interview quotes from their original language into English was also reflected. In this process, it was important that the research/supervisor's team is bilingual.

N-Vivo software was used.

Results and Discussion

In order to be able to comprehensively debate the data and the literature, we decided to combine the results with the brief discussion.

Digital and Face to Face: New Paths to Presence?

The dimensions of intergenerational solidarity must be understood as dynamics that follow the different family groups under study. That is, the structural and associative dimensions (space, distance vs. proximity and frequency of contact) (Bengston & Oyama, 2007) seem to be re-signified when the group is articulated between the digital and the face to face. This change, in turn, is transformative and transforms the affectual dimension, to the extent that contact, frequency, and intensity allow emotional bonds to the well-being and understanding of the space of each of the elements (Mateia, 2018; Rojas Rodríguez et al., 2021).

When we analysed the presence, the form of it, as well as usefulness of this same contact in developing a connection in the group, the entire sample was coded.

All but one of the participants reported that their presence and participation in the family have a high frequency and intensity. Family rituals—whether in a daily, celebratory, or occasional form—are experienced in a face-to-face and digital way, changing, in turn, the classic view that geographical proximity reflects the capacity and willingness to interact, which is in line with more recent approaches to transnational families, that refer to the importance of the hybrid connection (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

All participants highlighted that it is systematic to gather with the family in Portugal at times of celebration (Christmas in all cases; and other celebrations, although with less expression, such as birthdays, Easter or All Saints' Day). The participants perceive these moments as important and indispensable for the maintenance of the family with the ascending and descending generations, as Marta (F4) states

> Christmas for me has to be spent as a family. So, every Christmas I go to Portugal. [...] at least while my parents and my relatives are alive, I intend to spend this festivity with them. For me, it's a family celebration. For me, it is unthinkable to spend Christmas here with my husband and my daughter, unthinkable.

More than half of the participants mention that, even though the purpose of the trip to Portugal may not be to visit the family, this is always the transversal topic when planning the trip to the country of origin.

Although few, in the cases in which there is a significant pair that emerged during the migratory experience, they refer that the face-to-face contact, mainly for daily celebrations and rituals, happens mediated with the cultural values of the partner and the country of the interviewee. As participant Patrícia (F9) refers, talking about her partner,

> It's a big challenge and there he helps me a lot because he's quite a bit more detached, I'm very attached, so anything was crying or [...] and he's very... it's

> not that he doesn't care, but detachment sometimes does good, and he taught me a lot about that.

It should be noted that, with a daily to weekly frequency at most, all participants reinvented the contact and their dynamics with the family through the use of communication technologies, and these technologies changed the paradigm of contact and dynamics, in cases of the older rising generation, teaching how to use digital channels as one of the contact routines that went from face to face to digital, exemplified by Lucas, (F14)

> three years ago, so, she [mother] seventy-five years old opened a *Facebook* account and knows how to use it now more or less [...] maybe it's the biggest support I've provided, therefore, but also a little bit consequence of my move.

All participants mention that there is very frequent contact via new communication technologies to accompany and support family rituals and daily tasks. They also use them to plan face-to-face contact for specific moments or family celebrations.

Video calls and message boxes—namely using the *Whatsapp* and *Messenger* apps—constituted themselves as a form of more private contact; and *feeds*—namely using the *Facebook and Instagram* apps and also groups in any of these apps—as a form of sharing content for family members in different geographical points, although less specifically directed to the narrative and exchange of support among family members.

Rather, it serves as a reinforcement of presence and exchange of experiences in a group larger than the nuclear family. Guilherme (F20) refers to the intense use of digital contact:

> […] calls are every day after dinner, between dinner and between going to bed, then it depends if they [parents] have some plan here in Portugal [...] during the day, for example, my cousins will be messing with me on *Facebook* or talking on *Messenger* or something like that always.

The vast majority mentioned that they use video calls as an everyday moment of sharing and presence with the family, even when it is just being there without any associated task. Nevertheless, some participants mentioned that video calls are also used to follow up on specific needs, such as recovering from illness of parental figures or themselves. In addition, they are also used by grandparents in Portugal to monitor domestic chores and keep company with/look after their grandchildren (when they are old enough for autonomy with video call safeguarding by grandparents).

A few refer that given the difficulty of digital adaptation of the elderly, analogue telephone calls are made, with no adaptation of the parental figures and/or elderly in Portugal, but rather of young emigrants, in order to maintain the form of communication of the ascendants. This agrees with the literature that age-related access to ecosystems is more difficult (Ganito, 2018).

Some of them refer that this contact is perceived as a two-way form of reducing anxiety or loneliness due to living at a distance from the household. Also, considering the increase of technologies in their lives and dynamics (Mateia, 2018), family

rituals also seem to have adapted which in turn will transform how these families can become more flexible for individual and collective resilience (Denov et al., 2019; Walsh, 2020).

Contact, whether in person or through digital forms, allows a more frequent presence among the various elements of transnational families, providing space for diverse dynamics, who it will be important to consider the symbiosis between the solidarity-conflict-ambivalence *continuum* (Bengston & Oyama, 2007; Lowenstein, 2007; Lüscher, 2011) and how being in contact increases perception of presence, resulting in a stronger feeling of belonging (Neto, 2019).

Therefore, it is impossible to reflect on the feeling of belonging in these families without considering the central strength of the affectual-solidarity dimension, since it is in this one of the IS that we find perceptions where feelings and satisfaction with affective ties are framed, possibly being at the basis of the dynamics that allow resilience in presence (Bengston & Oyama, 2007; Fingerman et al., 2020,).

Analysing this affectual dimension, we see that more than half of the participants reported the existence of family support in their migration project. Some even refer that the family and the nuclear family were essential in the affective reinforcement during the migratory plan, even when it was a process perceived as uncomfortable for family members in Portugal, as illustrated by participant Alice (F22), when telling about her experience with her caregiver figure (grandmother) "[she] cried of joy, cried of sadness… but she supported me… supported me in my decision, always told me that there was always the possibility of going back, but that she wanted the best for me". Beatriz (F19) said that "it was mainly in the sense: go, we will help you and when there are no alternatives, come back and we are a backup plan for you to support you… which is something that not everyone always has", highlighting the affective support as the matrix for intergenerational communication, whose relationships are a way of mediating conflict situations (Lüscher, 2004).

Finally, it is possible to consider the effect of affective ties in the mediation of these dynamics, since around one-third mentioned that the parental/family dynamics, even with the not always easy management of differences, improved since they were living with a geographical distance, having now daily contact and follow-up through digital contact, which allows them to reduce the loneliness of the ascending elements in the country of origin (Mateia, 2018).

Norms and Values: New Perceptions?

The different forms of presence and modifications to the dimensions of solidarity make us reflect on what this implies for the norms in the light of what each element expects from the family, as well as the social values. Both can be understood if we consider the dimensions of solidarity-normative and solidarity-consensual (Bengston & Oyama, 2007).

We can see that the family is perceived by almost all participants as a structure of unity, weight, and context that dictates norms between generations (normative-solidarity), with which most participants report identifying (Bengston & Oyama, 2007), reinforcing family belonging (Neto, 2019).

They indicate shared macrosocial values, norms, and orientations with their family members (consensual-solidarity). Shared values are frequently referred: autonomy, family connection, social support and solidarity, respect for individuality, the right to individual space, freedom, and the right to an opinion. On the other hand, the interviews show that the conflict goes beyond the family sphere of action and becomes macrosystemic. That is, most participants stated that their parental figures have more conservative values and attitudes, which prevents intergenerational sharing.

These participants refer that the lack of intercultural experience and less global experience of their parents creates differences in their opinions and values, perceiving them as less sensitive towards differences as we present in a brief example given by participant Joana (F17):

> living with people of different nationalities...having to learn to live with very different people, ended up making me much more open in relation to: emigration, migration, war, international politics (...) about migrants, about refugees... maybe, we diverged... we start to diverge a lot mainly because my mother and I have very different experiences... my father was also an immigrant, my mother was never an immigrant... she was born, grew up and always lived in the same house, always in the same place and we end up having slightly different values, seeing things in a slightly different way. Not that they have less respect for the value of human life or whatever, but maybe we accept things and see things a little differently from each other.

Given this data, it is important to consider Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecosystemic perspective and its focus to understand not only attitudes, values, norms, and respective prejudices as behaviours resulting from the influence of micro- to macrosystems but also within a chronological context in which parents and adult children have different perceptions of globalisation and the flow of norms and values. It becomes increasingly important to understand the intersectional and multisystemic contexts (Villas-Boas et al., 2017).

Approximately half of the participants mentioned that the opinions and values held by the caregivers have already created conflicts that have led to a breakdown in communication and the need to avoid the issues at stake. They refer to issues of Portuguese cultural identity that they consider to be inappropriate, such as bullfights or the experience of typical celebration rituals (clothes, ceremonies, conditioning of behaviours in order to follow traditions). A large majority mentioned that the way in which parental figures see with prejudice the welcoming of foreigners, the acceptance of LGBTQI + movements and policies, ethnic minorities, and also the avoidance of risk in the labour dimension leads to weariness and lack of understanding. These aspects emphasise the need for an intersectional understanding of norms and values that are impediments to building a more inclusive society (Ilic, 2020).

In one case, limitations based on gender roles were mentioned. Although the option to explore solidarity through the lens of gender theories was not taken, it must be emphasised how important these dynamics are when understanding intergenerational dynamics to comprehend expectations and roles in the family framework (Min et al., 2012). The literature indicates that there is a directionality of expectations of

support, although more on care, in cases of ascendant illness (solidarity-functional) (Coimbra et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2003). Though, this perception entails a set of projections of family roles (normative-solidarity) and, consequently, their projection into the values based on what is expected from female figures (e.g. mothers, daughters, grandmothers—consensual-solidarity). These dynamics of prejudice and norms make migrant women in transnational families feel more ambivalence and conflict (Fingerman, 2004; Wilson et al., 2003).

In all these cases, participants refer ambivalence between wanting to inform and update the figures on issues which they consider to exist due to the lack of experience of diversity contexts in Portugal and, in the opposite direction, wanting to avoid the themes in question, since they perceive that they cannot change any reality, as exemplified by the participant Cátia (F11): "I know that she won't change her mind, but we excuse it sometimes, but without getting angry with me or my father or getting angry with her or something". This brings us back to the conflict-ambivalence associated with consensual-solidarity (Bengston & Oyama, 2007; Lowenstein, 2007): how important but stressful communication with parental figures can be. However, there is a positive impact of this communication on the construction of transculturality and acceptance values regarding diversity in family members who stayed in the country of origin in transnational families are highlighted (Albert & Ferring, 2018; Barros, 2021).

It was also found that one-third of the interviewees chose avoidance as a way to manage family conflict. Most of them mentioned that they address the issues that negatively affect their relational dynamics with their caregivers, but they end up avoiding openly discussing the reason for the conflict since they do not consider that the family has the capacity to listen and give meaning to experiences that interfere with their migratory well-being. They end up using digital communication to mediate contents that are not shared with their parental figures.

Is Conflict-Ambivalence in the New Forms of Presence?

Although the majority of the participants refer that contact via digital platforms has improved or allowed the development of better quality family relationships, the majority indicate that geographical distance hinders family interaction and this is manifested in generational divergences of perspective on what is expected in the times and frequencies of visits to the participants' host country (van Gaalen et al., 2010).

Most of them perceive that the different perspectives of family members about the number of times of contact (either digital or face to face) increase internal conflict and psychological tension, leading to conflict between family members, which corroborates the literature on conflict and ambivalence as usual in the dynamics (Albert & Ferring, 2018; Lowenstein, 2007). This is regulated with the gradual experience of the new contact experience and with the support of the family built with the love partner in the country to which they emigrated, as referred by Rosa (F22):

> My son is now three years, [...] I don't know if I'm going to be able to carry that through, but with my husband and in general we try that, really, things

> are the way they are, families are not perfect, nor do things always go well and the important thing is to say things as they are and to affront them.

The presence of conflict, resolved in intergenerational cooperation, is also highlighted in what is perceived as adequate in family rituals, whether they are daily, celebratory, or occasional. In other words, the vast majority mentioned that the way the ascending generations perceive their presence is a wearing factor, perceiving an emotional burden due to an excessive presence in the family in Portugal, in contrast with the notion of home in the country of destination, as Catarina (F10) illustrates:

> Normally, about two or three days before I go is when I start to get... it's not anxious, it's not, but I start counting the days, let's say because my parents start asking what I want to eat and where I want to go and who I want to see and so, it starts....the memory begins to revive and [...] I'm in Portugal, most of the time...the first three, four days, I still manage to be...very devoted, let's say, to my family, afterwards, more than that, it begins to be complicated because I feel that I have two lives.

It was mentioned that the maintenance of contact between the family developed during the stay abroad is a cause of tension that is being negotiated. The digital presence brings realities closer and facilitates contact, but it also seems to annul the privacy and autonomy before the family members, since they are all always connected, as the example of Ana (F7):

> I try to tell her: mum! you know you don't have to... you don't have to send messages every day or, look! there are certain things that I now, it's not, I'm an adult and I have my life and we can talk, but not every day... and try, maybe... I think I also notice phases, my mother also, if she's a little more emotionally needy, there are times when she'll send me more messages, so I also try to understand what's happening on her side.

This statement brings us back to a rethinking of gender expectations of the generations and how they can be a source of stress and ambivalence (Fingerman, 2004; Wilson et al., 2003).

The great majority of the participants feel internal conflict for not being more present in the lives of older relatives since they could not adapt so easily to communication via new technologies and consider that they cannot keep up with the daily contact, which creates ambivalence between enjoying the migratory experience but feeling uncomfortable for not keeping up with the ageing and health of relatives, denoting concern for the elderly, as we can see in the example of Lucas (F14):

> The probability of them eventually dying and I not being there, also leaves me with some anguish...not so much guilt because that's the way things are and that will happen, so, no... there's no doubt, nobody stays here, but the probability of me being far away when that time comes is quite high, so it also leaves me with some anguish not being able...not being able to accompany the next few years around them.

These findings refer us to the importance of reflecting on digital ecosystems, particularly how age can be a vulnerability in digital access and to reinvent familiar rituals between digital and face to face (Denov et al., 2019; Ganito, 2018)

Conclusions

Generational differences present themselves as a challenging factor for the cooperation of parents and adult children since they have different perspectives on life, different possible socio-cultural context, and the time–space in which the person lives change the way he/she sees the world. As an illustration, we may use Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (2005), which alerts us to the importance of considering the systems where the individual is inserted, from the closest to the most distant social systems, but never forgetting the chronological dimension. When we study transnational family dynamics, it is even more important to understand not only the social dynamics but also the intersectionality of challenges that families composed of emigrants and those who stay in the country of origin (Villas-Boas et al., 2017; Ilic, 2020).

Considering the essence of support in these families, the model that allowed us to analyse these relational dynamics was intergenerational solidarity (Bengston & Oyama, 2007; Coimbra et al., 2013)), nowadays integrating the symbiosis between the solidarity-conflict-ambivalence *continuum* (Bengston & Oyama, 2007; Lowenstein, 2007; Lüscher, 2011). This option allowed for a proper analysis of what changed in these participants' experiences with the family's hybrid presence: mediated between the digital and the face-to-face aspects.

This study allows to deepen the digital space contributes to the emigrant's communication and presence with his/her family in the country of origin and, respectively, how this is reflected in the maintenance of relationships and perceptions about them. Rather, it shows how this behaviour mitigates the impact of the difficulties and challenges of geographical distance, allowing the adaptation of family rituals, whether in their daily forms, celebrations, or traditions, which are experienced in a face-to-face and digital way (associative-structural-solidarity). Participants seem to re-signify the perception of space, making hybrid interactions, which increase their belonging to the group (Neto, 2019). At the same time, it alerts us to the growing differences that give rise to conflicts and ambivalences, both in the context of the family group: what are its expectations of care and presence (functional-normative-solidarity) and what is the sharing of values and social norms that may bring generations together (consensual-solidarity), with a view to jointly shaping their trajectory (Albert & Ferring, 2018). Even so, the affectual-solidarity acts as a union for all the other dimensions to function and remain dynamic in these relations, with natural aspects of solidarity-conflict-ambivalence, which corroborates the literature that indicates the importance of approach this *continuum* (Albert & Ferring, 2018; Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema, 2019; Barros, 2021).

The data showed us that digital forms of communication can work as a way of promoting belonging and interculturality, as emigrants can bring new perspectives about the world and different ways of living, being a way of social growth, and, at

the same time, a form of bringing cross-cultural values and more openness to the *other* to their parental figures in Portugal. This is very important as it is necessary not only for intervention but also for reducing stigma and prejudice in relationships, as it is important to increase empathy and intercultural competencies (Gamsakhurdia, 2019; Ramos, 2013).

It is believed that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital contact, and the use of various forms of online communication is now even more expanded (Rojas Rodríguez et al., 2021) than when the data was collected. Notwithstanding, what remains common for future studies is the importance of having a more intersectional perspective that considers gender issues and management between work and personal/family life—accentuated with homeworking and digital forms in the pandemic for resilience (Walsh, 2020).

In future studies, it is also necessary to address aspects related to parenthood and conjugality in the life course (Min et al., 2012). This is important because it is necessary to address the idea of ageing that preoccupies these young adult migrants, both in relation to their parents and their own lives in the transnational experience, which may result in lower well-being (Denov et al., 2019; Fingerman, 2004; Neto, 2019).

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Data Availability The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available since they constitute an excerpt of research in a doctoral thesis [http://hdl.handle.net/10451/50377] with ethical protection of participants' interviews, but general data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. It has to state that at this research the transcribed interviews are available in Portuguese.

Declarations

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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