

Generational Shifts in Angolan Students Migrations to Portugal: “Grant Students”, “Inheritors” and “New Students”

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Abstract

The heavy legacy left by colonialism, regarding the formation of Angolan non-white populations conditioned its access to higher education in the period after independence. So, many students who entered higher education were rescued from various social contexts. Most of them came from families with very weak connection to the school. However, there were, at the time, some families educated above average, which did no more than reproducing this situation by passing it to new generations. In this paper, it is to compare these “heirs” with the “new students” and how they built their school careers, and how they were articulating with the different contexts of changed Angolan society itself.

Keywords

Higher Education, Angola, Grant Students, Inheritors, New Students

1. Introduction

Viewed from an individual perspective, studying beyond the mandatory school age is, sociologically, particularly stimulating. It is partly a conscious act by individuals (and families), therefore presupposing a decision-making process that is in fact limited to specific social contexts, which serve as dynamic “framing” structures. To a certain extent—as in other kinds of situations—they can be of a less autonomous nature (as is the case of grants attributed through centralized educational policies) being nevertheless, always negotiated or negotiable. Additionally, this particular topic is stimulating since it presupposes the expectation of a positive income, being economic (employment situation and economy as a whole), symbolical (social recognition) or even psychologi-

cal (reinforcement of human dignity and of individual self-esteem).

Considered from a collective perspective, the investment in higher education—when assumed and supported by the state—corresponds to a national development effort in the creation of a qualified work force on a grand scale, a necessary condition for a country's economic growth.

Until the 1990s, the international debate promoted the idea that the support given to higher education should primarily concern developed countries, reserving resources from international aid for inputs in elementary education in developing countries (Venkatasubramanian, 2004). The argument was that higher education would increase social disparity most likely serving the elite of these countries, and that an investment in primary education would not only be more egalitarian but improve economic performance in the long term.

Such an approach led to a neglect of investment in higher education in the countries that were in most need of it. Nonetheless, throughout the 1990s and in numerous international conferences—beginning with 1990's World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, followed later that year by the World Summit for Children in New York—governments gave growing priority to secondary and higher education, establishing a framework of objectives and targets for achievement which were renewed in the World Forum on Education in Dakar in April 2002 (PNUD 2002). The pursuit of studies beyond elementary school level was finally viewed as an fundamental requirement for access to employment and an improvement of living conditions, thus gaining growing acceptance in the context of development theory.

This was subsequently reinforced by the inclusion in the UNDP Human Development report in 1993 of a human development index (IDH) created in 1990 by the economists Amartya Sen and Mabub Ul Haq.

In the case of Angola, after the country's independence in 1975—which was followed by a period of internal conflict (1975-2002) that led to relocation of populations, breakdown of production, and an emphasis on the demand for resources for basic survival, the support given to secondary and post-secondary school education was perceived by families (particularly in the urban middle class) as a way of investing in the future of the country's youth. The ties that bound Portugal and Angola, and above all the already existing family networks linking the two countries, made Portugal an obvious choice for pursuing studies as well as for emigration.

When analysing the choice of Portugal, one should also take into account the changes in the (precarious) conditions of financing university studies abroad. If, for some time, this was only possible by way of scholarships—granted by the Angolan state as well as by other countries with close ties to the country, the expenses were soon borne by the families. This change in the source of investment in university education will constitute the basis of this current study.

These social, economic and political dynamics, which unravel from the time of Angola's independence, appear to suggest an analysis that links several historical moments, empirically represented here by two generations: 1) one, older generation of Angolan students who attended university in Portugal and, had obtained their diploma, and returned to their homeland; and 2) another, younger group of Angolan students currently enrolled in the Portuguese university system. This analysis draws an inevitable comparison between the plights of one generation: a) those who received scholarships from the Angolan *state*, with that of another, i.e. b) those students essentially supported by their *families*. However, within this second generation, we still consider it pertinent, in accordance with Bourdieu and Passeron, to distinguish between the “inheritors of educational capital” and “new students”.

We identified as “inheritors” those students whose parents had themselves obtained university diplomas, whereas in the case of “new students”, we referred to those whose parents were aware of the importance of investing in “educational capital” despite the fact that they themselves had not studied beyond elementary school or high school level. Therefore, within the context of their own families, the latter category formed the first generation of university students.

The present analysis is based on the approach developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron 1964), put forward and applied in their essay *Les Héritiers*, today considered as “classic” for an understanding of the social changes that took place within the universe of the educated.

The transition from the situation of “scholarship recipients” of the Angolan state, or resulting from agreements with other countries, to the condition of “inheritors” or “new students” supported above all by their families, reflects a discontinuity—also described by Bourdieu and Passeron—which appears particularly significant for our analysis of the Angolan case, since it allows for a reflection on the possibilities of democratic development of the regime through these new generations educated abroad.

In contrast to the Bourdieu's study, both groups that constitute the new generation—whether “inheritors” of

familial educational capital, or recent arrivals in academia—consider themselves freer than the previous generation of grant students. This situation, characterised by increased autonomy, and identified by Bourdieu and Passeron as favourable to achieving success in school, is a consequence of: 1) freeing themselves from dependence on the regime, the re-focusing the trajectories of their studies as self-made actions or decisions, which are therefore potentially more creative¹; 2) currently living in a time of peace and economic growth, which the previous group (the “scholarship recipients”), never experienced, thus placing them in a more advantageous educational position; 3) having access to means of transnational communication which allow for faster, wider, and, freer exchange and circulation.

On the other hand, the life histories of these Angolan students indicate that the main incentive for scholastic effort on the part of parents, is significant and cross generational for different social groups. This observation also distinguishes them from the group of students studied by Bourdieu and Passeron, who attributed to a considerable disinvestment in incentives to scholastic effort to parents in the lower social classes. This difference is, in all likelihood, the result of positive expectations regarding the value of degrees, which is a characteristic of developing countries—that is to say, countries with an extremely low index of advanced education; or, quite possibly, associated with a collective sense of education that was forged and consolidated during the period of socialist government.

2. Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis

For the current study², we used the method of a semi-directive interview with students from Angola attending higher education in Portugal and with professionals who, having attended a Portuguese university, thereafter returned to their homeland, integrated into the job market, and applying the expertise they acquired. These two groups allow for a comparison of “life histories” associated with substantially diverse contexts.

Generation A the oldest generation or the “scholarship receivers”

- Adults (ranging in age from 35 to 65);
- Initiated their education in a period previous to the independence of Angola, having defined their trajectory through higher education during the post-independence period;
- Attended higher education during the re-initiation of the Angolan civil war (between 1992 and 2002);
- Their itinerary through the educational system was erratic, having been forced to interrupt and, in many situations even change their course;
- Entered academia at an age above the European average.
- Generation B the younger generation of “heirs” or “new students”
- Young adults (with ages ranging from 21 to 35);
- Began education after Angolan independence.
- Lived in a period of civil war during elementary school and high school—some having been sent temporarily to Portugal after 1992 (the majority of being boys, to escape mandatory military recruitment);
- Their educational itineraries were relatively continuous (even when, in some cases, they were obliged to remain for a certain period of time in Portugal);
- Entered university at an age equivalent to the European average;
- In some cases, the passage through university coincides with that of their parents.

These different situations will here be analysed based on interviews conducted with seventy individuals: twenty-five from generation A which took place in Luanda, Angola, and forty five pertaining to generation B, interviewed in Lisbon (35) and Oporto (10).

As this is an “exploratory” study and since a qualitative analysis was preferred, the methodology of sampling adopted here, consequently non-probabilistic, results from the combination of “convenience sampling” and “snow ball” data collection. In other words, it was assembled in accordance with the availability of the informants, on a basis of which a first contact with new individuals was established.

We proceeded as well to collect statistical data by means of primary sources that focused mostly on the number of Angolan scholarship recipients enrolled in Portuguese higher education. Finally, this research is supported by bibliographic sources related to the history of late Angolan colonialism and post-colonialism and its connec-

¹Creators of “citizenship” and, consequently, of democratic ideals.

²As integrating part of the project: *Educação Avançada e Desenvolvimento. A Cooperação Portuguesa com os PALOP* (Higher Education and Development. Portuguese cooperation with the PALOP)

tion to Portugal, above all with regard to higher education.

3. The Training of Angolan Students

The African countries that once constituted the Portuguese colonial empire are among the latest to achieve independence. They also belong, nonetheless, to the group of countries, which, at the time of their independence, registered extremely low education rates and some of the highest rates of illiteracy. This was the result of the lack of and the unequal distribution of the metropolis's investment in the colonies but also from the colonial racial policy, which systematically disregarded, over time, the teaching of non-white peoples, with the exception of a small minority of "assimilados" or "assimilated" citizens.

"The 'assimilados' were required to speak the Portuguese language fluently, to practice a craft, art or trade that would assure their economic sustenance and of their families, or possess the necessary means to achieve this end; in addition, they should demonstrate decent conduct and acquire the knowledge and customs required for complete application of the public and private legislation for Portuguese citizens, and could not have a criminal record or be military deserters (art° 56°)." (Dalila Cabrita Mateus 1999: p. 22).

In the 1950s, the vast majority of Angolans were still considered "non-civilized". Data from the Portuguese National Institute of Statistic (INE—*Anuário Estatístico do Ultramar* 36 - 37 quoted in Mateus 1999: p. 23) refer to the existence of 135.355 "civilized" on a total of 4145.266 inhabitants. The number of 4009.911 was attributed to the category of "non-civilized" Angolans. This relative amount was also reflected in formal education attendance, even within white populations.

"It is a caricature that, in 1950 Angola, 12% of all "civilized" Portuguese individuals, over 6 years of age, were completely illiterate. Although claiming to read and write, 32% had never attended the school system, 39% had gone through elementary education and only 17% attended high school". (Dalila Mateus 1999: p. 21).

At the end of the 1950s, when elementary education had become mandatory for the entire population of the colony, the percentage of youth of school age that was actually receiving school education was merely 8%.

In spite of this situation which can be considered disastrous, there was a minority within the indigenous population that persisted their studies, thanks to the support of Catholic and Protestant missions.

"Apart from for a small minority of non-whites that did not enjoy public schools meant for the "civilizados", the Catholic and Protestant missions would, and for a long period of time, be the only educators of the "assimilados" in this phase of colonization by the colonial state. A missionary and Protestant researcher (Lawrence Henderson) goes so far as stating that the Protestants educated in Angola were more "assimilated" than the Catholics". (Christine Messiant 1998: p. 253).

In the life stories", narrated by those of our interviewees who returned to their homeland (generation A), the crucial role that these religious missions played in their basic education is emphasised.

"My parents were illiterate. I did my Elementary and High School education practically entirely in the Congo, at a Catholic Mission. We would leave on Sunday, after Mass, and walk to the village and make kikuanga (bread dough wrapped by leaves), would return to the Mission with the kikuanga on our heads and walk with the meal that would sustain us for a week. The Mission only provided shelter. Even the mattress was my own. The classes were very good, very good indeed! There was no room for play." The priests accompanied our studies. (EA 18—male—age 56—Originally Uige—Professor at the University Agostinho Neto degree in Universidade de Lisboa).

However, the role of the Protestant Church was not regarded favourably by the colonial Portuguese regime. At the close of the XIX century, when the influence of the Baptist Church expanded from the Kingdom of King Leopold's Congo, the Portuguese considered protestants "dangerous intruders" (Birmingham, 1998: p. 345).

The strong appeal of these Protestant missions also stands-out due to their position with regard to African cultures, assuming an attitude that did not many aspects of their traditional organization, as well as showing respect for the dignity of the African (Messiant 1998: p. 253).

Following the 1961 rebellion, which marks the outbreak of the colonial war, Salazar ordered that the protestant missionary be "hunted down" (*Ibid*: 35). In the regions most affected by the war these missions were also responsible for the sheltering of a significant number of children and youth, some of which were—as they themselves described (see transcriptions bellow)—literally "saved" (and catapulted to the top of the social pyramid) by these missionaries, who gave them the possibility of prolonging their studies until the end of high school.

“In 1961 the war started. So we went out of the mission and left for the village. We left alone. On the 15th of March, 1961, when they were attacking the fortress where the colonial regime was established [...] we were still at the mission. In September 1962, since we had an uncle who lived there in the [Belgian] Congo, and who came and found us in the bush and it was he who took us to the other side. I enrolled again in the 1st grade in French. It was there that I finished my studies, but always with the Protestants. When the British missionaries arrived at that Protestant church they started supporting it with the help of the United Nations, etc. When I got to 5th grade I received a scholarship”. (EA 18—Male—age 56—Originally from Uige—Responsible for Academic Affairs in the Agostinho Neto University degree in Antropology Universidade Nova de Lisboa).

A younger student (generation B) describes another education path associated with protestant churches, referring not to himself but to his father.

“My dad had a somewhat complicated life...He was born in Bié, studied there, but at the age of 8 left his parents’ home and moved to a Protestant mission. I’m not sure you know that the Protestant missions educated cadres at the time. So he needed an average of grade 14 or 15 in order not to go into the army (EB1—Female—age 42—PhD Universidade Nova).

In view of recent events, changes were made in educational policies in order provide free access to school for all citizens. In spite of this, the lack of advanced education institutions in Angola determined that the candidates for this degree would have to relocate to Portugal. Despite being granted scholarships, these grants were not available to the majority of Angolans. In an attempt to solve this problem, the “General University Studies” programme was founded. It was instituted in 1962 by the decree-law 44530 of 21st August³, and integrated in the Portuguese academic system. However, given the near absence of courses, which furthermore did not correspond to the degree of “*licenciatura*” (graduation), Portugal continued to be one of the main destinations for the acquisition of higher education diplomas.

Angola achieved independence with an estimated rate of school enrolment of 33% (data for 1973) (MED, 1995). The new regime, of Marxist inspiration (i.e. the administrations of 1975-1979 and of 1979-1987), attributed fundamental priority to the investment in education as a way of compensating for the high degree of illiteracy (around 85% as of the beginning of 1970) (PNUD, 2002: p. 26), as well as for the departure of the white population, the majority of which left the country for Portugal after 1975, and the need to replace the cadres of state administration.

In an effort to mend the damage caused by the colonial regime, in 1975 the Constitutional Angolan Law consecrated education as a universal right, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or religious belief. The state therefore assumed the responsibility of providing education to all Angolans. As a result, the state was no longer a privileged site for one single race, creed or religious confession, and was now open space to each and every citizen.

One of the informants describing her trajectory through school system—having begun during the colonial period—recognizes to what extent independence created opportunities that otherwise would not have been available to her.

“I was educated at the Catholic Mission of Chivinguiro—province of Huíla. (...) in the meantime the independence took place (...) Afterwards I completed 5th and 6th grade and after that I went to Lubango. There I did 7th and 8th grade. Before the independence I only had completed 4th grade. Thank God I entered the school system after-independence (...) They knew I was the eldest daughter and that my mother had gone through a rough time. The government had education and health as its main priorities. I had free books because my mother couldn’t afford them, as she was a washer woman. (...) There was pressure for me to study but it was not too strong since the state helped. And my mum belonged to Organization of Angolan Women (OMA)! I am aware of the fact that, if it had not been for independence, I would never have arrived where I am today, never! On a personal level it was the best thing that ever happened to me.” (EB 10—Female—age 43—PhD African Studies ISCTE).

In spite of this, the ambitious educational project of the MPLA was confronted with serious obstacles owing to the increase of armed conflict and consequent bad performance of the economy, which lead to a growing dependence on the external aid. Therefore, the investment in education gradually decreased and the measures had seemed revolutionary, would confront many limitations to their practical execution.

For more than a million students enrolled in elementary school there were twenty five thousand teachers dis-

³Universidade de Angola (portaria 77-A/76), which changed its name after 1985 to Universidade Agostinho Neto.

tributed heterogeneously throughout the country, which, under normal conditions, corresponded to an average of one teacher per forty one students. In spite of this, only seven percent of teaching staff working in elementary school had obtained minimum qualifications required to practice teaching (Filipe Zau, 2009: p. 263-264).

The numbers given above indicate that the number of registered students more than doubled. However, this increase was not complemented by an increase in the number of teachers nor by the availability of facilities, which differed little from the colonial period. On the other hand, the intensification of armed conflict, and “the general destruction of school infrastructures, particularly in rural areas; the absenteeism rates among professors; the limits on the funding of schools within the general State budget for investment in human resources and in infrastructures” (Zau, 2009: p. 269) resulted, over the following years, in a decrease of enrolments in regular, basic education facilities.

Regarding the investment in higher education, at the time of Angola could boast only one university, the University of Luanda—formerly the “*Estudos Gerais Universitário de Angola*” which would later (in 1985) be renamed the University Agostinho Neto. Nevertheless, the state invested in the human capacity building of cadres connected to the ruling party, especially through the establishment of teacher training schools: the ISCED—Higher Institutes for the Sciences of Education. The Angolan state invested in the

Higher education of peasant or working-class young adults, as well as the dispatch of others to middle or higher education degrees in socialist countries, as a way of, in the words of the MPLA president “guarantee the firm class position of new intellectuals”. In reality, although there were no well-structured policies in the training of party cadres adjusted to the country’s development strategies, after independence the Angolan government promoted measures that were directed towards a large scale training program for cadres at the highest level, in as well as outside the country (José Januário, 2007: p. 89).

In this respect, programs for technical-professional tuition were also created—as was the case of PUNIV (a pre-university program created in 1979 and which corresponded to the last years of high school education). Apart from these political distinctions, the post-independence trajectory of students also reflects the perpetuation of socio-racial distinctions, since there were schools for “white” and “mixed race” pupils, considered to pertain to the “elite”, as opposed to those for “blacks” (mostly directed towards teacher training).

“In secondary school I attended the best pre-university centre of Lubango, (PUNIV), that was also an elite school, when most people preferred INE—Regular Institute of Education—where there were a lot of blacks and they considered it to be more a school for blacks... and then there were stories that the profession of professor was a low status one, so I went to that school... there I found an elite of individuals in the prime of their teenager years.” (EB3—male—age 38—MA in Cultural Heritage and Identities, University of Lisbon).

These racial and political distinctions were also reflected in the selection process of scholarship grants for studying abroad—one of the priorities of the regime—by means of cooperation protocols with Eastern Block countries. In the 1980s, scholarship grants went from being coordinated by the party to a more publicly regulated model, which depended on the state—The National Institute of Scholarships (INABE). Throughout one of the most devastating periods of the Angolan civil war—between 1997 and 2001—priority spending on scholarships continued as before, to take pride of place within the education budget, following the investment in primary education and in administration, representing around 18% of total costs (Vinyals 2002: p. 56).

4. The Higher Education of Angolans in the Diaspora

During the post-independence period, the cooperation of Angola with its political allies was, as mentioned above, investment in the higher educating of Angolan cadres especially in the former URSS, RDA and Cuba. In these countries, students were provided with an “ideological degree” and they were expected to, upon their return to Angola, to become competent political cadres (even if their degree would not quite correspond to the African context they would encounter). Nonetheless, for many Angolan families, Portugal seems to have been a preferred destination of parents who sent their children abroad, primarily during extended periods of civil war, not only for security reasons but also in order to overcome perceived faults in the educational system.

Following the consolidation of peace in 2002, the growing liberalization of Angolan economy and society, and the increase in foreign investment, from a diversity of sources—the value of school diplomas was once appreciated, but now in an entirely different context, given that those who entered the system would increasingly be expected to compete in the international job market. The impact that these reconfigurations brought with them of the country’s economic and social institutions, paved the way for the emergence of new mechanisms for

the transmission of knowledge. One of the effects was that school and most particularly academic degrees became highly valued assets in the job market.

These policy reforms and the new clientele that resulted from their implementation meant that the expectations of success became increasingly associated with greater comparative competitive advantages and their likely economic effects, thereby replacing political objectives. The importance of the international recognition of diplomas led to an increase in demand for university degrees in Angola's new foreign partners such as England, the USA and Brazil.

It is also worth noting that these novel opportunities not only benefited younger age groups but also their parents' generation. Enjoying the stability brought by peace and by the political reforms of the Angolan state, and a new freedom of choice, many seized the opportunity to continue their studies, which had been interrupted as a result of the civil war. In several of the interviews that were conducted, we noticed a temporal and geographic coincidence in the advanced education of parents and children (all of whom enrolled in higher education in Portugal).

In addition, in the context of this one-party post-centralism (i.e. from 2002 onwards) higher education was seen as way of acquiring freedom and access to decision-making positions. As the market became progressively less regulated and the first group of graduate students returned, the importance of possessing a formal education when accessing the job market (increasingly in the hands of foreign investors) became increasingly apparent.

5. Enrolling in Higher Education in Portugal

Throughout the course of the interviews, conducted with Angolan undergraduates who study (or have studied) in Portugal, three social contexts facilitating the access to higher education, with distinct historical and biographical references, were identified.

1) Those whose access to higher education was facilitated by bilateral political protocols on a non-continuous basis, arose from politically propitious moments in the post-independence period (i.e. the second half of the 1970s, and early 1980s) and resulted from inputs that were meant to accelerate in the training of party cadres, i.e.: the groups of "scholarship recipients" (many of which having obtained high school education with the aid of catholic and protestant churches prior to the independence)—generation A.

2) Those who had access to advanced degrees through continuous learning processes associated with an educational culture embraced by their families, e.g. parents, and in some cases grandparents, who themselves had obtained higher education degrees and were now integrated in Angolan society in careers in which they valorised this educational capital—generation B—"inheritors".

3) Those who had access to higher education as a result of processes that valued the acquisition of scholarly capital, to which families adhered after independence (i.e. during second half of the 1970s, and early 1980s) and was reflected in the incentives these same families provided towards school effort and performance, and at a later stage in their investment in the higher education of their children (sometimes at considerable cost)—generation B—"New Students".

6. "Scholarship Recipients", "Inheritors" and "New Students"

For some, the access to elite culture is an achievement that implies great costs; for others, it is an inheritance that simultaneously incorporates ease and the temptation of easiness.

(Bourdieu and Passeron 1964: p. 42).

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1964) base their analysis on the role played by families from different social backgrounds in the acquisition of skills conducive to scholarly success. The group status of "inheritors" is the result of their inheriting "school capital" from their families rather than their links to school, by way of possessing a "school culture" that aided them in their path to success. In their view, the bourgeois *diletantism* of the "inheritors" from the educated middle class, contrasted with the effort and perseverance of the students who originated from the French working, agriculture, and petty trade classes, who had greater difficulties in assimilating and acquiring (by their own initiative) the culture of the educated elite. While the first possessed an almost natural "gift", which was required to achieve success in school, the second worked hard to obtain this "gift" which they attributed not to themselves but to the knowledge obtained in school through a process which Bourdieu and Passeron called "true acculturation". The first, whilst being more creative, would take their studies less seriously, maintaining a somewhat distant relationship with school, whereas "in the case of the

students of less privileged classes, school would remain the only path to access culture and valid for all levels of learning” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1964: p. 37). Depending on the each student’s point of departure, the imagery they created of their university degree were associated with a “possible”, “impossible” or “normal” future. This perception, in turn, would be determinant for their choice of vocation, or their own success.

6.1. Generation A—Students That Returned to Angola: “Scholarship Recipients”

Those inquired from generation A (all over 35 years of age) owe the continuation of their learning experience to their country’s independence, as their opportunities to access higher education during the colonial period were almost non-existent. These persons, nowadays reintegrated into Angolan society, commenced their education prior to independence. Their paths were determined in most cases, by events they did not control or rationally anticipate.

“More than guaranteeing access to the course and educational institution which, at the time, seemed to offer the most economical and/or symbolic benefits (...) simply attending higher education, regardless of the field chosen, figures as an achievement sufficiently important to be presented (...) as upward social mobility, given the exceptional nature that this scholarly trajectory represents in the social space that the protagonists are part of.” (Manuela Fonseca, 2003: p. 231).

These informants came onto the scene during the period of the PUNIV towards the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. Their choices were, consequently, relatively limited. Some spent time in Eastern Block countries or Cuba, where they followed courses of shorter duration. Many of those who are nowadays involved in teaching took classes for teacher degrees (at ISCED). The value they attribute to higher education is mostly political, in the context of the nation’s effort to train cadres.

6.2. Generation B—“Inheritors” or “New Students”

These younger students, pertaining to generation B, were interviewed when they were enrolled in higher education in Portugal, and belong to the 21 to 35 age group. They concluded their elementary education after-independence. For this reason they form part of a generation which received a very politicized elementary education, based on narratives of bravery and heroism—influenced by socialist ideology.

“We had to sing the national anthem every time we arrived at school, and were expected to call our teachers “comrade”, and our colleagues “comrade”, we had this style... when someone entered the room we had to stand up and say “good morning comrade teacher”, “good morning comrade principal”, the books were extremely ideological or political. We had stories of pioneers such as Zeca or Gangula who were ambushed by Portuguese troops; they were tortured to death without ever revealing the truth.” (EB2—female—age 23—degree Universidade Católica Portuguesa).

In spite of often descending from more educated families (using the previous generation as reference, fig. 8), for them education is also associated (by imposition of their families) with signifiers such as personal learning and character formation, in a process in which the exhibition of rigid and disciplined behaviour was instilled by their parents.

An alternative motivation for the prolongation of studies, in the particular case of young males, results, as seen before, from a dread connected to military recruitment.

“Coming to Portugal was a consequence. It came to a point when the civil war in Angola started spreading across several generations and, as it was my turn to be recruited into the army and I was the only son, my mother was scared. So my transfer to Portugal came about as a consequence.” (EB 29—male—age 28—degree in Political Science, Universidade Lusófona).

The integration, of those who enrolled in the Portuguese educational system, required a determined effort of adaptation and acculturation. The departure from the country of origin and the support of the nuclear family, at an age of a person’s character formation, constituted an intense experience of identity construction.

The youth of this generation clearly assumes this notion of being different. It built its identity on three levels and by reference to three groups from which they distance themselves.

- 1) Having gone to study in Portugal as opposed to other possible choices such as London or the USA;
- 2) Being “Africans” as opposed to being “Portuguese”;
- 3) Having left their country to study as opposed to those who remained in Angola.

6.3. “Inheritors”

As observed above, the volume of inherited “school capital”, whether recent or older, is of great importance to the inheritors. Many of these young people reveal a premature and “natural” trajectory of investment in education, rooted in a family environment that valued education, starting with their parents (and in some instances also grandparents), which reproduces itself in subsequent generations

Prior to coming to Portugal some of these young adults enrolled in the “Portuguese School” of Angola, an elite school where the high school program was in conformity with the calendar and model of Portuguese education, serving the purpose of preparing them to depart to Portugal.

“Portugal was my first choice, seeing that I was already attending the Portuguese School, it was as if I was already set on the right path” (EB1—male—age 20—degree at ISEG).

6.4. “New Students”

Our interviewees often refer to their family’s investment in their education as an integral component of their moral upbringing and character formation. These parents primarily transmitted what Bourdieu and Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964) defined as “cultural good-will”, having encouraged them since their childhood, and generally in a rather strict fashion, to dedicate themselves to school work.

Both “inheritors” and “new students” moved to Portugal by imposition of their families, leaving behind an insecure country with an uncertain future. They were often forced to live with family members that up until then were complete strangers for them, having to cope with problems in terms of integration. These difficulties were overcome once they acquired autonomy, i.e. when they moved to student residences or to their own apartments. Being younger they were also more demanding with regard to the quality of Portuguese higher education and particularly criticized its strong theoretical character.

The choice of the country for pursuing their studies in higher education was strongly influenced by the social status and the historical trajectory of their respective families. This freedom of choice, of both the country and the degree, corresponds to what Pierre Bourdieu defined as the “possibility of individualization”. Such a possibility is, according to the authors, in direct dialogue with other “social trajectories” of similar groups.

This comparative framework composed of groups and their relation to one another is clearly influenced by broader contexts of political and ideological change. In the Angolan case, with the reduction of state regulations, and consequent progressive liberalization of the political and economic system, the responsibility of families for their children’s formal education has been gradually increasing, thus shifting away from state control.

In Angola’s history of the last three decades of independence, the role attributed to school education was accompanied by significant changes in the countries’ political regime. Nonetheless, as in the case of European elites mentioned by Bourdieu, one could identify a group of educated families whose trajectory is related to protracted and lasting social dynamics, which, Despite experiencing critical and threatening situations, these families never seized to give special priority to investing in their children’s educational capital, thereby ensuring its reproduction. One should, however, consider a recent phenomenon with consequences of a somewhat dramatic nature: the generalized investment in formal education, as result of a national policy towards “education for all”, which characterized the post-independence period and affected families that traditionally had no educational background, with strong ties to the rural environment and considered to be part of the lower end of the social hierarchy.

The investment in academic capital, a determinant factor in the orientation of life trajectories, experienced notable changes during the process of transformation of Angolan society throughout the 1980s and 1990s. These transformations that played a key role in the lives and careers of our interviewees, as students or professionals, can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Those who began their educational trajectory in colonial times, with support of either of their families or religious missions and, in most cases, forced to move from region to region in order to achieve progress in school. Since they were educated above average, at the time of independence these Angolans were recruited as agents of education and/or granted scholarships.
- 2) Those who were born in the post-independence period, during which they attended elementary school, integrated in nationalist educational programs based upon a socialist ideology. They were enrolled in public or private schools having, thereafter leaving the country, with support of their families, in order to escape the country’s lack of security and instability, or owing to the poor conditions of Angolan higher education institutions.

Most of these students, with the exception of the “inheritors” who possessed a more natural relationship with schools, began their education with a collective sense of service to their country, having later adopted other more individual attitudes, somewhat more self-centred and elitist, in conformity with the new tendencies that currently define the politics and economy of Angola.

Portugal is today one of the countries favoured by students and families who choose it of their own initiative. However, it is not the most preferred country in terms of the amount of scholarships granted through bilateral agreements. Families choose Portugal on account of the historical links established between ex-colonizer and ex-colonized countries, cultural and linguistic factors, curricular considerations (curricular similarities), administrative reasons (administrative cultures with similar roots) but mostly for economic and affective reasons, given the persistence of kinship relations, in Portugal, that provide frameworks for support of the students during their stay in this country.

7. Conclusion

The construction of chains of meaning, relating to life experiences outside the motherland and in the present case resulting from the experience of Angolan youth, studying or intending to study in Portugal is understood here as a creative process of agency producing singular characteristics for a certain generation. This dynamic is situated in particular spatial-temporal contexts, enjoying a measure of independence from policies aiming at integration or identitary narratives that frame them. It is therefore, in itself, a reflection of factors of change, particularly important, considering the repercussions in the construction of views about the world and expectations of the free exercise of citizenship.

As a result, we presume that each generation creates for itself its own conditions for the reception and assimilation of situations of contact with dissimilarity, also being free to attribute meanings to events and of re-reading, in their particular ways, pasts and common cultural roots.

One should consequently consider that, besides a historical connection, the enrolment of these students in higher education in Portugal reveals circumstances that result from individual decision-making, benefiting from an autonomy that implies that these decisions also take place beyond the realm of interstate agreements. This new relationship of these families with Portugal affects the perception and representations they have of the old colonial metropolis, increasingly perceived as a gateway to Europe and, through it, to developed democratic and free regimes.

For most of the individuals who formed part of the current project sample, Portugal was not exactly a free choice. It was not the case for the first generation which had very few options to choose from at all; and nor was it for the second generation whose families decided for them, compelled by aims that were hardly related to the quality of Portuguese higher education in the context of the international academic market. Most of them fled from insecurity to security, purposefully led on by their families' decision.

The arrival of Angolan students in Portugal, by means of their own initiative, is still to occur in the near future. Research into future generations of students, in the course of a dialogue with the past and present (as described above), will be of great value to a better understanding of the situation in both Portugal and Angola, of their respective political and academic elites, and also crucial for the advancement of further cooperation between the two countries in field of higher educational.

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