

Chapter 12

“I Was Enthused When I ‘Returned’ to Portugal, But I’m Leaving Disillusioned”: Portuguese Migrant Descendant Returnees from Canada and Narratives of Return, Re-return and Twice Migration



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12.1 Introduction

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and first half of the 00s, Portugal became a country affected by growing globalisation, development and modernisation. Its inclusion in the European Union brought about benefits to the country that included the modernisation of both the public and private sectors as well as that of the country’s infrastructure, all aided by EU financial transfers. In conjunction with this financial influx, major international events also gave the country unprecedented visibility. Such was the case with the World Exposition of 1998 (EXPO 98) and the EURO 2004 football tournament, both of which contributed towards the development of various parts of the country, as well as drawing the world’s attention not only to the events themselves but also to the host country.

Drawn by the newly-generated prosperity of this period, Portugal witnessed the return of a significant number of its emigrants – not only of first-generation migrants, but also of their offspring, some of whom had left Portugal as young children, while others had been born in the country of immigration. It is this latter group of migrants I focus on in this article. “Returning”¹ to Portugal at a time of economic growth, many migrated with full awareness of the opportunities that could be found, many often possessing plans of how they could contribute to the country’s growth and vice versa – about how Portugal could contribute to their own personal growth. For

¹I am fully aware that one cannot return to a place one never departed from. Thus the term “return”, when referring to the sons and daughters of migrants, will be used to imply ancestral homeland return or return to one’s ancestral roots.

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some, however, such ambitions and beliefs were discarded in the wake of the economic crisis that loomed over Portugal from the mid-2000s until very recently. As a consequence, new mobility trajectories, consisting of re-return and twice migration,² became common in the lives of some returnees.

At the height of the period of economic crisis, high unemployment and increased emigration resulted from the economic downturn. Estimates show that in 2013, for example, around 110,000 Portuguese nationals departed for other shores (Pires et al. 2014), a figure that surpasses annual emigration statistics from Portugal's emigration heyday of the 1960s and early 1970s. Among Portuguese emigrant descendant returnees, the economic crisis led to job losses, to the closing down of businesses, as well as to individuals not being able to find work. The consequences of the crisis upon this group were thus no different from those experienced by society at large.

Taking the above points into consideration, in this article I aim to analyse narratives of return, re-return and twice migration. I set out to do this via the examination of stories and opinions collected through in-depth interviews and casual conversations held from 2008 to 2015 as part of two related projects. To support my arguments, I will rely on the narrative accounts of six Portuguese migrant descendants from Canada who have re-returned or twice migrated after having resided in Portugal for an extended period of time.³ I have named these participants António, Carla, Marco, Natália, Nelson and Teresa.⁴ Through this examination, I set out three primary goals of analysis: (1) to reflect on issues of attraction to and settlement in Portugal at a time when growth and prosperity were defining factors of return. The discussion will centre here on processes of integration and perceptions of Portugal and Portuguese society, past and present; (2) to examine the reasons behind acts of re-return/twice migration as provided by the interviewees, taking into account the impacts of the economic crisis; (3) to analyse the resources available to these individuals when it comes to making the decision to either return to Canada or move to another country. To achieve this third analytic goal, interactions between transnational network constructions and negotiations – factors that may facilitate mobility – are taken into consideration. The aim will thus be to understand how interactions, constructions and negotiations influence the mobility choices of these individuals at a time when social capital is particularly needed – at a time of economic downturn.

² Building on the concept developed by Bhachu (1985), I use the term “twice migration” to refer to migrants who migrated first to one country before migrating again to another to seek further life opportunities.

³ The reduced number of research participants for this analysis is due to the fact that, out of the 22 Portuguese-Canadian returnees interviewed between 2008 and 2015, only these six participants had already moved out of Portugal by the time my fieldwork came to an end in 2014. I additionally point out that among these 22 participants, others also expressed a desire to leave Portugal due to the economic situation, while others were taking steps towards doing so. These individuals, however, remained in the minority, as most participants had no desires or plans to leave Portugal.

⁴ In order to maintain anonymity, the participants of this study have been given pseudonyms.

12.2 Methodological Considerations

Ethnographic research is at the heart of this investigation. Relying on the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing as the primary source of data, complemented by information gathered through casual conversations with participants, this research has as its central aim the unveiling of meanings encoded in the act of return and re-return/twice migration and the construction and maintenance of personal networks (Christou 2004). This research thus relies on storytelling and the gathering of opinions, with discussion focusing on the conceptualisation of nation, place and culture, as well as dynamics of belonging and identity constructs in the migrants’ network (re)building, both when moving to and out of Portugal.

Given that the author and researcher is also a Portuguese emigrant descendant who returned to Portugal from Canada, an additional methodological issue should be considered: the researcher/author’s position as an “insider-outsider-within”, a position that was particularly important in the recruitment of participants since members of my own personal networks of descendant-returnee migrants both participated in the study and provided links to other interviewees. My “insider-outsider-within” position further implies that I have personal experiences and “rootedness” within the same social context (of return) as the subjects that make this work auto-ethnographic. Auto-ethnography enhances participant research this owed to the fact that the researcher is seen as one of the researched – a boundary crosser (Reed-Danahay 1997).⁵

The participants this article focuses on were all interviewed twice. The first round of interviews, carried out between 2008 and 2012, took place when all interviewees were still residing in Portugal. Thus, all interviews were carried out face-to-face. Follow-up interviews that took place after 2013 were either carried out via Skype or Facebook, or face-to-face whenever participants were in Portugal on holiday.

Semi-structured interview guides were used to steer the interviews. The first round of interviews was guided by questions focusing on (1) integration issues, (2) negotiations of identity and belonging, and (3) local and transnational network construction and maintenance. The second round of interviews focused on the impact of the economic crisis in Portugal and its influence on mobility, and specifically its role in encouraging re-return/twice migration.

In providing a brief characterisation of the participants and their mobility paths, first, all six were born between the years 1973 and 1983 and all returned to Portugal between the years 1995 and 2003 unaccompanied. In 2013–2014, four of the

⁵Although this ethnographic research technique may bring with it limitations due to the lack of neutrality of the “insider looking in” (Dyson 2004), these limitations are outweighed by what I consider to be the technique’s methodological appropriateness for the research, given that it can provide an additional layer of authenticity, reinforced by self-reflexivity and research awareness from an “insider” perspective (Denzin 1997; Ellis and Bochner 2000). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) point out, the social world cannot be researched without the researcher being a part of it.

participants re-returned back to Canada, the other two having twice migrated (one to the United Kingdom and the other to France). Of the four who re-returned to Canada, three returned to the same location they originally departed from, the other to another part of Canada. Lastly, while the participants returned to Portugal single, five out of the six have re-returned or twice migrated with their spouse or common-law partner, two with children as well.

12.3 The Lead-Up to the Crisis

For the offspring of Portuguese emigrants, “homecoming” is often seen as a superlative act; the realisation of ethnic completeness (Christou 2006a; Sardinha 2011a, b). This is particularly the case for those who dream of returning to an often idealised version of Portugal first imagined in the emigration country. Once the return is accomplished, however, pre-return idealisations may be contested by the realities of everyday life which may be very different from what was preconceived. As Christou (2004, 54) points out, “exilic” spaces can extend to the “idyllic” space of the ancestral homeland, which is the source of ethnic belongingness; but once the “real” return takes place, disillusionment and disappointment may become the dominant reactions: indeed, the “dream” may even become a “nightmare” (Christou 2006b) when the expected does not come to fruition.

Asked to discuss the reasons why they had “returned” to Portugal and what they were expecting upon settling in the ancestral homeland, participants most commonly described the lure of prosperity, of being able to succeed, and the belief that the Portuguese labour market held more professional opportunities for them. Also talked about was the desire to participate in the development and growth of the country, especially at the local level – in the communities their parents had departed from – where it was felt their involvement could make more of a difference. Moreover, interviewees also described wanting to “return to roots” (Wessendorf 2007) and to live out “being Portuguese in Portugal” (Sardinha 2011a, b). It is common for second-generation migrant descendants to relate nostalgically to the parents’ place of origin, especially when their upbringing has been strongly transnational in nature. Such strong connections to roots might even be the motor that drives their desire to live in the country of their ancestry; to be ensconced in roots, where one expects to find the ideal homeland and the socio-cultural elements one thinks defines it – the same elements that served as the backbone of their sense of belonging during their transnational childhoods and adolescences. Building up to becoming “roots-migrants”, such individuals tend to draw from everyday translocal experiences while growing up, be they those experiences fostered at home, in the company of fellow emigrants and/or during short holidays in the ancestral homeland (Wessendorf 2007).

Returning to their roots in the hopes of grounding themselves socially and culturally, however, is seldom a clear-cut accomplishment. As Wessendorf (2007) points out, the adaptation of migrant descendant returnees’ highly translocal everyday lives to their parents’ country of origin cannot be neglected. It is especially impor-

tant to consider how these individuals deal with the discrepancies between their images of the homeland prior to migration and the actual realities they encounter once they settle there.

Although growing up surrounded by “Portugueseness” in Canada, both in the household and in the community, participants in this study commonly talked about being drawn to the ancestral homeland by what they saw in Portugal during holidays – times when experiences often serve to reinforce romanticised images of the country previously created at a distance, through familial and community transmissions in the diaspora (Afonso 1997, 2005; Santos 2005; King and Christou 2008; Sardinha 2011a). During these short stays, activities are more often than not “carnivalised” occurrences, as seldom are holidays “lived experiences” that permit “normalness” (Sardinha 2011a, b, 2014a). A commonly held perception, therefore, was that of people in Portugal living better, more enjoyable lives in comparison to the lives they themselves had in Canada. Carla (born 1973) expresses this very sentiment:

To me, there were no wrongs in Portugal. Everybody seemed to have a pretty good life. You wanted a bank loan to buy a house, they’d throw in some extra money for the furniture. Everybody was ‘living high off the hog’, as the old saying goes. The country received international attention because of things like EXPO 98, EURO 2004, we would come here in the summer and everybody had money to rent a house in the Algarve during the month of August, going out every night and stuff. It was a better life than in Canada ... at least I was led to believe that ... but it was all smoke and mirrors.

What Carla perceived to be a “relaxing, laidback Portugal” when in the position of a holidaying returnee was quickly revealed to be otherwise upon moving to Portugal and being confronted with everyday life. As King and Christou (2008, 18–19) emphasise, second-generation homecomings needs to go beyond the notion of “an emotionally compelling existential project” and the myth-laden mission of return. This is due to the fact that upon facing the realities of everyday life in the ancestral homeland, many returnees will witness preconceived notions of the mythical/historic homeland – which often only mirror the subjectivities of migrant belongings – clashing with their new surroundings (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004).

In describing the origins of such clashes, the respondents particularly referred to conflicts encountered at an institutional level. For example, societal and organisational “let-downs” deriving from encounters with the “inner workings” of Portuguese society and the state – ranging from bureaucracy, to lack of honesty, to corruption – were described as having brought about disillusionment and rupture. In the words of António (born 1979):

I moved (to Portugal) because I loved the place, and I still do. But the more time I spent here, the more I realised I didn’t really know the place. You look at the Vasco da Gama Bridge and you think wow! Right? But then you realise that bridge is still not paid for and over the years, certain people made a lot of money off of it. It’s no secret to anyone. I never thought about the justice system when I came here, but when you get here, you quickly find out it doesn’t work, there’s corruption at all levels, people give jobs to their friends who don’t know a thing about what they’re doing. It happens inside the government. We’re supposed to believe things are going to be rosy forever in a country like that?

What Markowitz and Stefansson (2004) refer to as “the unsettled paths of return” – a phrase used to describe returnees’ experience when confronted with the unexpected – are very much evident in António’s narrative. António’s words go beyond describing disillusionment with the unexpected, however, as they cast doubt on the country’s present and future fortunes due to what is perceived as its negative functioning.

Misguided perceptions of the Portuguese job market were also highlighted. Some of the returnees said they had moved to Portugal thinking that their know-how and educational capital would permit them to enter the high end of the labour market, only to be confronted with the fact that things are not so straightforward once in Portugal. Natália (born 1980) recounted her experience:

When you move to Portugal, you start at ground zero. Everyone else here is already set up in one way or another. They have their “connections”, their “cunhas”, as they say here, and we all know how valuable that is in Portugal. So you try to work your way up in an honest manner and you quickly find out that that’s not how it works. I worked as a journalist in Portugal for a couple of years and it’s a world of fierce competition that promotes exploitation. So as things got worse and people started losing their jobs ... I mean, I knew of people who were making pretty good money, were let go and then couldn’t land a job paying minimum wage. People with a lot of experience in the business. How was I supposed to compete with that? The only way would have been to subject myself to making even less.

Natalia’s quote reflects a common sentiment – that migrant descendants are at a disadvantage upon returning to Portugal due to not having the right social capital or “cunhas” (individuals who assist in furthering one’s professional advancement), as well as due to difficulties in penetrating already established social networks.⁶ Thus, Natalia’s experience mirrors the experiences recounted by some of the other participants, of having put in a lot of work to get to where they are professionally in Portugal, and to now see it all hit a “stumbling block” or “dead end”. Among our participants, some lost their jobs, others closed down businesses, others couldn’t find work, while others simply got tired of jumping around from job to job with no security and labour rights, all owing to the economic crisis overshadowing Portugal. Employment is the main concern for these individuals. It was described by them as the primary factor that had led them to pursue further mobility. The next section will examine this issue.

12.4 Re-returning/Twice Migrating: Transnational Networks and Reasons for Mobility

I had a language school. That’s how I made a living. When people and families start losing their jobs and getting taxed to the bone, they’re going to look at where they can cut spending. Right there, the English classes for the kids is one of the first things to go. This town, a

⁶Research carried out by Tsuda (2004) on the return of Japanese-Brazilians (Nikkeijin) back to Japan as well as Christou’s (2006a) work on Greek-Americans’ return to Greece have noted similar tendencies.

medium sized town, has been hit particularly hard by the economic crisis. Without students, I couldn’t pay the bills, so I closed the doors. Contributed to the city with yet another empty building, packed up my things and returned to Canada.

Marco (born 1979) saw an opportunity when he left Canada in 2001 to live and set up a business in his parents’ hometown. Portugal provided him with an opportunity, but one that did not last as long as he would have liked. Marco’s situation was one not uncommon to crisis-hit Portugal. The difference between Marco and others in Portugal with similar stories is that Marco had an alternative country he could turn to – a “safety net country”; a form of “life insurance” possessed through dual citizenship, ready to be activated when needed.

Elsewhere I have argued that return migration often serves to fortify the transnational self, but in reverse. Where once the returnee invested in making contacts with Portugal and keeping Portuguese culture alive while in the diaspora, in the post-return period efforts are often made to keep the familial country of immigration present via contacts, dealings and lifestyle choices (Sardinha 2011b, 2014a). This is to say that returnees’ migration experiences seldom end with return, for there is always another country to which one is tied. The past one often took for granted in the familial country of immigration may become fortified through maintained ties with individuals who are left behind, through maintained interest in events and occurrences back where one came from, as well as through confrontations with socio-cultural differences in the ancestral homeland.⁷ As Cassarino (2004) points out, return migrations are more often than not part of a system of ties and exchanges distinguished by ongoing circuits of mobility (not always of a physical nature), as opposed to being definitive acts of resettlement.

In the narratives collected, it was often implied that mobility is an integral part of migrants’ life strategies – even if not urgent in nature, it is a strategy they “hold in their back pockets”. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2003) point out, the degree to which an individual wishes to be transnational depends on the extent to which he/she wishes to be attached to the transnational social space and one’s level of involvement in it. Defined as spaces in which there is ongoing dissemination of transnational meanings and symbols through social and symbolic ties, transnational social spaces are key to helping maintain multi-fold transactions that traverse borders (Pries 1999, 2001; Faist 2000). Investment in such a space is often a key tactic for gaining or maintaining “mobility capital”. These individuals’ transnational spaces are preserved through relations maintained in Canada and elsewhere that have facilitated a re-return/twice migration. The following three narrations – first from Marco, second from Natália, and third from Teresa (born 1983) – demonstrate how this works in the case of re-return:

⁷As a number of authors (Potter 2005; Conway and Potter 2007) have come to argue, the differentiation and non-acceptance of return migrants leads to a process of “othering”; that is the marked marginalisation of the returnees as outsiders who are perceived as being different to the indigenous population. This may lead to the returnee turning inward, leading to the realisation of difference between the individual and the society returned to, which in turn leads the individual to become closer to the country returned from (Sardinha 2011a, b, 2014b).

Before I moved to Portugal, I lived in Edmonton where I went to college and I worked in restaurants as well. I have some friends there that I've always kept in contact with, who helped me out when I got back there. You don't have to look very hard to realise that Edmonton and (the province of) Alberta is filthy rich because of the Tar Sands (petroleum). Everybody's looking for workers so it's easy to find work. It's the complete opposite of Portugal. Having friends there who basically guided me and told me to go talk to this guy and that guy was very important. We're lucky to have another country to go to such as Canada, where we know people that can lend a hand if need be.

In Toronto, with the Portuguese community being so big, there's all kinds of ethnic media. I know a lot of those people. I was sometimes even asked by the Portuguese media in Toronto to look into things for them in Portugal since I worked in the business. This is always a good thing, for if you're helping someone now, the day might come when they'll help you out. I mean it's no coincidence that I ended up finding work with an organisation that works for the Portuguese community (upon going back to Canada). That's the thing, you return to Portugal but you don't disconnect from where you came from, the place and the people ... Even when you are away, you still maintain contact with everyone through the internet, Facebook, that sort of thing.

Up until he had to close down his butcher shop, my husband used to say: 'I will never leave Portugal'. But things started going downhill pretty fast. My parents have this back and forth lifestyle with a house here and a house back in Canada. If they had decided to sell everything and move (to Portugal) permanently, I don't know if we would have gone back. We have a big family there, one of the biggest Portuguese families in that part of Canada, and there's a lot of solidarity. My husband is not even a butcher there anymore. He works with my uncle in his cement business and makes more money than if he were a butcher. For the time being, we're also still living in my parent's house.

The three citations above have one commonality: they all express the importance of social networks and the role they played when making the re-return. Marco highlighted the importance of his friend, Natália the Portuguese community and Teresa her family. These quotes also emphasise the importance of networks in acquiring work in particular, but not exclusively. Teresa, who re-returned with a family, also drew attention to having a place to live upon arrival. Writing on ancestral homeland return, King and Christou (2008) outline three key challenges to be overcome if the "return of social realism" is to be successful: finding a place to live (a real sense of home in the homeland); economic security (a job); and a circle of friends. In making the re-return, we again witness the importance of the exact same variable.

Another point worth drawing attention to is the fact that these individuals nurtured their transnational networks at a distance, something that today is facilitated by modern technologies – namely the internet and telecommunication technologies. Using technological means of communication results in mobility that is spatially, temporally, and infrastructurally anchored, but globally distributed. Being able to see and talk to someone thousands of kilometres away at the click of a button, and being able to know what is happening as it happens in real time, helps link individuals together, facilitating exchange and reinforcing transnational ties (Somerville 2008). Access to news and information via technology provides proximity to occurrences of a social and cultural nature. As pointed out by Williams et al. (2008), people are often pragmatic about how technology fits into their current practices and it can help them accomplish what they want to accomplish in life. The authors further suggest that the degree of technological use is often influenced by family, friends, and

individual interests. Being close to family and friends and/or being up-to-date on issues that affect the individual, or are of interest to the people back in the country of departure, may therefore become a priority for these descendants for strategic reasons, namely to facilitate a possible re-return if need be.

Beyond re-return, migrants may want access to multiple mobility strategies – the luxury of being able to pick between two or more options, with the ultimate aim being to find the best place to live at any given time. To exemplify this, I turn to António, who explained the following:

Well I kind of knew things weren’t going to work out for me (in Portugal) when I finished my PhD (in Political Science), but I wasn’t limiting myself to Portugal nor to Political Science. I could’ve tried applying for a post-doc, but together with my partner, who is French, we decided to go back to Montreal, thinking it would be the best option for us. Portugal was on a downward spiral (economically) and it was a good idea to get out while we were ahead. On a more personal level as well, I had started to mistrust a lot of things about the country, from government to academia ... it just wasn’t healthy for me. In the end, leaving ended up being a wise decision. (...) The future of academia is in ruin in Portugal. But anyway, I got out of academics altogether. Portugal paid for my PhD. and it will never see that return. In Montreal I started working for an insurance company but my partner wasn’t all that happy there – she couldn’t find the right job, that sort of thing – so we packed up again and moved to France where I’m doing the same thing I was doing in Montreal and everyone’s happy.

António identified Portugal’s economic downturn – which had produced an environment he felt he could not thrive in – and personal factors brought about by the country’s “bad governance” that were affecting his well-being as the key reasons behind his decision to leave Portugal and go back to Montreal. Montreal, however, was not his “final” destination. Having a partner who is a French national also facilitated migration to France. His mobility flexibility was equally influenced by a second person who became another key player in the mobility negotiations. Thus, from António’s mobility options and patterns, it can be argued that terms like “return”, “re-return” and “forever” are incompatible. This is due to the multiplicity of lived-in and travelled-through personal maps, and to the negotiations and transactions carried out in transnational social spaces. The sense may be one of always being in transit, lured by the ephemeral state of “quest” that is often driven by global contemporary societies and, in some situations, the combined condition of youth, trying to find oneself, and the search for place – one that will permit prosperity, tranquillity and personal and collective growth (Pessoa 2004). Having anchored places or residency as back-ups at any given time in their lives gives António and his partner the security that enables them to have a flexible approach to career changes and options. As Hannerz (1990, 239) points out, such mobile participants will more often than not maintain a position of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, searching out contrasts rather than uniformity. Such transnational meanderings often imply that such individuals will gain the propensity to feel at home in a variety of contexts (Giddens 1991) as long as where they are provides the conditions they desire, something António felt Portugal, in the current time, could not fulfil.

Like António, Nelson (born 1979) opted to twice migrate, explaining in the following narrative why he and his wife chose to do this:

After I decided to stop playing (professional football), we decided that it would be best to go somewhere that would give me an opportunity in life. We could have gone back to (the province of) British Columbia – all my family is there – but it was too far away from Portugal. My wife had spent a couple of years studying in Wales, so it was an easy decision. They facilitate everything there, not like here (in Portugal) where everything's a nightmare. I finished high school there and then got into university to study Sports Science and, through that programme, I landed a job with a top-flight football club. All this within three years, basically. Can you imagine this happening here in Portugal? I can't. (...) Still, if you ask me if I want to go back to Portugal, the answer is yes. I'm a sucker for the punishment. Portugal is like that bad boy that all the girls want, you know? ... Or like that (popular) saying in Portuguese: 'The more you hit me, the more I like you'? That's Portugal (laughs).

What we take from Nelson's statement is his feeling of needing to leave Portugal because Portugal could not provide what he needed to succeed. He points out the efficiency and organised way of life in Wales that has permitted him to grow professionally in a short period of time, contrasting that with the lack of efficiency and disorganisation he found in Portugal.

Another point worth highlighting is Nelson and his wife's decision to move to Wales instead of Canada, primarily owing to the proximity of the United Kingdom to Portugal, a proximity that allows them to visit Portugal with more regularity and at lower travel costs in comparison to the west coast of Canada. As various authors (Baldassar 2001; Christou 2006a, b; Condon and Ogdén 1996; Duval 2004) have pointed out, return visits can be perceived as transnational exercises through which social spaces are constructed, linked, and maintained. When these spaces become anchored in the ancestral homeland, they end up playing key roles in constructing return desires. Nelson and his wife's choice of moving to Wales over Canada is part of that strategy; of being close to Portugal in order to facilitate more regular contact, with the objective of someday returning to Portugal again. What we witness, therefore, is the desire to return to the ancestral homeland, no different from the desire Nelson had possessed before making his initial move to Portugal from Canada. The difference this time around is the fact that he now has a different vision and outlook towards the country he again yearns to live in. Asked why he would rather be living in Portugal than Wales or Canada, he replied:

Because it's where I feel most at home; it's the country and the culture I was raised on and raised in as well. It's basically where I feel I belong, you know ... even if things are a mess. Plus there's all that good stuff I'm sure you get from everyone you talk to: the sea, the sun, the food, the lifestyle, Benfica – who doesn't love that? Someday we'll go back ... we'll see.

The aspiration to someday returning to Portugal is thus defined by feelings of being at home in the ancestral homeland – where the clarification of the "self" is consummated through being surrounded by familiarity, through comfort and through being a part of a greater whole, factors that seem to outweigh the negatives associated with Portugal. Such grounded attachment leads to questions about patterns of second returns to ancestral homelands, and about the extent to which positives associated with Portugal outnumber the negatives to the point where someday these individuals return, once again, to Portugal.

12.5 Conclusion

The objectives of this article have been threefold: to observe the return to Portugal of six descendants of Portuguese migrants from Canada at a time of economic prosperity in the ancestral homeland; to analyse the causes and patterns of re-return / twice migration during the recent period of economic downturn that overshadowed Portugal; and to draw attention to the transnational networks and ties available to these individuals that have facilitated their re-return/twice migration.

Upon returning to Portugal, the returnees described being confronted with the “real lived-in version of Portugal”, which was dissimilar to what they had learned to appreciate about their ancestral homeland at a distance or during holiday visits: that it was relaxed and laidback. Upon settling, positive preconceptions often got deflated and replaced by adjectives such as “bureaucratic”, “dishonest” and “corrupt”, reflecting perceptions that brought about disillusionment and rupture with the society returned to. Such disillusionment was particularly highlighted in relation to the job market, where it was felt they were at a disadvantage due to not having the right connections or social capital.

Beyond the integration struggles described, recent disillusionment was also thought to have been brought about by the economic crisis – often thought to have been caused by the often unprincipled inner workings of Portuguese society and the country’s poor governance – which, in turn, led to individuals losing their jobs, closing businesses and not finding work in Portugal. To leave Portugal, and search out opportunities elsewhere, became the natural alternative.

As this article has highlighted, mobility is often dependent on the strength of social networks and the social capital an individual can accumulate (Cassarino 2004; Morosanu 2010). If networks across borders are nourished, transnational links will persist (King and Christou 2008). Investing in and maintaining transnational spaces is thus a key tactic for gaining “mobility capital”. This is where returnees are at an advantage, for they have come from a country (in this case, Canada) where they have maintained networks that have assisted in constructing the transnational self. Judging by their circulation patterns and networks, these migrants have thus become what Klimt (2000) terms “transmigrants”, maintaining relations of a familial, social and organisational nature that traverse borders.

Mobility strategies may consequently have become unpredictable, determined not only by a logic of comfort in which economic survival – rather than living out one’s roots in the country of ancestry, which was once given greater importance – becomes an overarching factor, but also by one’s ties. This is the case for the two participants who ended up migrating to a third country. The decision to do so was not made blindly. Added to the equation, in both situations, was the fact that the wife of one participant, and the legal partner of the other, had ties to the two respective countries. The primary reason for twice migrating is no different from the main reason for re-returning – to improve one’s life, above all economically; but one reason that did differ was articulated in Nelson’s explanation that he opted for Wales in order to be physically closer to Portugal.

The initial act of returning to Portugal may therefore be nothing more than an act of self-discovery (Sardinha 2011b) happening in the “here and now”, but one where the near future is kept in mind – and where transnational links are always maintained so they are ready to be activated if necessary. If the “here and now” is defined by economic hardship, then re-activating one’s transnational status, mobilising any transnational social capital one possesses to one’s benefit, and thus prompting further mobility – a re-return/twice migration – becomes a natural process.

One question now remains to be answered: will these individuals and their families give Portugal another chance? Or perhaps equally important to ask is: given their experiences and expectations, will they ever see Portugal as capable of providing them with the life they most desire in the land of ancestry?

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