Chapter 6
Migrating to Complete Transitions: A Study of High-Skilled Youth Migration to France

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6.1 Why This Research?

Many people have asked us why I decided to examine the issue of high-skilled emigrants who chose France as their destination country. To be sure, the overwhelming majority of Portuguese emigrants have a low level of formal education – though it is still clearly higher than that of those who left the country in earlier times, due to a process of structural change over the last few decades in Portugal involving the substantial expansion of compulsory education. It is also undeniable that emigration has always existed, despite the overestimated allure of Portugal in the nineties (the "glorious years" of Portuguese modernisation) when the number of immigrants temporarily exceeded that of emigrants (Peixoto 2007; Malheiros 2011). And it is true that the mass media seem to have forgotten the "old" emigrants and have instead become enchanted by the "sexy" emigrants, who are young, educated, urban and cosmopolitan. Cogo and Badet, in line with Padilla, refer very pointedly to the ideological biases that often underpin stigmatising distinctions: "the notion of high-skilled migration includes a dominant perception that tends to define migrants mainly as either those with arms and hands (usually referred to as 'labour' or 'economic' migrants) or those with a brain (usually referred as 'talent migration', 'highly qualified migration', 'exodus' or 'brain drain')" (Cogo Badet 2013, 35), the former being "necessary" and the latter "wanted" (Padilla 2010).

Moreover, I soon realised that it was extremely difficult to produce a sample of the population under study. Despite simultaneous snowball attempts through numerous institutional actors (the embassy, consulates, universities, Portuguese community associations in France, bank branches, networks of mayors of Portuguese descent, etc.), I was able to find questionnaire respondents (113) and interviewees

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C. Pereira, J. Azevedo (eds.), *New and Old Routes of Portuguese Emigration*,
IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15134-8_6

(14) only through *Casa de Portugal* in Paris, the Alliances Françaises, and mainly through social networks (Facebook and LinkedIn). In conclusion, I have gathered a convenience sample with no statistical representativeness, which in itself reflects the small numbers of high-skilled migrants moving from Portugal to France.

Why study them then? My interest arose precisely from their statistical and official invisibility, unrecorded as they are in Portuguese statistical systems (they move within the Schengen area, which is intended to eliminate registration requirements and mobility restrictions). They remain to a large extent unknown to French and Portuguese authorities, which they rarely contact. Meanwhile their depiction by the media tends to be inaccurate and based almost exclusively on subjective experiences – which should not be neglected but can be complemented and better understood by an analysis of patterns and regularities.

6.2 Methodology

My initial intention was to combine extensive and intensive analytical procedures that would enable us to detect different interwoven aspects of the case under examination. I therefore favoured data triangulation. First, in 2012, I distributed a questionnaire to young adults between 20 and 35 years old with at least one complete university degree, in order to map socio-demographic regularities (origins, destinations, social backgrounds, trajectories) and collect their beliefs, attitudes and opinions. My aim was to identify explanatory variables.

This sample was gathered through social networks – in particular Facebook and LinkedIn, following the advice of my privileged informants – but also through some online forums, which may evidently lead to biases since these networks reproduce and exacerbate mechanisms of unequal social capital distribution (Recuero 2009). I used informative and appealing posts, published at relatively short intervals, requesting the completion of the survey either by downloading a file and sending it to an e-mail account or by filling in the survey directly through Google docs. Validated questionnaires (113) represented 53% of the total.

Therefore, the sample cannot be considered statistically representative. It is instead a convenience sample complying with the purposes of my research. In fact, the requirement of statistical representativeness could never be a *sine qua non* condition of the study because we are analysing an emergent phenomenon whose broader universe of reference is unknown.

Second, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with questionnaire respondents who both stated their availability in the appropriate field and left their contact details. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed. Their findings were organised in 13 sociological portraits (one of the interviews did not contain enough information to allow the production of a portrait) following in the footsteps of the French sociologist Bernard Lahire (2001, 2002), who argues for the creation of a sociology on an individual scale without giving in to psychologism or postmodern individualistic trends.

In this chapter, however, due to space limitations, I shall not present the results of the biographical approach in detail and rather focus on the data collected through the questionnaire.

6.3 Socio-Demographic Profiles and Reasons for Migrating from Portugal to France

6.3.1 Young, Female, Single: A New Emigration Profile

One especially interesting aspect of my sample is that it is substantially female, which can be attributed to both the feminisation of (access to and success in) higher education in Portugal (Martins 2012) and gender emancipation processes (Almeida 2011; Wall and Amâncio 2007).

In fact, Table 6.1 shows that nearly three quarters of the respondents are women. This finding distances my respondents from the traditional pattern of Portuguese emigration.

As mentioned before, the goal of the research was to study young adults. The contemporary phenomenon of youth extension – due to the expansion of the so-called "moratorium period" – led us to select an age interval between 20 and 35 years, that is, between a minimum limit corresponding to the eventual completion of a (3-year) Bologna university degree, and the post-adolescence milestone of 35. The structure of the job market entails various forms of pressure and obstacles to attaining autonomy. These are longstanding difficulties insofar as they derive from the transition between Fordist societies – in which work relations were protected and regulated – and post-Fordist forms of so-called flexible accumulation capitalism (Harvey 1989) – in which secondary sectors of the job market are dominant. These secondary sectors prevail through the use of fixed-term contracts, publicly-funded training schemes, work sharing, part-time jobs, and, in more recent times, the boom of the "neither-nor generation" – young people who neither work nor study, at least not constantly.

In addition, there is a considerable amount of job insecurity, postponement of employment, unemployment, and in-between situations – i.e. situations where people are transitioning between employment, unemployment, training and education.

Table 6.1 Respondents by gender

	N	%
Male	29	25.7
Female	84	74.3
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

Table 6.2 Respondents by age

	N	%
20–25 years old	47	41.6
26–30 years old	41	36.3
31–35 years old	18	15.9
Dk/Da	7	6.2
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012
Note: *Dk* don't know, *Da* Don't answer

Table 6.3 Respondents by marital status

	N	%
Single	90	79.6
Married	10	8.8
Non-marital agreement	11	9.7
Divorced/separated	1	0.9
Dk/Da	1	0.9
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

However, what is novel today is that there aren't enough jobs available in peripheral segments of the labour market, or via family assistance networks, or even the informal economy. Within a context of globalisation and trans-territoriality, emigration appears to be especially attractive to the youngest age groups I surveyed, as shown in Table 6.2.

The largest group I studied was that of 20–25 year-olds, who made up 41.6% of the total (n = 47), followed 26–30 year-olds, accounting for 36.3% (n = 41), and finally 31–35 year-olds, accounting for 15.9% (n = 18). Unsurprisingly, the respondents were almost all single – which does not mean, as we shall see when collating data from the interviews, that they do not informally cohabit – reshuffling the traditional synchronization between adulthood, marriage and work, and forging ever more plastic trajectories (Table 6.3).

6.3.2 Crisis, the Major Trigger

The data presented in Table 6.4 show that 7.1% (n = 8) of the respondents have been living in France since 2013; 43.4% (n = 49) since 2012; 23.9% (n = 27) since 2011; 10.6% (n = 12) since 2010; 8.8% (n = 10) since 2009, and only 5.3% (n = 6) since 2008.

Table 6.4 Respondents by period of time residing in France

	N	%
Since 2013	8	7.1
Since 2012	49	43.4
Since 2011	27	23.9
Since 2010	12	10.6
Since 2009	10	8.8
Since 2008	6	5.3
Dk/Da	1	0.9
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

Table 6.5 Respondents by educational attainment

	N	%
University degree	71	62.8
Post-graduate/Masters	37	32.7
PhD	4	3.5
Dk/Da	1	0.9
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

6.3.3 Obstacles to Education and Social Mobility

The numbers in Table 6.5 indicate that we are referring to an over-educated sample, as 62.8% (n = 71) of my respondents have a university degree, 32.7% have a post-graduate or masters' degree, and 3.5% (n = 4) have a PhD. For the general population living in Portugal in 2012, the modal level of education was still the 1st cycle of primary education (in the case of over 2200 million individuals), whereas the population with complete higher education (a little over 1600 million individuals) did not represent more than 14.5% of the country's total population.

Among those stating that they are married, only a small minority have spouses with a level of education below a university degree. There is thus a strong endogamy within this group. Despite a romantic belief in the unpredictability of passions, affective relationships entail regularities in this regard. The probability of finding a partner with both similar experiences and a similar social background is, from the beginning, presumably enhanced by the contexts of socialisation shared by the "society of youth" (Lopes 1996), whether these are higher education institutions or informal or non-formal leisure settings (Table 6.6).

In conclusion, the educational capital of these young people is characterised by *modern* traits, suggesting that their social mobility is rising compared to that of previous generation. Their particular status as emigrants nonetheless exposes the difficulty that they face: their title (diploma) is not enough to secure them a job that

Table 6.6 Educational attainment of the respondents' spouses

	N	%
2nd Cycle basic education	2	1.8
3rd Cycle basic education	1	0.9
Secondary education	5	4.4
Bachelor degree	2	1.8
University degree	18	15.9
Post-graduation	1	0.9
Masters	9	8.0
PhD	1	0.9
Dk/Da	74	65.5
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

Table 6.7 Respondents by field of university degree

	N	%
Nursing	27	23.9
Physical therapy	18	15.9
Economics	4	3.5
Social service	2	1.8
Communication	2	1.8
Sociocultural animation	2	1.8
Biology	2	1.8
Other	18	15.9
Dk/Da	42	37.2
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

meets their expectations or ambitions in their country of origin. To some extent, this difficulty is entwined with the very belief in human capital, together with a belief in the operation of the social ladder that higher education supposedly provides (and which legitimises much of the effort expended by parents in their children's education).

If we look in more detail at my respondents' university-level education (Table 6.7), we realise that there is a considerable concentration of degrees in health-related fields. Physical therapists and nurses constitute almost 40% of the sample.

Those with a degree in Economics are less numerous, standing at 3.5% (n = 4) of the total, as are those with a degree in Sociocultural Animation, Biology, Social Service and Communication, accounting for 1.8% (n = 2), and, finally, those with a degree in Sociology, Cinema, Painting, Accounting, Communication Design, International Relations, Sports Science, Music, Psychomotor Rehabilitation, Tourism Management and Languages and Literature, with 0.9% (n = 1) each.

It should not be forgotten that France's total population has grown substantially in recent years: it increased by about 5 million between 2000 and 2013[1].While the birth rate in France did decrease slightly over the same period (from 13.3 per thousand in 2000 to 12.6 per thousand in 2012), natural growth is positive and the immigrant population remains on the rise (the migration balance has always been positive), currently standing in excess of 5 million. Despite some retraction, the welfare state maintains a considerable level of coverage and the health system is almost universal, requiring a supply of qualified workers that French higher education institutions cannot meet, particularly when it comes to nursing. On the other hand, the proportion of the population aged 65 or more is around 20%, which also contributes to the high demand for nursing care.

6.3.4 Employment

What is the respondents' current employment status? Unsurprisingly, 69% of them are working; 8.8% are both working and studying; and 18.6% are studying only. Unemployment is residual. These are young emigrants with clear notions about their careers. Their job may already be assured before migrating, as I learned from the interviews (Table 6.8).

Most of the respondents are employees. However, 15.8% are employers (12.3% manage a staff of more than 10 people), which – given their short time living in France and their young age – indicates that they have a remarkable capacity for taking on risk and achieving inclusion in a competitive job market, on the one hand, while being recognised for the high quality of their education and skills, on the other. It should also be noted that 7.9% of respondents are self-employed. The interviews help us understand the sequence followed by the respondents' trajectories. Almost all of the interviewees began as employees, but some of them seized opportunities when they arose in their area of work and quickly created their own jobs, recruiting employees as soon as it became necessary.

Table 6.8 Respondents by employment status

	N	%
Studying	21	18.6
Working	78	69.0
Studying and working	10	8.8
Unemployed	1	0.9
Looking for the first job	2	1.8
Dk/Da	1	0.9
Total	113	100.0

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

[1] Source: INSEE.

6.3.5 *Reasons for Leaving Portugal*

My data reveal that men have a greater tendency than women to want to leave the country after completing a university degree (Table 6.14). As many as 41.7% of the women surveyed said they "do not agree" that they had this desire.

The literature on gender socialisation provides interesting interpretative clues as to how to understand this result. Notwithstanding the gradual tendency towards men and women experiencing the same fields of possibility, young men are still more oriented towards leaving the space of the family, as well as towards greater autonomy from the family order. Thus, they imagine certain paths or options as more likely to happen, whereas girls show a much stronger connection to the domestic realm (Table 6.9).

Those who have always had a greater desire to leave the country after graduating are the oldest in the sample. They are the ones who have been most exposed (and for a longer period) to factors that exclude them from the labour market, as well as having suffered the most from a prolonged and systematic lack of recognition of their qualifications.

We can see (from Table 6.10) that the youngest age group (of 20–25 year-olds) has found it most difficult to enter the job market (42.6% strongly agree with the statement that they could not find a job despite several attempts). This difficulty seems to decrease as individuals become older, not only because they have accumulated experiences that have enriched and diversified their professional curriculum, but also because they have probably done some "internal" work to readjust their

Table 6.9 Degree of agreement with the statement "I have always wanted to leave the country after completing my degree" by gender

		Do not agree (%)	Partially agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Dk/Da (%)
Gender	Male	27.6	10.3	34.5	20.7	6.9
	Female	41.7	15.5	23.8	15.5	3.6
	Total	38.1	14.2	26.5	16.8	4.4

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

Table 6.10 Degree of agreement with the statement "I could not find a job despite several attempts" by age

	Do not agree (%)	Partially agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Dk/Da (%)
20–25 years old	17.0	12.8	19.1	42.6	8.5
26–30 years old	46.3	2.4	17.1	31.7	2.4
31–35 years old	55.6	5.6	22.2	16.7	0.0
Total	34.9	7.5	18.9	34.0	4.7

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

own perceptions and expectations to the objective conditions imposed by the labour market.

There is also a widespread consensus (without significant variation according to possible independent variables, except for gender) that Portugal has reached stasis with respect to developing a career. In addition to high unemployment rates, respondents' belief that they will not be able to build a career in Portugal points to one of the defining characteristics of so-called "flexible employees": the informality and instability of their work arrangements. Such constraints mean that professional gains are highly reversible and always temporary, and employees may even be "imprisoned" in a permanent condition of ephemerality.

The impossibility of maintaining expectations of stability (the "career") is due to a double individualisation of employment relationships. This individualisation is both external – materialised, for instance, through fixed-term contracts that affect the youngest workers in particular, and through the tendency towards facilitating layoffs – and internal – through the proliferation of individual work contracts and the sharp decline in collective bargaining.

Women feel that it is harder for them to progress in terms of education (Table 6.11), or that they are less likely to see their educational efforts recognised. This reflects the persistence of gender segmentation in the job market.

Furthermore, employers now demand an accumulation of educational experience. Structural unemployment and instability allow the employer to demand more for less money. In fact, the young worker is "obliged" to pursue his own education, being penalised if he does not do so. However, 50.4% of the sample agrees that it is impossible to progress in this area. Once more, the strong disconnection between socially acceptable demands and the objective conditions necessary to fulfil them may lead to severe frustration.

Both men and women tend to agree that in Portugal they cannot progress in terms of salaries. However, this trend is more pronounced among women (63.1%) than among men (55.2%).

Contemporary societies are extraordinary classificatory machines. It is not by chance that the phrase "500-euro generation" is mentioned so often today. The high volatility of youth employment and the increasing ease with which employees are replaced – due, among other things, to strategies of task fragmentation and the externalisation of production chains – has enabled a reduction in salaries. The existence of a variable portion of employees' salaries (e.g. lunch allowances, bonuses), in turn – even if this is now less common – is associated with work intensification:

Table 6.11 Degree of agreement with the statement "In Portugal I cannot progress in terms of training" by gender

		Do not agree (%)	Partially agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Dk/Da (%)
Gender	Male	20.7	34.5	17.2	17.2	10.3
	Female	10.7	29.8	23.8	32.1	3.6
	Total	13.3	31.0	22.1	28.3	5.3

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

increasing working hours; introducing flexible schedules, including work on holidays and during weekends; working to targets; etc. Pablo López Calle (2010) writes about the "balkanisation of the job market" to which young people are particularly exposed: an increase in the number of different tasks employees are required to perform as part of the same role; the same job being intermittently done by the same person, or a succession of different people doing the same job; fraudulent declarations of self-employment; teleworking, etcetera. In short, more work for less money. This reinforces the trend that started in 1972 on the eve of the oil shock, according to the geographer David Harvey (1989) – a trend based on the transition from a "Fordist" system to a capitalism of "flexible accumulation", where labour costs must be reduced to a minimum. This transition that impacted developing countries in the first instance has now reached both the countries of Europe's periphery (such as Portugal) and those in its centre (Table 6.12).

Now turning to the possibility of starting a family, we notice that women tend to feel more constrained by a lack of money (Table 6.13). Once again, despite clear progress in equalising educational attainment (higher education is increasingly feminised, both in enrolment and in completion), women see discrimination in the workplace as impeding their independence *vis-à-vis* their family of origin. Life cycles are thus "shuffled", moving far from a phased model of linear transitions (Nico 2013). In addition, as shown by European comparative studies, "there is a high level of attachment to pay among women, as well as a wish to combine work with family life, contradicting the old stereotypes about women's wishes and their social identity" (Torres et al. 2007).

One of the issues on which my respondents are mostly inclined to agree regardless of gender and age – but with insignificant differences across professional fields – is the difficulty of owning their own house. Contrary to previous interpreta-

Table 6.12 Degree of agreement with the statement "In Portugal I cannot progress in terms of salary" by gender

		Do not agree (%)	Partially agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Dk/Da (%)
Gender	Male	3.4	10.3	27.6	55.2	3.4
	Female	.0	9.5	23.8	63.1	3.6
	Total	.9	9.7	24.8	61.1	3.5

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

Table 6.13 Degree of agreement with the statement "In Portugal I cannot make enough money to start a family" by gender

		Do not agree (%)	Partially agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Dk/Da (%)
Gender	Male	3.4	20.7	37.9	34.5	3.4
	Female	3.6	13.1	56.0	22.6	4.8
	Total	3.5	15.0	51.3	25.7	4.4

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

Table 6.14 Degree of agreement with the statement "In Portugal I cannot have my own house" by gender

		Do not agree (%)	Partially agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Gender	Male	10.3	10.3	41.4	34.5
	Female	7.1	13.1	16.7	59.5
	Total	8.0	12.4	23.0	53.1

Source: Table by the author, survey on new emigration to France, 2012

tions – according to which the comparatively late independence of young Portuguese people is due to an ideological-symbolic and familial tradition – the data available shows that it is precisely the lack of their own housing that hinders these young people's transitions. Unlike their parents – almost all of whom have a stable job and a strong savings ethic, and who could buy their own house (even if mortgaged) – younger generations do not have a fixed income or a tendency to save money, factors that are aggravated by structural deficiencies in the rental market (Table 6.14).

6.4 Concluding Remarks

My respondents were mostly women with stable or even comfortable family backgrounds. For the most part, they decided to migrate mainly because of their wish to stop being sociologically young – that is, trapped in transition, waiting to get a stable job, to get married and have children – rather than because of despair or extreme deprivation. They aim to pursue a career in their field of education; they seek good salaries; they intend to start a family and have their own house – to be independent from their parents. For them the search for autonomy – escaping family dependency and uncertain transitions – is of primary importance (Guerreiro and Abrantes 2004).

For these young people, France offers better salaries, recognition, modernisation, and personal development. Basically, it offers a career – even if it is one that is initially precarious. Thanks to these attractions, these young people are not put off by the unstable structure of the French job market. Moreover, compared with that of Portugal, France's welfare state is more highly-structured and its rate of retraction slower. This provides work opportunities for many of these young people, particularly in the health sector, which is quite competitive in France.

As can be seen from existing surveys, some of these young migrants may not remain in France. Europe's diversity enables people to draw comparisons and adapt, particularly when there is some willingness to experiment and move. Still, it seems certain that these young people do not wish to return to (their) youth, a youth of stubbornly prolonged periods of transition. Emigration emerges as a possible response to the disorganization and precariousness of youth trajectories in Portugal at the peak of the economic crisis, revealing the tension between constraints and opportunities, reflexivity and agency.

Acknowledgments and Funding This study was conducted in response to a challenge posed by the Directorate-General for Consular Affairs and Portuguese Communities. I am grateful to the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (Foundation for Science and Technology, FCT) for funding the translation of this chapter, through Strategic Funding (UID/SOC/00727/2013).

The proofreading of this chapter was funded by the Portuguese Emigration Observatory (Observatório da Emigração).

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