Moving beyond the colonial?
The new Portuguese migrants in Luanda

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Conferência Internacional
“Regresso ao futuro: a nova emigração e a relação com a sociedade portuguesa”

Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian
23 Outubro 2015
The Portuguese migrants: A diverse group

- Construction workers (first to come, first to leave)
- Young highly educated
- Children of *retornados*
- Short-term consultants
- Businessmen and managers of Portuguese and Angolan businesses
An ambiguous position

- Portuguese elite protected by the President’s office
- Many are quite well paid and have a management position
- Especially the non-elite migrants feel vulnerable in relation to powerful Angolan and authorities (o sistema)
- Many have problems with migration documents (bribes, undocumented residence, etc.) and the last year also with transferring remittances
Aim

To discuss the changing relationships between the ex-colonizers and the ex-colonized in the wake of global economic transformations:

- In what ways do colonial power relations still resonate between Angolans and Portuguese in Luanda?
- How can we understand ruptures and continuities with the colonial past?

Focused on relations at workplaces (construction, banking, telecom)
Postcolonial studies

- Attend to how colonial history shapes identities and power relations
- Tend to focus on former colonial powers ("European navel-gazing")
- Often stress the continuance of the colonial (e.g. in development interventions)
- Focus on British and French (post-)colonialism

Contribution of present study:
- Integrate the ex-colonizers and the ex-colonized into a common analysis
- Probes into the limits of the colonial (sees “post” as signifying both “going beyond” and “continuity”)
- Focus on recent processes with altered economic and political power relations
Method and material

- Long-term experience, worked in Luanda 1988-91
- 45 ethnographic interviews carried out in 2014 and 2015 (new fieldtrip Oct-Nov 2015)
- Angolans working with Portuguese, Portuguese migrants
- Two thirds highly educated
Methodological challenges I

- Luanda 6,5 mil inhabitants and deficient transportation infrastructure
- Most expensive city in the world
- No “natural” meeting points
- Little participant observation
- Necessary having research assistants setting up interviews - depending on their networks
Methodological challenges II

- Many Angolans afraid of talking: fear of loosing job (Port bosses protected by national political and military elite) + political culture of silence and conspiracy

- Some (male) Portuguese see me as a representative of a super-developed politically correct gender-aware Sweden.
Controversies at workplaces
"I’ve eleven years of work experience and I earn 2.300 USD. A Portuguese who has two or three years of experience earns 5.000 USD. The Portuguese also have a subsistence allowance, free housing and a free car... They can hire four or five Angolans for the same cost as one Portuguese."

“The Portuguese don’t like to learn together with us, maybe because we’re African. As colonizers, they have an attitude of superiority”
Angolan voices: Hindered to gain better positions and new skills

”There is a lot of space for the Portuguese at my workplace. They want to support each other so they say there are no qualified people here. We need training, and as they don’t want to give us that there will never be any qualified people here”

TAP as the most efficient university in the world!
”We contribute to positive changes, if they close the border the country would collapse. The big problem in Angola is primary education. We can pass on a lot, help them structuring their minds. This is not a question about intelligence. There are different ways. But they are bad at synthesizing, they are not pragmatic, they are enslaved by bureaucracy, and don’t think. There is a lack of intellectual independence and structured thought”
Portuguese voices: Lack of work ethics

“They show up late and there is always an óbito”

Conflicts on work ethics go back to the colonial period when forced labour was a primary mean of subjugating the Angolans.

To work for someone else = symbol for suffering and subjection.
Positions in relation to the colonial past
Turning the table

Angolan stories about postcolonial score-setting.

*Example:* “Mello Xavier had a Portuguese manager he wanted to get rid of. He didn’t pay him his salary, and then he ordered SME to rob his passport. Then he called SME again and told them to deport the Portuguese as he had no documents’

Lingering influence of colonial structures of power evident in feelings of revenge.
Downplaying potential tensions

Portuguese:

- Silence and sometimes guilt, especially in relation to slavery and decolonization process
- Talk about "a love and hate relationship" (underlining love, closeness and similarity)
- Understandings of national Self as good at mixing (cf. lusotropicalismo)
New positions as migrant / ‘host’

- Portuguese migrants have to adapt to new situation → solicits a response and revaluation of (post-)colonial relationship
- Angolan pride in being a country of destination for Portuguese labour migrants → colonialism a thing of the past? (at least for some of the young highly educated)
The Portuguese migrants tend to identify stronger with their roles as ex-colonizers than the Angolans do with being ex-colonized (although images of “arrogant Portuguese” etc. may very well have colonial undertones).

Port: A national identity still under the shadow of a lost empire + the need to redefine one’s position as a migrant

 versus

Ang: Colonialism as a painful past (a new Angola every decade)
The dominance of the ex-colonizers is broken, as many Portuguese migrants are dependent on being accepted on the labour market and by Angolan authorities. The postcolonial power relations between Angolans and Portuguese in Luanda are contested and unstable.