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'There was no freedom to leave:' Global South international students in Portugal during the Covid-19 Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Moving abroad during tertiary education represents a means of improving personal and professional development for students across the world. Within Europe, internationalized learning has become particularly popular, whether through participation in programmes such as Erasmus or migrating for the entire duration of a degree course, attracting students from the Global South as well those from the Global North (see, e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2011; Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013; Raghuram, 2013; Van Mol & Micheilson, 2014; King, 2018; Author, xxxx). In this article, we look at the experiences of international students from the Global South, using the example of learners from Brazil and Portuguese-speaking Africa.

Our discussion also looks at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their experiences. This includes coping with the emotional and economic impact of an unprecedented societal lockdown, while taking into account pre-existing vulnerabilities related to funding shortages and restrictive migration policies (including the renewal of visas), and the need to meet what feels like an ever-rising costs of living in the host country (see also Sherry et al., 2010; Lomer, 2018). While some of the issues we explore apply to many international students, we contend that Global South students face specific challenges due to their third country national status and may have a need for greater levels of support during their period of study abroad, particularly during a pandemic (Lee & Rice, 2007; Brown & Jones, 2013).

Following a brief discussion of various contextual issues, we will look at evidence from Portuguese-speaking African and Brazilian students, specifically interviews conducted during the lockdown period. As well as potential health consequences arising from the pandemic, this material reveals that they face uncertainty regarding the viability of their studies in Portugal due to financial stress and the anxiety arising from being cut-off from friends and relatives in other continents at a particularly difficult moment in time. In our conclusion, we hence argue that the pandemic creates and contributes to new and pre-existing forms of precarity for these individuals, an issue that invites further debate in the field of international student mobility.

ANOTHER SIDE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

In entering the debate about student mobility, we aim to provide insight into what might be termed another side of student mobility, specifically pertaining to Global South learners who have moved to Global North universities. In spite of being categories that caused some debate recently (Eriksen, 2015), we adopted here the conceptual framework of 'Global North' and 'Global South' to analyse specific contemporary flows of students between countries that occupy divergent positions of power in the world economic system. In terms of education, we take the concept of 'Global North' to describe those countries that lead and control the Global Education Industry (Verger et al, 2016), attracting students from other countries, the 'Global South', coming from Higher Education Institutions considered less developed in terms of performance indicators. Relationships between those countries in terms of education are often marked by post-colonial links and educational dependency, expressed by specific programs to foster the circulation of Global South students towards Global North institutions, and also a settled tradition of elites from Global South being

educated in institutions of Global North (Ploner & Nada, 2020). In our particular case, we treated students from countries with post-colonial links with the former imperial power, Portugal, namely Portuguese-speaking African Countries such as Angola, Cape Verde or Mozambique, and also Brazil. All of them are considered by the global indicators and rankings as countries with less developed Higher Education systems than Portugal, reflecting geopolitical interests and post-colonial issues, and also the drawing power of European Union in the global market of education (Authors, xxxx).

In this sense, we are also looking underneath the somewhat glossy image of student mobility presented by the institutions and agencies who host and fund exchanges, revealing some of the hidden costs and risks of student mobility coming from Global South, that can reproduce rather than eliminate social and economic global inequality (Findlay et al., 2012), and new challenges might have emerged during the pandemic, potentially deepening pre-existing problems.

At a theoretical level, we are looking at the meaning of what is termed 'international student mobility' (see, e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2011; Author, xxxx; Van Mol, 2014). Apart from the global structures of international education, literature has also recognized international students themselves as social agents capable of organizing and building their own processes of mobility (King & Raghuram, 2013). The most common research strategy has been the deploying of the methodological framework of Pull and Push factors, which explored the perceptions of students regarding their own mobility and the main motivations (or constraints) for going mobile in the global higher education market (González et al, 2011; Van Mol and Timmerman, 2014). The personal and professional benefits of learning abroad are usually highlighted as important drivers for the circulation of international students through this global system of transnational education. However, we will provide here a critique of the idea that student circulation

leads to individualized success through acknowledging the economic and emotional costs for movers. In doing so, we are following a recent trend among authors who have started to note that the somewhat self-celebratory artifice presented by host universities rings somewhat hollow when juxtaposed with the reality of what life is like for many international students (Author, xxxx; see also King, 2018), with only the exceptionally privileged able to provide enough support to their children to enable them to engage in a fully cosmopolitan learning experience (again, see Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

Our specific contribution to this debate is to add the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic into literature about student mobility. In doing so, we recognize that we are discussing student mobility at an extremely difficult time, when there are many urgent policy priorities relating to the greatest global health challenge of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, we hope to recognize that international students, particularly those from the Global South, need support. This explains why we emphasise the social and economic impacts on their lives before and during the pandemic; issues that have the potential to severely disrupt their lives and learning experiences.

Global South international students in the Global North

We also recognise that scholarship on international students has developed considerably in recent decades, moving from a position of relatively invisibility within research agendas to the mainstream in disciplines such as sociology and geography (King, 2002), albeit less so in relation to student mobility outside the Global North (Lipura & Collins, 2020). This imbalance may explain why work is now emerging on students from a wide range of global regions (Phan, 2018; Prazeres, 2019), admittedly oriented around students from Asia rather than Africa or South America (Iannelli & Huang, 2014; Author, xxxx; Jiang & Kosar Altinyelken, 2020; Lan, 2020).

In regard to what we do know, learning trajectories that emerge from the Global South often reflect prior geopolitical relationships, with educational exchange programmes linking students from former colonies to a former metropolis, facilitated by visa exemptions and ostensibly simplified nationalization processes (Author, xxxx; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016; Hierro, 2016). In addition, cultural links, especially shared language, help create accessibility (Kritz & Zlotnik, 1992; Ploner and Nada, 2020). Added to these considerations is the financial challenge of meeting the cost of living and learning in a foreign country, that are often much higher than in the sending society (Olwig & Valentin, 2015), and an accompanying dependence on low-skilled and informal employment just to make end meets (Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017). By describing the most common problems we encountered in the discourses of our interviewees we are not implying that Global South students are a homogeneous group transversally affected by economic vulnerabilities. On the contrary, we are aware of socio-economic diversity among all kind of students, including those coming from Global North contexts (or the local students), whose difficulties were also exacerbated by the epidemic. However, we tried to portrait in this text the specific disadvantages and vulnerabilities suffered by Global South students, which are those related to their structural position as foreigners coming from countries that (in this case) are considered extra-EU territories. In this sense, their experiences on obtaining visas, finding a home or a job and also episodes of racism and xenophobia are the extra burden suffered by these students.

During the last decade international students coming to Portugal more than doubled, growing from 17,900 in 2008/2009 to 58,000 in 2018/2019, most part of them coming from the Global South, according to DGESS-MEC[1]. Portugal has traditionally been receiving students from its former colonies to its Higher Education system,

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particularly from Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP) and lately from Brazil, a sending country that became dominant. In 2018/19, Brazilian students in fact constituted the majority of international students in Portugal (62%), followed by their Angolan (13%) and Cape Verdean (13%) peers (DGES, 2019), suggesting that incoming student mobility to Portugal continues to be shaped by post-colonial links, and pre-existing power asymmetries and inequalities (see also Author, xxxx). Also, the marketing efforts of Lisbon's tourism industry and the city council to attract middle-class and wealthy young foreigners (tourists, lifestyle migrants, international students) lead to the increasing presence of students coming from other European countries through frameworks such as the Erasmus Programme (Author, XXXX). However, most part of international students coming to Portugal are still Global South students, particularly Brazilians, Angolans and Cape-Verdeans, that will be the focus of this article.

The challenge for Global South international students in European countries like Portugal is hence to obtain a diploma or complete a credit mobility exchange at a tertiary education institution in the former metropolis, facing what may be difficult economic circumstances, especially for those without a scholarship and the need to find employment to supplement familiar resources, as we will see below. Therefore, even prior to the pandemic, they were required to endure psychological as well as economic stress as part of the internationalized learning experience, in pursuit of new skills and credentials they hope will boost their careers upon return to the sending society or provide an opening to a globalized labour market (Madge et al., 2009; Rumbley, 2013; Fonseca et al., 2016).[2]

METHODOLOGY

This article draws on material from a project entitled 'Pandemic Immobility: The Impact of Covid-19 on International Students in Portugal,' which examined the challenges facing international students during the lockdown period. In the analysis that follows, we use findings from interviews conducted with 27 international students, defined as non-Portuguese nationals studying at universities in Portugal, covering those engaged in credit mobility exchanges and others who migrated for the entire duration of a degree course. More specifically, we included cases from Brazil and Portuguese-speaking African countries in this sample, all of whom were aged between 20 and 40 years old and had remained in Portugal during the lockdown of Spring 2020. To construct this sample, a maximum diversity principle was followed to ensure representation from different academic disciplines and educational levels (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral), retaining balance for gender and socio-economic background.

In this sense, we believe that educational structures are a system of social and economic reproduction (Bourdieu et al., 1977) and international students should be approached as a kind of a "migratory elite" (Waters & Brooks, 2011). However, there are global, regional and individual strategies that serve to include many non-elite, Global South families in international education, as is the case for our interviewees. As shown by the literature, several student mobility streams follow the current inter-regional migration patterns (Pelliccia, 2014) and post-colonial links between countries (Author, XXXX), which often means that they are supported by existing ethnic- or national-based social networks in the destination country (Collins, 2010). PALOP and Brazil students in Portugal often rely upon these networks of support, that might help them to adapt and survive in a foreign country without being specially wealthy. Financial support also explains how Global South students enrol in international

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education. Among our interviewees, the scarcity of grants and studentships (and their limited capacity to cover the overall expenditures of studying in Portugal) engage families in some cases to make an exceptional financial effort. Globally, for many students coming from the middle-classes (and even for some from low-income families), studying abroad is an investment in education made by the family in order to assure the social mobility of their children (Olwig & Valentin, 2015). As we will see, some students without this familiar financial support needed to find jobs in Portugal as an essential strategy to continue their studies.

Due to social distancing restrictions at the time of conducting the research, these students were contacted by the authors through online platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp, with the interviews, which lasted between 50 and 90 minutes, conducted via zoom and skype. Following transcription and translation into English, analysis was oriented around responses to questions about the decision to stay in Portugal during the pandemic, the impact of lockdown on everyday life and challenges faced at this time, including social and economic issues. Due to the sensitivity of this information, and to protect the anonymity of interviewees, specific universities and grades are not named in this article and pseudonyms have been used throughout. As well as respecting the need for social distance, the interviews followed all other appropriate ethical protocols, only commencing after students were fully informed as to the purpose of the study, with the option to refuse to answer questions or leave the interview at any point.

ANALYSIS

Educational choices in the post-colonial student world

During the initial stages of assessing our material, it became clear that the experiences of the Brazilian and African students were different compared to their peers undertaking intra-European exchanges in Portugal, with whom we had familiarity from previous projects (see, e.g., Author, xxxx). A number of common experiences emerged. From a positive point of view, we could argue that their experience of moving to Portugal and integrating into Portuguese society was 'easier' due to shared language and some level of cultural familiarity, to the extent that host institutions tended to overlook their needs as international students (Ambrósio et al., 2017; see also Sin et al., 2019; see also Santos, 2020; Neto, 2021). Being more circumspect, we also observed that students from the former Portuguese African colonies were highly dependent on programmes created by the government of Portugal or home country administrations, with systematic problems reported about the late payment of scholarships, with waits of up to four months after the start of exchanges, and grants being pegged at levels insufficient to cover basic living cost (see also Ambrósio et al., 2017; Doutor & Alves, 2020). In fact, as we shall discuss, most of the costs of their education tended to be covered by parents or students through working in informal jobs (see also Jardim, 2013).

In regard to the choice to study in Europe, interviewees often explained their decision to come to Portugal in terms of the easiness to obtain certain benefits, expressing the existent post-colonial links between their countries and the former metropolis, as explained above: specific scolarships directed at them, student visas, linguistic and cultural similarities and a certain tradition of student migration flows

from their countries to Portugal. We might, somewhat harshly, interpret this situation as arising from making educational choices based on convenience, especially the choice of a destination with linguistic compatibility. However, this rather simplistic view neglects to consider that for all but the most affluent international students, there will be pragmatism in making educational decisions. The choice of Portugal as a study destination nevertheless remains associated with the relative ease with which the interviewees were able to obtain student visas compared to equivalent processes in other European countries.

This apparent ease has now obviously been affected by the pandemic. Issues such as a lack of funds and limited travel connections mean that unlike many Europeans, the interviewees who had moved to Portugal from Brazil and Africa had little or no chance of returning home during the lockdown. As well as facing higher travel costs and fewer flight options, there was the fear of losing a scholarship if they returned and subsequently losing the opportunity to study in Europe. This was particularly pressing for students in the first year of their degree courses when the pandemic started:

When I realised that this pandemic was here to stay, I went into panic mode. I'm a grant student, so I thought that maybe it might be impossible to me to return to Portugal at a later date, after the pandemic, to continue my studies here. Also, access to internet in my country is rather limited so following the online lessons would be impossible (Jazmine, 19, São Tomé, studying a technical degree in Covilhã since 2019).

As a starting position for our analysis, we need to acknowledge the specific challenge of being a student from the Global South and the dilemmas created by the decision to move to Portugal during an unforeseen pandemic; a temporary return to the sending country might be impractical in financial terms, dangerous in relation to health and risky in regard to losing a scholarship, with further issues emerging such as an inability to engage in remote learning should a return be made. All these considerations created stress, and uncertainty, at a time when anxiety was already running high.

Host and home institutions did not help students to clarify their situation and thereby reducing incertitude. Institutional support provided by universities and directed to Global South students during the lockdown was rare. In general, grade students received only general emails with sanitary recommendations and also the instructions regarding the shifting to online classes. There was no coordinated response by universities to attending the many needs international students may have when living in a foreign country, as we will see below. Also, some doctoral students were contacted individually by their supervisors following a personal concern, not as an institutional response

I realise that they have here an International Office, but they never contacted me. I know that other people were contacted, but not me. However, my supervisor was very nice with everyone in the lab and was always available by email to answer to our questions and worries. On the contrary, I never received any communication by my home university, they were totally missing. (Adriana, 40-years-old from Brazil, studying a technical PhD, living in Coimbra since 2019).

More troubling is the lack of institutional support regarding more serious situations of need. According with the consulted leaders of Angolan and Cape Verde student associations (UECL, Cape Verdean Students Union and AEAP, Association of Angolan Students in Portugal) the difficulties suffered by their peers were enormous during the pandemic. After identifying the most critical cases through the sending of a survey and personal communications, they were able to distribute around 20 computers to the most in need students. However, a second problem, concerning around 200 students from Cape Verde and 130 from Angola living in Portugal, was more drastic, in being unable to sustain themselves, leading to an intervention from the consulates and the Banco Alimentar (Food Bank), coordinated by the alluded associations. According with the associations, universities did not play any role in attending the most basic necessities of their students in trouble.

Devalued currencies and dependence on precarious jobs

The preceding paragraphs recognize the importance of finance for these students, and economic constraints were rarely far from the surface during the course of the interviews. Crucially, these concerns tended to pre-date the pandemic, although students' finances may have become more stretched due to the impact of Covid-19 on the global economy, which has devalued currencies internationally and imposed budgetary difficulties on governments in host and sending countries. As the pandemic proceeds, it may also be that universities and the institutions who fund international students become increasingly stretched, mobility becoming less of a policy priority due to the need to focus on responding to urgent public health needs.

What we are suggesting is that the pandemic has not necessarily created economic vulnerability among Global South students in Portugal but may have made

pre-existing problems more acute. The interviewees were able to explain how this happens. Some have scholarships from national agencies in their home countries that cover university fees and expenses for the entire duration of their studies. However, these grants are subject to fluctuations according to economic and political conditions in the home country. For example, INAGBE (the Angolan agency for the administration of scholarships) has drastically reduced its level of support for Angolan students in Portugal due to a domestic economic crisis[2]. This helps explain why even those with scholarships generally feel it necessary to work, especially when living in Lisbon or Porto, and they now must continue to do so as the economic situation at home may have worsened during the pandemic. For example, the case of Ana, who was well placed to comment due to her involvement with the Cape Verdean Students Union (UECL):

> The level of the scholarships is too low. If you are living with your family, it's ok, but if you must pay for your expenses the grant is not enough and you must work. Actually, even those that live with relatives eventually get a job, and this job tends to be informal, without a contract, which is not even permitted when you have a grant. Either during the first degree or the Master's, the African student always works (Ana, 25, Cape Verde, studying a social science Master, living in Lisbon since 2012).[3]

This position explains why many Global South students need to supplement their incomes with money from employment despite receiving grant funding, and the Cape Verdean students' association is in fact aware of such practices, despite being contrary to the conditions of scholarships and visas. Another financial problem, faced by Brazilian students in particular, concerns the ramifications of political instability

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back home, as this has an impact on the Brazilian economy and exchange rates. This greatly complicates living situation in Portugal, even more so since the start of a pandemic that has had a massive impact on Brazil, with some parents losing their jobs.

> Even with a scholarship covering the university fees I need money for my expenses, especially the rent and food, which is very difficult because of the exchange rate of currencies. My mother lost her job recently and that has a strong impact on the possibility of sending money, because she lost an important part of her income when converted into Euros (Ricardo, 19, Brazil, studying a technical degree, living in Setúbal since 2020).

We therefore have another driver pushing these students to get a job: to release families from the pressure of sending money to Portugal. Problems can also arise out of difficult domestic situations. As Fernando from Angola, now living in the city of Covilhã in central Portugal, explains:

> At the beginning my family supported me, but two years ago I had an argument with my stepfather and he stopped sending money to me. For a year my mother sent me money, but she is also supporting three of my brothers in Angola and with the crisis and the devaluation, sending more was out of the question. She wanted to continue sending money but I told her: 'Don't. I can find a job here,' which I did. After I persuaded my mum to stop sending money, I finally found a job, in the kitchen of the hospital here in Covilhã. So, this is why I have money to live. However, at the moment I am having a pause in my studies because I was unable to pay the fees during the last semester. I am saving to return to

university as soon as possible (Fernando, 21, Angola, studying a technical degree, living in Covilhã since 2018).

Fernando's account reiterates what seems to be the most reliable revenue stream for students from Africa and Brazil in Portugal: not scholarships or money sent by family members, but work in their new place of residence. In regard to type of employment, his case is however somewhat exceptional. While most of the jobs the interviewees had were in restaurants, he found work at a hospital kitchen shortly before the pandemic started, which ironically meant that he was one of the few interviewees who remained in employment during the period of confinement.

In evaluating these accounts from the interviewees, we can see that difficulties in the domestic sphere, and in the national economies of the sending countries, can create financial vulnerabilities. For many of these students, employment provides the answer to their economic shortages, but earning enough money to cover living costs has been made more difficult by the pandemic; for example, when people lost their jobs in the hospitality sector due to the shutdown of restaurants and tourism during the lockdown. Looking for an employment is a widespread strategy among higher education students belonging to the middle- to lower-classes, either those coming from other countries or among domestic students. However, with the sudden arrival of the pandemic most local students that lost their jobs can return to their parents' homes, while international students remained in a difficult situation: waiting for the storm to pass or returning to their countries, both entailing unexpected expenses on housing or plain tickets. This difficult and stressful choice during pandemic times complicates further the usual precarity conditions of foreign student-workers (Nyland et al., 2009; Robertson, 2016).

Confinement, isolation and *saudades*

One of the defining features of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the lockdown of societies, extending to the closing of educational installations and other public amenities. In the case of Portugal, this involved the declaration of a State of Emergency on 19 March 2020, following which spatial movement within cities and municipalities, as well as international travel, was severely constrained. Universities shifted from presential learning to online classes, all extra-curricular activities were cancelled, and facilities such as libraries and catering services closed.

According with the student associations we contacted during this research (UECL and AEAP, see above), students faced two pressing problems regarding education at the start of a period of confinement, which lasted until 2 May 2020 during the first wave of the pandemic. Firstly, a lack of computers and/or reliable internet connections to enable them to work remotely. With the shutdown of university facilities, many students were left without the means for following online lessons. Secondly, many professors used the suspension of presential lessons as a pretext to increase homework, which created stress and anxiety for those without good domestic conditions, even affecting mental health, and generating a longing for home:

My family have helped me for some time with the bills, but it's extremely complicated with the exchange rates, so I got many jobs from October: in a restaurant, in a company that makes vacuum cleaners and in Iberdrola (a utilities company). It's difficult because now I'm not working and it's not easy to find a

job in this situation. We (me and my boyfriend) also have strong *saudades* (feeling of homesickness or melancholic nostalgia). We talk about going back to Angola all the time because now we can take the lessons online, but my boyfriend always reminds me that we struggled to come to Portugal and that as long as one of us has a job, we must try to continue here and finish what planned to do (Helena, 24-years-old, Angola, studying a social science degree, living in Lisbon since 2019)

This feeling of *saudade*, and awareness of the distance between Portugal and their country of origin, has been reported as a cause of stress and unrest during the pandemic. Distance here is not only an objective fact but must be understood as reflecting the diminished possibility of travelling home and that friends and relatives are not allowed to visit Portugal, creating a strong sense of isolation. The thousands of kilometres that separate Portugal from Brazil, Angola and Cape Verde was also felt in terms of the price of the plane ticket. In fact, the high cost of travel meant that in pre-pandemic times many of these students knew that they would have to stay in Portugal for practically the entire duration of their studies, only returning for the occasional holiday.

It has been difficult for me, because I never travelled back to Angola in three years because of my economic situation. I have to choose between paying 800 euros for a plane ticket or paying the university fees. My mother misses me and insists all the time that I travel back, but I need to work during the holidays […]. I really thought about quitting the job and returning to Angola because I'm in a risk group, I have a medical history of respiratory problems, and my mother

insists that I do so, but in Angola currently I have nothing to do. Here I have a job at least (Fernando, 21-years-old, Angola, studying a technical degree, living in Covilhã since 2018).

Distant family relationships, the economic constraints of being a student-worker and the emotional strain of isolation combined during the pandemic, creating an intense form of stress. There are also concerns with families at home, especially in regions where infection rates of Covid-19 were high:

I'm worried for my parents living in Piauí (North-east region of Brazil). It's so far away... and also, I can't go there now. If I wanted to go back tomorrow I cannot! For me, the most crunching impact is being far from the people I love (Rubens, 26-year-old, Brazil, studying a technical PhD, living in Lisbon since 2019).

With Portugal being one of the less severely affected countries in Europe during the initial months of the pandemic, observing other countries with higher rates of infection from a distance was another source of tension. The images of a line of military trucks transporting dead bodies in Italy resonated around the world, as did increasing levels of despair in Brazil.

In order to avoid images like that I decided to stop watching the news. But in April, when the pandemic spread in Brazil, I realized that people living close to me or to my family had started to die. Then I began to feel extreme tension, because I imagined that if some family member got Covid, I wouldn't be able to

travel to say goodbye or to go to the funeral. Then I started to be agitated and to have insomnia, which led me to miss the online lessons because I didn't have the energy to wake up. I was in a very critical mental state for two weeks until I decided to speak with my family about the possibility of coming back (Eduardo, 23-years-old from Brazil, studying a technical degree, living in Lisbon since 2019).

To help them cope with these situations, the interviewees did report a sort of responses and strategies; solutions came not from their universities but rather from 'family' and friends in Portugal, as explained by Tiago:

Africa is far from Europe and thinking about the distance is hard, especially considering my financial situation. It's easy to fall into loneliness and depression. Exercising and sport helps a lot, but mainly the contact with my friends here, which over the time became family (Tiago, 25-years-old Angolan, studying a social science degree, living in Lisbon since 2017).

International students in pre-pandemic times often portrayed their experiences abroad as a process of transition to adulthood, a vital episode of discovery and personal growth often characterized by the recognition of themselves as independent adults for the first time in their lives (Tse and Waters, 2013). Even for those already living alone in their home countries, the stay abroad constitutes a collective adventure represented by intense and meaningful processes of construction of subjectivity (Frändberg, 2015). This adventure borrows the features of "youth travel": world-view affirmation, friendship celebration, segregation from the adult world, assumption of new

responsibilities abroad, and the relational learning process of sharing everyday life with the same age group (Author, xxxx). However, maintaining social contacts during the lockdown was difficult for many students, especially in university dormitories. Their residences were converted into hyper-securitized environments with no possibility of leaving, except to buy groceries in a scheduled plan for all residents. For months, the situation in university residences was very strictly controlled in order to prevent large groups of people being together in the same building. Rodrigo explains what happened in his residence at this time:

> Here at the university residence there were intransigent measures and no one dared disobey them. Since the suspension of visits (no one from outside could come in, except the ladies who came to clean); then alcohol gel; the kitchen, etc. They left guidelines on how we should use the kitchen and what distance we should keep between us [...]. It was then that I experienced the loss of my freedom; it was very hard. Emotionally it is very complicated, because there was no freedom to leave the house. Everyone was required to stay at home. I could only go out and buy something. I couldn't use my time to do the things I like. And that psychologically, being in the same space for 24 hours a day, is very exhausting. Psychologically, almost unbearable. I reached my limit. I was not well, a little exhausted, worn out (Rodrigo, 28-years-old from Guinea-Bissau, studying a social science Master, living in Lisbon since 2015).

This is obviously quite a difficult situation, that emphasises the need to focus on issues like mental health within international students' lives, although others were more

fortunate, passing the lockdown in rented flats or houses where they had more space in which to adapt their habits to the new situation (see also Author, xxxx).

> In the beginning it was awful. I was very stressed with the idea of staying at home. However, I took the opportunity to get to know 'another me' and started to watch series and conferences online, and do sport at home, which are habits I didn't have before. Also, we met with friends to watch together videos of training at home (Ana, 25-years-old from Cape Verde, studying a social science Master, living in Lisbon since 2012).

Housing situation hence had a major bearing upon adaptation to lockdown conditions, with as we might expect, those with the best domestic conditions having greatest comfort. The topic of international student housing in Portugal (not only among those coming from Global South) was previously explored for the case of Lisbon (Author, xxxx), portraying the anxieties and uncertainties experienced by students facing the unregulated status of many houses (no contract, no bills), among other precarious conditions. In fact, housing and sociability are both topics of great importance when tackling the changes experienced by international students during their stays abroad. International students separation from national or local students (even when belonging to the same age group and social class) has been widely documented in the literature (Hendrickson et al., 2011). They tend to associate together around same-country and same-language groups of friends (Mitchell, 2012). However, this regular separation seems to be exacerbated by the isolation and the exceptional measures imposed by the sanitary lockdown. In any case, it remains to be seen what the long-term

mental health problems for those who endured the psychological stress of the prolonged period of confinement will be, suggesting further research will be necessary.

Online and offline conviviality

As was the case with Ana above, to cope with the stress of lockdown, many students engaged in various forms of sport, either at home or in nearby parks and green spaces. The most commonly reported activities were yoga, jogging and taking long walks during the daytime. As in the cases of Erasmus students portrayed by Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002) we disclosed and detailed here the everyday adaptations of transnational students in order to understand the complexity and fluidity of their subjectivities during the lockdown in Portugal. In our case, sport practices helped counteract the sedentary habits of confinement, providing some form of exercise, often undertaken collectively, in person or through virtual means.

> I started to meditate with a friend at the same hour every day. Also, I'm meeting online daily with my mother and sisters. It's all about keeping calm, because there are days that we become more anxious, it's normal in this situation, so we need to do breathing exercises. On the other side, the body feels that we are doing less physical exercise and gives us signals about that. We are living on the fourth floor and we feel exhausted every time we go upstairs (Juliana, 36-years-old from Brazil, studying a PhD in Arts, living in Porto since 2019).

After the initial period of confinement, characterized by uncertainty and fear among the population, Portugal adopted measures and recommendations that were less

stringent, following a lowering of the rate of infections and deaths. From May 2020 onwards, meeting socially with people from different households was permitted in open spaces and in small groups.

In Coimbra, the entire city depends on the university, and with the suspension of lessons the urban space was really empty. This gave me peace to walk and go shopping to the market. I have some Brazilian friends that I meet here and we are planning to make a picnic this weekend on the bank of the river Mondego (Adriana, 40-years-old from Brazil, studying a technical PhD, living in Coimbra since 2019).

Other students took advantage of the abolition of fixed working hours to try something different: for example, synchronizing their lives with their country of origin rather than Portuguese time.

I'm sort of living in the time zone of Brazil. I'm going to bed four hours later and waking up four hours later too, which alters greatly my cycle, to be honest, but this way I'm able to maintain contact with my friends, family and everyone in Brazil. As a consequence, I'm getting less sun, which is negatively affecting my work performance (Rubens, 26-years-old from Brazil, studying a technical PhD, living in Lisbon since 2019)

These impacts, while seeming slight, amount to new or at least altered ways of being an international student. Although improvised, and part of an adaptation to changing circumstances, they show how people actually cope with new difficulties, and

the challenge of being socially isolated. Precisely by following international student biographical trajectories and strategies in host countries (see Murphy-Lejeune, 2002 above) the research on student mobility moved beyond the classic 'motivational' literature to analyse factors such as the changing values and identities of foreign students in the country of arrival (Genova, 2016). In our case, as Rubens demonstrates above, these new habits and values may also help sustain conviviality, in this case, through regular online contacts with friends and family in Brazil, but this may come at the cost of disrupting studies, creating a new set of difficulties that may need to addressed at a later date.

Future consequences: More movement or minimizing mobility

Before the pandemic, literature already explored the consequences of mobility on individuals and future human flows: the difficulties encountered in post-student transitions to work (Mosneaga and Winther, 2013), the consequences of studying abroad in the future intentions of travelling and living in a foreign country (Frandberg, 2015), or the potential dysfunctional consequences of student mobilities for individuals and families (Waters, 2015). While the Covid-19 pandemic is, understandably, always going to be evaluated in terms of its impact on public health, national economies and international integration, as researchers in the field of student mobility we also know that there will be long-lasting consequences for international education. In fact, major questions need to be asked about the continued viability of large scale circulation as the risks start to outweigh the potential benefits. The interviewees nevertheless remained relatively optimistic about their future prospects, with their plans often involving further mobility. Among our interviewees we were able to locate two migratory strategies, relating to staying in Europe (not necessarily in Portugal) and returning to the home

regions on completion of their studies respectively. In regard to the former position, a lot of this talk was fairly aspirational, even jovial; for example, in the case of Fernando.

> My idea is to stay in Portugal or wherever I can find a good job in Europe. Not necessarily as an architect. I joke sometimes with my mother, telling her that when I find a good job, I will buy an apartment and then she can move here with me. I think that in the future we will find the vaccine and circulation will return to normal (Fernando, 21-year-old Angolan, studying a technical degree, living in Covilhã since 2018).

As we can see, there was an expectation that a vaccine will make things 'return to normal,' with people engaging in mobility much as they did before the pandemic. Today, is still too early to evaluate the consequences of the current mass vaccination. Furthermore, the views of Fernando are shared by most of the other interviewees, many of whom were looking forward to the beginning of the next academic year, seeing this as an opportunity to return to familiar routines.

In contrast to this first position, a second line of thought is more concerned with minimizing mobility in the future, and is more prevalent among older students and those in the more advanced stages of their studies. They look at the prospect of staying in Europe less positively, seeing their mobility as time-limited and something to be concluded as soon as possible; the study abroad period is a temporary interregnum during which they aim to improve their curricula while thinking about a more definitive place to live in the future. This is the case for Adriana and her boyfriend, whose supervisors at their respective universities have offered them the possibility to stay in

Portugal in postdoctoral positions; however, their attachment to 'home' seems to be stronger, meaning that they will not be staying.

> I think that living in Europe maybe is not what we want, even though it is a dream for many Brazilians. We are discriminated against here as in many other countries, which is what happened to my boyfriend when he was living in USA; for being Latin American. So, I don't think that staying here is definitive. I can't see myself living here forever because I don't identify here as my 'home' (Adriana, 40-years-old Brazilian, studying a technical PhD, living in Coimbra since 2019).

Returning home is in fact always present as an idea in the accounts of the interviewees, always seen an option even prior to the pandemic. This choice is particularly tied to post-colonial notions of inequality, and perhaps forms of disadvantage as noted by Adriana above. More pragmatically, as Miguel points out, there is an opportunity to contribute to one's homeland by returning after the completion of studies:

> I'm still studying, but my idea is to return to Angola, because I want to help my country. It's nice that Portugal gave me an education, but if I live here, I'm contributing to Portugal and I want to help my country to develop. Angola needs us to come back and make our contribution (Miguel, 24-year-old from Angola, studying a technical degree, living in Lisbon since 2014).

Another interesting finding was that other students want to go back 'home' to the African continent, not a particular country.

I want to come back to Africa, but not necessarily Guinea, which does not match my ambitions because is too small a country. There's lots of things to do, of course but Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Senegal are more organized and give me more options. I want to live in an African country, because it's different from Europe, I feel better there (Rodrigo, 28-years-old from Guinea-Bissau, studying a social science Master, living in Lisbon since 2015).

The process of imagining future migratory paths among these African and Brazil students does not seem to have been affected by experiences of living through the pandemic, at least not at the time of the interview. This may explain why most declared that once normality had returned, they will continue their peripatetic life courses, in one direction or another. Its seems that the difficulties posed by the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 were not yet sensed as particularly harmful for the long-term future; no more challenging that coping with precarious jobs or visa problems.

CONCLUSIONS

In reaching conclusions, our investigation into the impact of the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic among international students from Portuguese-speaking Africa and Brazil has produced some insight into what happened to their lives at this time. There has been considerable disruption to their well-being, including strong feelings of isolation, a deepening of financial difficulties and, in regard to academic life, the

transfer of studies onto online platforms. More curious is the relative lack of concern with long-term consequences of the pandemic, including prospects for future mobility, which were not perceived as being under threat.

Identifying more specific concerns, a number of nuances emerge. Firstly, one of the more striking aspects of the lockdown experience has been the conversion of the international learning experience into a national, or even a local, one. This is quite a radical shift in circumstances, with a transition from one set of norms to another, as well as different socialization patterns. One implication seems to be that due to the lack of a specific plan to sustain internationalized learning at Portuguese universities, students from abroad have had to fall back on the domestic sphere, and spend more time within the local community in which they have been grounded. This practice is obviously not confined to learners from the Global South, but they may experience a more heightened sense of isolation due to the lack of realistic prospects for returning home.

Second, the adoption of online education by Portuguese (and worldwide) institutions during the confinement has had major implications in educational terms. The limitations of remote learning are in fact evident, not only the lack of presential teaching but also the loss of conviviality with fellow students. The confinement exposed the dependence of many students (not only from Global South) on university infrastructure, especially libraries, which were crucial in order to access to computers and internet connection. The lack of a plan to provide students with these technologies during the confinement exacerbated social inequalities among them. A way to resolve this situation for future emergences could be the opening of spaces to follow the lessons online for those students without resources or access to internet. Those spaces could be fostered in a partnership between Higher Education Institutions and local authorities,

following the current sanitary guidances, as in many other emergency spaces. If education continues during an outbreak, it must continue for all.

Thirdly, and somewhat surprisingly, we did not find any accounts of universities engaging with their overseas students' welfare during lockdown in the interviews. Student associations, consulates and also civil society organizations assisted financially the most troubled students, being the universities totally missing. This is puzzling considering that as feepayers, they represent a significant income stream, one that these institutions will have to work hard to retain during, and presumably after, the pandemic. More coordination between student associations and universities, via the recognition of their important role as representatives of particular groups of students, may assure in the future the involvement of institutions in the well-being of their students.

The limited nature of financial support, an issue pre-dating the pandemic, also raises the importance of employment, and seems to have led to a dependence upon particularly precarious jobs, often without the security of a contract. This is a common situation for other student-workers, as explained above. However, some students from PALOP and Brazil found themselves trapped in Portugal without a source of income or direct familiar support and the need to pay the rent and food in order to survive. The interviewees in our study suggest that they are essentially compelled to take on work that may be risky in terms of sustaining an income, as well as hazardous in terms of being exposed to the virus in hospitals, bars and supermarkets, thus posing a threat to their studies in more ways than one.

As a final remark, while there is no positive side to the Covid-19 pandemic, we hope that our work can at least make visible what we termed another side of student mobility, issues that while pre-dating the pandemic, may have now become more visible and harder to ignore. In this sense, we regard the precarious employment which

international students from the Global South (and also their local and international peers) must engage with while studying and their lack of comprehensive access to digital technology as major issues that need to be addressed. As reported by the student associations mentioned above, these are the most relevant problems faced by Global South students in Portugal during the first period of confinement. We hence hope that we have been able to make a contribution towards supporting these students, at what may be a turning point in the history of international student mobility.

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i   Portuguese General Directorate of Higher Education

i   According to the president of the Association of Angolan Students in Portugal (AEAP), less than 20 per cent of Angolan students in Portugal have scholarships sponsored by their home countries, including those issued by INAGBE, the Angolan Ministries of Minerals, Oil and Gas, and the Ministry of Defence. Some Angolan students also received support from the Portuguese institution for cooperation between Portuguese-speaking countries, the Camões Institute.

i   Agencies such as INAGBE or the Camões Foundation provide scholarships pegged at around 700 Euros per month. Housing and tuition fees are also paid directly by the financing institution to the universities. In contrast, scholarships provided by the government of Cape Verde are only 271 Euros per month.