

HOME SPACE ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT

HOME SPACE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

The central objective of this ethnographic study was to examine the evolution of living space in the city of Maputo via an in-depth analysis of a small number of families living in and building on this space.

We sought to understand the meaning and importance of *home space*² in the organization of families, and in the perpetuation or transformation of family structures and relations. The way the use of *home space* structures lived experience and influences the way residents create and transform this *home space* was another key objective of our research.

The data we obtained revealed that the situations of the families in terms of economic solvency, composition of households, places of residence and type of dwelling have undergone significant transformation in recent decades, in all their multiple dimensions. These transformations occur in family structures and relations and in physical living space, each influencing the other. This

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²This concept – developed in a speculative sense by the research team of the programme “*Home Space* in African Cities” – refers to the spaces within which the majority of African urban residents dwell - dwelling being both a place and a process. Creating *home spaces* thus involves spatial and social practices, but conceptually *home* is above all else a culturally defined concept

process of change is essentially characterized by multiple articulations and inter-relations between different income- and produce-generating activities, different types and levels of social relations, and different behaviours governed by values which are sometimes contradictory, and it is a defining feature of the modernity and urbanity of the families in the context under analysis.

In the first part of our analysis, we seek to understand the changes occurring in these families, and the way these changes are (and have been in the past) influenced by the economic, social and symbolic relationships which social actors maintain with the rural and urban worlds; we also examine the perceptions that social actors have of these relations, and how their perceptions condition social representations and practice. Our analysis opens with an examination of the classificatory system via which the *bairros*³, city and countryside are categorized. We examine a series of attributes and characteristics which, on the physical and behavioural levels, were considered simultaneously to be factors of differentiation and rapprochement between bairros, Cement City and the rural milieu. In doing so we shall describe the processes of mobility in which these families have found themselves involved, and discuss some of the opinions expressed with regard to the *ideal place to live*.

The ambivalences and contradictions we observed during our analysis allow us to conclude that although in terms of categorization the *bairros*, Cement City⁴ and countryside are typically framed according to dichotomy-based models of classification, these models do not always convey the same meanings and content.

The *bairros* are sometimes considered as belonging to the city, or as “incomplete cities” – as one informant remarked, “*This here isn't the bush, we could say it's the city, but it isn't exactly the city*” (male aged 20, Polana Caniço A) – depending on the greater or lesser presence of the infrastructure which marks one bairro as more urban than another. The bairros are considered as belonging to the “city” because “*they have energy*” (male aged 47, Polana Caniço A), “*they have*

³ *Bairro* (Portuguese) is translated into English as neighbourhood but the term 'bairro' will be maintained in this study as its use in Maputo implies more than the physical definition of a certain urban area. A *bairro* in Maputo is both an important political - administrative geographic unit which affects inhabitants in many ways and most residents have some sense of belonging to their *bairro*. However, the use of the term '*os bairros*' (which could be translated as 'the neighbourhoods') – as shown in the ethnographic work of the *Home Space* study – is used to describe the urban areas which are 'in between' the central city and the 'rural' which itself is a socially constructed term with many variations.

⁴ The city of Maputo retains a dualist character which is the legacy of colonialism and which in spatial and architectural terms is expressed in the existence of two urban nuclei: the so-called “Cement City”, formerly the “white *bairros*”, and the “reed *bairros*” where the indigenous population resided during the colonial period. At present, the “reed Bairros” (*bairros de caniço*) are designated simply *bairros* and reed has progressively been replaced by cement blocks. “Cement City” (*cidade de cimento*) is now usually designated the “city”, “the centre” or “downtown”. For more detailed information on the historic evolution of this African capital see Jenkins 2012a.

public transport, hospital and school nearby” (male aged 45, Mahotas). But informants also noted that the *bairros* don’t have everything (while the city does) and are therefore “*incomplete*”.

And although Cement City is an aspirational goal in abstract terms, not all informants would actually like to live here:

The difference [compared with Cement City] is that in a flat you’ve got two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom and there can be seven people living there. Here in the bairro you can build your bedrooms, I don’t like flat living” (male aged 45, Mahotas).

The *ideal bairro*, on the contrary, is either the one the informants are currently living in, or a *bairro* which is further from the city centre, where urban development is a more recent phenomenon and some land parcelling still exists. The fact that for many the ideal place to live is the place they are actually living in explains the enormous investment⁵ they make in their living spaces, into which most of the savings they manage to make are channelled.

We also observed that, for some, access to certain types of consumer goods is a factor which distinguishes the *bairros* from Cement City, although for others (the majority) differences in consumption habits derive more from the economic level of the family than from the place it lives (city, the *bairro* or countryside).

When it comes to classifying behaviours, attitudes and manners, we encounter the same ambivalence of opinion. For example, education (in general terms), the use of the Portuguese language and dress habits were so commonly cited as factors distinctive of life in the countryside, or Cement City that they lost all differentiating power.

The difficulties in arriving at a comprehension of the families in terms of dichotomy-based models are also related with the high degrees of mobility we observed. The large majority of family members live in other *bairros*; some live in Cement City, and nearly every family we studied has members which go there with frequency. A significant number of family members live in South Africa, and some families still have close relatives who send money remittances which are important for the domestic economy. Travel between the *bairro* and the rural milieu is not very frequent. The desire to return to the family’s region of origin⁶ is something mentioned only rarely.

⁵ The Physical Study (Andersen 2012) estimated that on average 15,000 USD were invested per plot on the construction of houses. Real expenditure varied between 5,000 USD and 30,000 USD and in most cases stretched over many years.

⁶ This term is used here in a simplistic fashion to designate the place informants themselves consider to be their *region of origin*. It may be their place of birth, or the place of birth of their parents or grandparents, or both. In the case of women

We observed that mobility is also associated with important relations of inter-dependence (of diverse types) between different residential nuclei of the same family. Although some mention was made of conflict which led to the severance of some of these relationships, remarks emphasizing the importance of lasting family ties were more frequent. This forces us to recognize the importance of family networks and the impossibility of understanding the different dimensions that shape and condition the life strategies of households without taking into account the set of relations (economic, social, symbolic) that they maintain and cultivate with a vast network of relatives.

In part II of our study our attention turns to the dynamics underlying the mechanisms of acquisition, construction and transformation of the *home spaces* of the households we studied. First we examine the different ways of gaining access to and possession of a plot of land. We investigate the daily processes whereby the inhabitants/residents of the *bairros* included in our study gain access to, produce and reproduce space, giving it social and cultural value which gives meaning to their lives. We also examine the practices whereby the possession of land is secured and legitimized. Part II ends with an examination of the dynamics underlying the construction and transformation of the home space, and a discussion of the processes activated by individuals and families in their endeavours to use and transform land according to the plans and purposes they have conceived for it.

One of the conclusions of this part is that the acquisition, construction and transformation of the *home space* are social and cultural processes which gives meaning to the lives of individuals and families: “*Having a house is like having a child, getting married (...) it’s making a dream come true*” (female, aged 37, 3 de Fevereiro).

We observed several co-existing mechanisms for gaining access to space, which essentially involves invoking traditional land transmission rights in combination with an appropriation, reinterpretation and manipulation of the state-prescribed legislation which regulates access to land. This takes place – and gains meaning – in a context where individuals are seeking to exploit the opportunities emerging in the urban property market. This market is increasingly manifest in the expansion of the peri-urban *bairros* and the occupation of the rural space surrounding the city for residential and commercial purposes. All of these processes remain associated with the state’s inability (lack of resources is one reason) to allocate land in an efficient and appropriate manner. In

(in southern Mozambique), it may be the village of their husband, or of a first husband since deceased, or of a husband they have now separated from. Alternatively, it may be the place of burial of ancestors from several generations back, but where neither the informants nor their close relatives was born in or have inhabited. The cultural diversity of the informants may cause them to give different answers, designating different places as their *region of origin* depending on the question. For these and other reasons (Geschiere 2000), the question of belonging is a complex one which merits closer examination than we can give it here.

this more or less structured, complex and multifaceted market, in which a large number of agents are active and whose field of operation is the interface between the legal and the illegal, the formal and the informal, rights of access to and possession of land are transacted with the sale of plots of land – officially parcelled or not – together with their built improvements, via the subdivision of space.

Another conclusion was that various methods exist for securing and legitimizing the possession of space by the individuals and households we studied. In the minds of our informants, security of possession of the plot and the respective right of use and usufruct of the premises are not always contingent on some kind of authorization or recognition by the state authorities. In the cases we studied, the absence of a corroborative document or “paper” did not deprive them of their rights over their lands, plots and houses. Social actors keep the legal process at arm’s length, not only because they are unaware of what procedures are actually involved, but also because they do not see the possession of papers and documents as the only way of ensuring security of possession and the right to use space.

Yes, I have a document from the former owner of the plot and the bairro secretary (...) I feel secure because I've never had problems (female aged 44, Albasine).

One recognized way of securing legitimacy of possession is parcelling. This process secures access to land, for it confers, and secures, practical legitimacy with regard to space/land. Yet this is not the only method, and not all individuals or families attach the same value to it. Other mechanisms also generate feelings of security with regard to the possession of land: living on it for an extended period of time, whether through loan, purchase or birth; mutual recognition in the *bairro* and vicinity; recognition by the *bairro* authorities; the fact that many *bairro* residents are in a similar condition relative to the absence of documents attesting to possession; and the absence of conflicts or problems relative to the land/plots that families possess.

From our analysis of the processes of construction and transformation of *home space* we concluded that for the individuals and families included in our study, building their own house, preferably a permanent and lasting one, is one of the main reasons for acquiring a plot of land. The house is more than a building, a piece of physical infrastructure, with walls, doors and windows; it also embodies the desires and ideals of the family, and its construction is the object of individual and family strategies. In the imaginary of these families, building a house represents the successful collective trajectory of the family, in a context marked by social and economic adversity. Of the strategies we examined, we observed that building a house is a drawn-out process – one that takes

place over the medium or long terms – and is not always guaranteed to reach completion. Houses are subjected to various transformations designed to meet requirements of use of space that change over time, and to respond to changes in composition and size that take place over the life cycles of the households.

In one case, for example, the plot was bought in 2004, whereupon construction of a house – a single-room reed hut with a zinc roof – began. At a later stage, this hut was coupled onto another partition made of cement blocks, with a zinc roof. At present, the cement block partition is used as the main bedroom, while the reed partition is used as an extension, for receiving visitors, and as a kitchen at night or when it is raining. Another room is now under construction: a bedroom for the children, who currently sleep with their parents. The family plans to totally replace the reed partition with a larger room in cement blocks that will equally serve as a visitors' room and dining room.

The third part of our study focuses on the internal dynamics of the home space. Our research here was oriented by issues related with shelter, social reproduction of the family, sociability, privacy and sharing.⁷ Our investigations into these issues allowed us to understand the meanings individuals assign to the home space, and the way its use conditions everyday life experiences via the socially-constructed mechanisms that regulate social interaction. Part III also addresses power and gender relations inside the home space, examining the implications of gender relations for property rights and the changes which these relations undergo.

The *home space* is the scene of domestic activities directed at the survival of family members and the family group; of social events that bring together friends, relatives, neighbours and/or church members; and of a wide range of economic activities. These economic activities, which are mutually complementary in a constant struggle to increase family incomes, are examined in the next part of this study. Their goal is not just daily survival but the completion, upkeep, transformation and expansion of the dwelling space.

As we observed, the organization and use of internal and external *home space* is not static. Equally fluid are the size and type of built and unbuilt spaces, and the composition of the families that live in them. However, co-existent with this fluidity we also observed forms of spatial organization in which visible frontiers (material and symbolic) demarcated certain spaces, which were reserved for certain functions. Where certain spaces were used for functions other than those originally intended, this was always seen as something provisional.

⁷ The economic activities pursued within the *home space* will be examined in the section dealing with economic questions.

My plan is to put a pantry in here and make a kitchen outside the house so we can close my bedroom and the children can't come in and sit on our bed; but without the pantry we can't lock the doors of our room when we go out, because they have to come in to get the food. There has to be discipline in the house, otherwise it's anarchy (male aged 54, Polana Caniço A).

We also observed that the organization of the *home space* is based on hierarchies of gender, age and status, which are socially regulated by degree of parentage. The same norms also govern the rights to use the different internal partitions of the home space. This occurs even when not explicitly acknowledged. These limits mark the dividing line between common and private space and the right of free circulation within the yard and house, and also denote the shared or exclusive status of property. The existence of rules for the use of space does not necessarily mean that they are followed, however, for the size of the family, the dimensions of the house and its partitions do not always permit this.

The current model for the construction of houses, where the different partitions are all located under the same roof, necessarily results in greater physical proximity between the different family members, and this brings about changes in the rules which have customarily dictated the varying degrees of proximity or distance between different family members.

“If I could, I'd like to have a house [i.e. bedroom separate from the rest of the house] just for me and P. I think about having my house with my wife and leaving the children in the other house with their TV and everything” (male aged 45, Mahotas).

This construction model therefore has implications on the level of family relations and the ways family members socialize with one another. However, constraints related with the duration of our fieldwork and the amount of time we could spend in the houses of the families prevent us from examining these implications in depth.

With regard to gender and power relations in the home space, the data did not allow us to draw any firm conclusions on changes in the status of women in the urban periphery of Maputo. We can however affirm that these changes exist, and point towards greater autonomy of women with regard to men. But this autonomy has to be re-conquered every day, for women continue to be socially valued first and foremost as wives and mothers. In this process of change, women face clear

difficulties in their attempts to make their own way in a context fraught with different rationales that co-exist and combine in many different ways.

We also observed the existence of elements which threaten roles which are culturally the preserve of men. These elements include not only the degree of economic power which women have won for themselves but also, and especially, the lack of work and employment prospects for men. As the men themselves remarked, without a job they cannot be respected.

This situation can be summarized as follows. With regard to the way gender relations, the different statuses of different family members, the power relationships which emerge and evolve, and the processes of conflict, negotiation and cooperation which accompany them are expressed, they all depend on bi-dimensional family relationships, where interest and affect are simultaneously expressed, on the different resources available to the family and its individual members, and on a collection of cultural and social norms with which the family identifies and through which it constitutes itself. The multiplicity of cultural norms, and the fact that none of these norms is “pure” but rather the outcome of syncretistic processes and multiple influences, means that they can be interpreted and manipulated in different, but not unlimited, ways.

In the families we studied, the power that different family members have in decisions related to the *home space*, the organization of the different activities that occur in the home space, and the way the space where these activities occur is defined and distributed, depends on the different interpretations which subjects construe of the cultural norms which constitute their frame of reference in the social context under examination, and on the relationships between the members of any given family. These relationships dynamically articulate affects and conflicts, negotiation and cooperation, and they express individual and collective interests, egoism and altruism.

In part IV, we examine the economic activities pursued by family members in their attempts to obtain income and/or products for the acquisition, construction, transformation and upkeep of their *home spaces*. Pluri-activity, the articulation of various sources of income and the dispersion of family members across different sectors of the economy, and sometimes across different geographic areas, is an important feature here. Agricultural activity is especially important, not just in social but also economic terms, for it perpetuates family ties between relatives who do not live in the same dwelling. Other important aspects are exchange and assistance in the form of income, goods and services between family members who do not share the same dwelling. The economic activities pursued within the *home space*, and their implications for the residential structure of the home space, were also examined. We also analysed the economic activities pursued by the women and young

people of the families included in our study, their importance for the family budget, their impact in terms of gender and age relations within the family, and the way hierarchical and power relationships are constructed, in our attempt to understand the way families organize and transform their home spaces.

We concluded that in their efforts to obtain resources and to reproduce, family members resort to a plurality of activities which generate income and products. These activities span all sectors of the economy (formal, informal, primary, secondary and tertiary); they take place in different geographic contexts (urban, rural and even other countries); and in most cases no single activity generates income sufficient to meet the needs of the families.

Jafar – N., aged 65, makes his living from biscates⁸, building houses of reed, wood and zinc, with thatched roofs using local materials and cement blocks in the dwellings of those who recruit his services. One of his wives works on a machamba⁹ that “was given [to him] by whites who don’t charge for it” and also operates a stall in his yard, where she sells bread and produce from the machamba. He has two sons who work in South Africa and send money towards the family expenses from time to time. He has a daughter who lives in Xai-Xai, and sometime gives the family “a bit of help”. He raises ducks primarily for domestic consumption, although he occasionally sells one when asked to. Another of his wives does some biscates as well as helping on the machamba, providing cleaning services on the land/plots of people who have just purchased them.

Situations like this necessitate constant exchanges and sharing, structured around family relations which extend beyond the nucleus of residents of any individual home space. The social value attributed to the different activities depends not only on the type of activity pursued or the income or products which are the outcome of the activity; essentially, it depends on the status enjoyed by the individual pursuing the activity. We observed that the economic activities pursued by men have a different social value from the activities pursued by children, youths and women. Only where the activities of the latter are pursued as part of formal employment contracts are they actually seen as work.

The internal management of the income and products obtained by the different family members in the activities they pursue depends on numerous factors ranging from power relations to

⁸ *Biscates* means odd jobs. Someone who does *biscates* is a *biscateiro*

⁹ Any plot of land used for agricultural purposes; the size can vary greatly.

normative codes and individual/collective affects and interests. Another factor is that the income or products resulting from these activities are often unpredictable, and in most cases are not guaranteed in advance. Many such activities require a degree of wheeling and dealing, knowledge of demand and the ability to imagine and anticipate future developments if a minimum amount of success is to be achieved vis-à-vis the competition. Other activities depend on social relations, knowledge and exchanges of favours. Others, like farming, depend on the climate and are founded on ancestral knowledge which includes the awareness of risk and lack of security. Consequently, the unpredictability and lack of security that characterize the urban milieu the families currently inhabit are nothing new. If anything, in fact, the city offers a wider range of possibilities for “playing” on various fronts.

Yet this potential can only be realized by combining different activities and simultaneously cultivating the social relationships on which such activities depend. And in cultivating these social relationships, actors embody behaviours and values which, depending on interests and circumstances, can actually be mutually contradictory.

Therefore, as we have seen, it is these multiple articulations and inter-relations between different income- and produce-generating activities, different types and levels of social relations, and different behaviours governed by values which are sometimes contradictory, which define the modernity and urbanity of the families in the context under analysis.

The conjugation of these apparently dissimilar but inter-dependent attitudes generates contradictions in the discourse of social actors. These contradictions become apparent in the comparison of discourses in which representations of normative ideals from different cultural models are evident (the practices of the actors are often in contradiction with their discourse).

We end part IV with the conclusion that the social and/or economic relations between actors are simultaneously a resource in themselves and a means to obtaining other resources. Some of these resources are given freely, as a means of creating or maintaining dependency, on the basis of which relationships of power and prestige are established within a given family, social group or network. Thus, doing business and the value of what is transacted frequently depend on pre-existing social relationships between the parties, or on relationships which the actors wish (or wish not) to establish.

In the fifth and last part of our study on *home space* as a social construct we examine the processes whereby identities are constructed and re-constructed. Our analysis includes a discussion of the *home space* in its spatial and identity-forming dimensions, and the way these identity-forming processes structure themselves within the confines of home space, family and church, the latter two

being key social networks in the universe under examination. We also examine school education and its relationship with the identity-reconstruction processes which generate a greater sense of individualism. Part V ends with an examination of the elements fuelling cohesion and disintegration of social networks and the processes via which social actors manage to articulate these elements.

At the beginning of part V, we argue that the identity-forming and identification processes that bind inhabitants to their houses are not generated by the specific characteristics of these urban spaces. They are the outcome, rather, of pre-existing identity-forming processes which necessarily undergo changes in their transposition to the urban context – but do not originate in the latter. And it is the transposition and transformation of identity-building processes which confers specificity on the spatial and social realities we are examining.

We then proceed to an examination of this transformation of the identity-building process in social actors on the basis of a theoretical perspective which views the formation of identity in individuals, families and social groupings as a dynamic process which changes and adapts over the course of time, interacting with new factors in a complex dialectic. Our investigation first addresses changes in the actors' relationships with their regions of origin, which via their ancestors and the rituals held in their honour gave spatial expression to their identity in the past, before we examine how this spatial dimension of identity is being transposed to the home spaces they now occupy.

We've held our ceremonies in honour of our ancestors here in Maputo since my parents began living here. Whoever wants to visit the graves in Manhiça can, because my grandparents are buried there. When I die I'd like to be buried here (...) because my parents were buried here in Maputo (female aged 31, Magoanine B).

One of our conclusions is that although it is of less importance nowadays, the region of origin has not “disappeared” as a referent of identity. Another conclusion is that ancestors continue to be fundamental symbols of family identity. The transposition of rituals in their honour from the region of origin to the current place of residence combines with other factors to confer upon the “new” *home space* considerable significance in terms of the affirmation of family identity.

We also observed that the transposition of identity-building processes from the rural to the urban milieu gives rise to changes in identity which accompany changes in family structure. At present, family structures draw on organizing principles from different cultural models: the patrilineal model of the peoples of southern Mozambique, and the modern, Western model. This situation opens up different possibilities where the sense of family belonging and identification is

concerned: the same individual may belong to several home spaces (and families) which are not mutually exclusive but don't have the same degree of importance over the course of the individual's life.

Our informants frequently associated the home spaces they currently occupy with sentiments of belonging and security. In regard to the first of these sentiments, belonging, we observed that it was shared not only by all those who are considered part of the same family and live in the same home space, but also by other relatives whom our informants consider as being entitled to live there: such as absent and even dead relatives. "*The house belongs to my deceased father, but it's my responsibility (...) We didn't buy it, we built it a long time ago*" (female aged 43, Mavalane B).

However, this notion of *belonging* to a house and a family does not rule out situations of conflict and the marginalization of certain individuals.

As for *security*, this too was a sentiment cited by all our informants. This stands in apparent contradiction to situations of uncertainty with regard to property title deeds, family conflicts and even questions related with burglary and theft. Our informants argued that the security which possession of their houses transmitted to them could only be understood by reference to past experience (when documents were never necessary for proving property rights), to the current context (where this type of possession is the norm), and to a range of symbolic and identity-giving meanings which their belonging to a given *home space* represents.

The family too is a focus for sentiments of security, even in situations of conflict with other members or branches of the family. We concluded therefore that these situations did not pose a threat to the importance of the family in terms of the identity-building value and security it represents for those who belong to it. None of this precludes the existence of complex relational dynamics and negotiations, however. Obligations, duties and rights operate at different levels vis-à-vis a shifting backdrop of power relations and cultural referents. All of these elements, we observed, contribute to a huge diversity of situations: on the level both of identity reconstruction and the role played by the spatial dimensions which underlie them, and consequently in terms of the security which belonging to a house and a family effectively represents. This diversity of situations can even transform the identity-building spatial referent of the *home space* into its opposite, with the home space seen more as factor of insecurity than one of family and social stability.

We then examine the role of churches as structural factors in the identity-reconstruction process of the social actors addressed by our study. Our research centred on the symbolic

equivalence between church and family, and the way churches reflect the spatial dimensions of the identity-forming processes of the social actors.

The church plays a significant protective role for families, as it helps resolve family conflicts deriving from traditional beliefs, and in this way contributes to family cohesion. We observed a significant degree of mobility of believers across the various churches, and concluded that changes of place of residence are one of the reasons for this. The churches are located in the *bairros*; those who frequent the same church see each other as “brothers”, and are, in fact, neighbours. In each of the various creeds, visits to the home spaces of fellow-believers are frequent. For church, *home space* and *bairro*, the frontiers between private and public space are extremely porous. In each instance, public and private intersect, without actually dissolving into one another. And this happens despite the occasional exception and a growing trend to delimit *home space* in a more rigid manner. Identity takes form via this intersection of spatial dimensions.

We end part V with an examination of the important role the churches play in education. Although our informants acknowledge the importance of schooling in the affirmation of social identity, in practice the prevailing notion is that identity is fundamentally built via processes which allow the creation, survival and reproduction of the family. And yet here too we observed families behaving in different ways in the same context. The decisions they take regarding the education of their children change over time, and are not equal for all. We also saw that education is valued not for itself but for the access it provides to better living conditions – even if achieving these better living conditions sometimes creates disunity in the family.

Family conflict, the ways it is resolved on a local level, and the representations of social actors on the causes of conflict, are also addressed in this final part of our study. In families as well as churches, there co-exist mechanisms which promote family harmony and those which sow discord. For our informants, belonging to a particular family or church is not necessarily a constant phenomenon, and families and churches themselves are not immutable: they intersect, and recreate themselves on a daily basis via a range of practices which renew the social relations which underpin them. And in this re-creation they are transformed, bringing in new members and excluding (or being abandoned by) others.

This is one possible explanation for the importance of these social networks in the identity-building process, despite the conflict they give rise to, which in some cases can lead to the disintegration of the family or the relinquishment of a church or belief.

The social practices pursued by family members require complex articulations of conduct in which contradictory values – loyalty and self-interest – are expressed and interpreted in many ways, and may or may not be socially reprehensible, depending on the point of view. The spatial mobility of actors, the flexibility of family structures and relations, the diversity of churches to which the individual can belong, and the ephemeral nature of many of these relationships of belonging are characteristics which facilitate the “circulation” of the sense of belonging and enable actors to embody contradictory values in their practices.

We also observed that the unpredictability of the social context, in conjunction with an exceptionally wide diversity of social norms, can sometimes polarize contradictions to the point where they become unsustainable, leading to marginalization, self-destruction or “voluntary” withdrawal from the original group of belonging. In either event, these social actors are stripped (in practice, or formally) of the powers they held with regard to the other members of the group, and excluded from the social positions they occupied. Yet this process is not irreversible: how the situation evolves depends on how the many normative frameworks that govern family and social relations are interpreted in each particular instance.