



Reframing Relational Space. Migration from the Perspective of Those ‘Who Stay’

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Received: 31 October 2023 / Revised: 26 January 2024 / Accepted: 27 January 2024
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Abstract

Migratory research projects are increasingly concerned with bringing together those ‘who go’ and those ‘who stay’, considering the impact of living in transnational family relationships. The perception and use of space have moved between digital and face-to-face spaces in the management of these dynamics. Considering that Portugal has both a high rate of ageing and a high number of young adult emigrants, it is important to explore how parental figures in Portugal and young adult children abroad re-signify their presence. In this paper, we intend to reflect on how parental figures in Portugal use digital and face-to-face presence to connect with their emigrated children and how that might re-signify the space with the community where they live. Using a post-positivist paradigm and semi-structured interviews, we developed a qualitative study with parental figures living in Portugal and their adult children living abroad ($N=20$, age $M=60, 83$; $DP=9, 15$). We analysed the data using the software *N-Vivo* (ed. 14). The general results point to the inclusion of digital space as a dimension for the negotiation of space–time within family rituals. In this sense, digital platforms and devices gain importance in the maintenance of communication and the planning of routines or celebrations. The dynamics of these family groups are influenced by the perception of social values and norms. The presence established between the digital and the physical seems to be important in (a) decreasing the impact of isolation and increasing participants’ sense of belonging, (b) promoting cross-cultural values, and (c) encouraging participants to use digital tools to connect with other groups in their communities.

Keywords Migrations · Transnational families · Digital presence · Social connection · Cultural and Social psychology

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Introduction

Transnational families are a phenomenon that has been focused on in social and human sciences, but the profiles and resources for adaptation in these familial members have changed in the last years (Bryceson, 2019; Gomes et al., 2015). Over the last few centuries, there have been several movements that have closely followed all those of globalisation, which emphasize the need to consider migration in an integral context (e.g., considering those who migrate and those who stay in the country of origin, with some connection), rather than in an individual level (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). An understanding of family structures as a multi-systemic, cross-border space in which the well-being of all members is taken into account necessarily leads to thinking about the place of support and care among these family members (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

Baldassar and Merla (2014) point out the importance of considering this connection in light of the concept of ‘circulation of care’, defined by these authors as a form of reciprocal, multidirectional, and asymmetrical support exchange throughout the life course in family groups. This conceptualization invites us to think of the family in an intercultural context with political, economic, cultural, and social contexts that influence the adaptation of the whole group—in all the countries where these family members live, whether they emigrate or not. The members of these families can be both providers and carers, and there is space for the group dynamic to be readjusted depending on whether they can ‘navigate’ between countries physically or in digital formats (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Baldassar, et al., 2016).

As new communication technologies continue to expand and offer countless possibilities for connection, it is necessary to think of society as a set of systems that are interconnected between face-to-face and the digital, where information and presence can transit these two dimensions (Matusitz & Musambira, 2013; Potter & McDougall, 2017). Moreover, it is important to study the potential transfer of these practices from the transnational family context to the insertion of individuals in the respective communities/societies where they live (Mateia, 2018), since migrations are situated in a dynamic system of care and support that is becoming increasingly flexibilized as it adapts to the global context (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

In the specific context of Portugal, according to the National Statistics Institute (INE), the use of communication technologies has increased over the last decade—in the period between 2012 and 2022, the number of fixed users (internet subscribers) increased from 2,314,494 to 4,057,223 users (Pordata, 2023a). Globally, in the home environment/for personal use, the rate of broadband internet use increased from 59.7 to 84.6% over the last decade (Pordata, 2023b). It is also important to consider access by age group. Indeed, the groups that most increased their use of the Internet for personal purposes were mainly people aged between 45 and 74. The remaining age segments have apparently seen less growth, but their use is already highly associated with the need to adapt digitally in professional and/or educational environments (Pordata, 2023c).

Studies on transnational families highlight the impact of socio-demographic variables, such as gender and age in migratory movements, with an intersection of prejudices and limitations for highly vulnerable groups—such as women, who have high expectations of being carers and migrations in individual level are most studied in migrant males perspective (Christou & Kofman, 2022); as well as the elderly persons, since there is an idea of immobility and dependence that invisibilizes the cooperation in care that circulates (multifacetedly) between generations (Bryceson, 2019).

This intersectional challenge continues when the purpose is to understand the presence of digital ecosystems capable of enabling access to information and developing good practices in digital ways (Ilic, 2020). Literature on digital presence (Dubrova et al., 2021; Ganito, 2018) points to the diversity of digital forms and to the change in access according to variables such as sociodemographic aspects, highlighting issues related to more vulnerable sociocultural groups (e.g., elderly people, women) and socioeconomic levels (e.g., lower economic status is associated with more restricted access to devices). It has been suggested that the use of social networks by the ageing population works as a link to prevent isolation (Roberto et al., 2014). As such, this has particular relevance in the Portuguese context given the high rate of ageing and the large number of transnational families with heterogeneous characteristics and vulnerabilities (Costa et al., 2020). Specifically in the context of a migratory project, not only the format of the connections between family members suffers transformation, but those connections are also reconfigured.

The increased awareness that more people are living to a later age, but that there may be fewer people available to provide the necessary care, has made it urgent to consider intergenerational dynamics in families (Albert & Ferring, 2013; Barros, 2023). These concerns also apply to the creation of various support networks in the family that can help throughout the life cycle, especially in stages where adjustment challenges may arise, such as the migration of one or more of its members (Mendonça & Fontaine, 2013; Villas-Boas et al., 2017).

Take into consideration that care and presence have a circular and adjustable shape, not only considering space and time but also the set of competencies and internal dynamics of the members of these families (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Yeates, 2012), it is necessary to consider how these relational mechanisms can be understood.

In this context, taking into consideration the Intergenerational Solidarity perspective (Bengston & Oyama, 2007), when applied to transnational families is of the utmost importance. This model, initially used to study contexts of adaptation between adult members of families living in the same house, became even more important when it began to analyse the impact of the various dimensions of the model on different family structures and dynamics (Albert & Ferring, 2018). Over the decades, the model takes on a more defined form when Bengston and Oyama (2007) define the six main dimensions of analysis, namely (a) affectual, affective ties; (b) associative, time and frequency of contact; (c) structural, reflecting how geographical proximity may underlie interaction; (d) consensual, proximity of opinions, values, and orientations between members; (e) functional, receiving and providing support; and (f) normative, norms of family importance. Later, the dimension of conflict was added, since relationships also have conflicting and ambivalent characteristics (Lowenstein, 2007). This whole framework suggests that is needed to think of intergenerational relationships between parents and their adult children as a *continuum* between solidarity–ambivalence–conflict in which various interactions play a part in the relational dynamic (Bengston & Oyama, 2007; Lowenstein, 2007). This is highlighted in this paper since perspectives and beliefs about family dynamics can be challenged both by those who emigrate and by the family that remains, directly related to whether they provide/receive support from other members.

Impact of the Migratory Project on the Perceptions of Members of Transnational Families

A number of academics have emphasized the fact that attitudes, values, and behaviours of transnational families are affected by the processes of integration or incorporation into the society of the individuals who have migrated (Berry, 1997; Bornstein & Cote, 2006; Tajima & Harachi, 2010; Ward et al., 2010; Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). When we consider transnational families holistically—both the ones who leave and the ones who stay—we need to acknowledge the impact that changes in their sociocultural context may have (Barros et al., 2023; Nauck, 2007). Not only does the new context provide new opportunities and constraints, but it also brings different sets of values, beliefs, and references. Families may change accordingly, while pre-migration cultural frameworks are likely to remain influential, to some extent (Foner, 1997).

Renzaho and colleagues (2017) indicated that young people in migrant families become culture challengers, as they try to balance integration into the new culture while maintaining their cultural values from the country of origin. Also consistent with these results, researchers (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2018) studied the contact between adult children and parents in migrant families and concluded that ties with parents are weaker when migrant children are more liberal in their values and behaviours, and when they have more frequent contact with natives. However, even in the context of ambivalence and conflict in transnational dynamics, family group negotiation can lead to a more inclusive view of society from both parties (Barros, 2022; Ghazarian & Cheryl 2010).

From a psychosocial perspective, transnational families also face the challenge of adapting to multiple changes. Adaptation refers to the process of integrating changes that people have to make in response to external demands (Berry, 1997). Two domains of adaptation can be distinguished: psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation (Neto, 2019; Ward et al., 2010), and these two most frequently are paired together. Both can contribute to a resilient response during the migratory process, which we can summarise as the ability to adapt efficiently when facing risk in terms of well-being (Coimbra, 2008; Walsh, 2020).

However, it is important to consider that the dominant cultural context and health/welfare systems can also provide different forms of support outside the family (Albertini & Kohli, 2013; Brandt & Szydlik, 2008; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2011), playing a crucial role in developing patterns of intergenerational solidarity and resilience. In other words, the result of solidarity between family members, as it emerges, can also be a situational response to worse/better health and social care provision systems (which presuppose less anchoring to family support). It can also be the result of cultural learning and the adoption of norms and values during the course of intercultural contact (Berry, 1997; Nauck, 2007).

The above rationale emphasizes the relevance of the questions of how and why different cultural contexts and environments—and their respective demands during adaptation—can influence levels of cohesion and satisfaction in intra- and inter-personal relationships.

In this paper, using a qualitative exploratory approach, we aim to explore the impact of the migratory project on Portuguese parental figures who have emigrant children. More specifically, we intend to explore how the experience of having family members abroad, in a migratory project, and with limiting connections between the digital and the face-to-face, influences parental figures in their perspective of well-being and use of relational space. Given the scarcity of previous empirical research, this remained an exploratory objective attended to by qualitative methods.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants in the study are parental figures, living in Portugal and with adult children who emigrated ($N=20$). According to their self-identification, most of them were female ($n=16$) and some were male ($n=4$). Their ages ranged between 48 and 76 years ($M=60, 83$; $SD=9, 15$). They all live in mainland Portugal, although ($n=4$) live in a rural location, ($n=5$) in a suburban area, and ($n=11$) in an urban area. Data were collected between the last quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.

Instruments

A script was drawn up for individual semi-structured interviews, which was adapted from a previous study with the adult children of similar transnational families (Barros, 2021). Prior to its application, it was discussed with experts the topics to develop ($n=8$), and a focus group was held with people with identical profiles ($n=7$) to guarantee the accuracy and suitability of the questions.

The interview guide integrated seven main themes: (i) family characterisation; (ii) motivations and cohesion in the transnational family; (iii) relationship maintenance with distance; (iv) cross-generational support network; (v) transmission of norms and values; (vi) lifelong learning, specifically how they manage ageing; and (vii) how they perceive their psychological and social well-being.

Before the interview, a brief sociodemographic questionnaire was applied and informed consent was required and signed.

Procedures and Data Analysis

A snowball sampling technique was used in collaboration with key players to invite participation. Contacts were made with several Portuguese communities abroad, parish councils/municipalities in Portugal, the media, and emigrant associations. A website and social networks were created to publicise the project and recruit participants.

The following inclusion criteria were considered for participation: (i) being a parental figure of at least one young Portuguese adult emigrant who had lived abroad for at least 1 year and (ii) living in Portugal.

In accordance with the code of ethics of the American Psychological Association (2018) and with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities (CETCH) of the Portuguese Catholic University, all the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and then, the audios were destroyed, with the names of the participants and sensitive data changed to guarantee confidentiality. The narratives presented here use pseudonyms and a numerical identification after the letter *P* (Participant).

In order to minimize bias, the collection and analysis of the data were analysed by the first author of the paper and discussed with the research team, in order to have a more reflexive and interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon, from a post-constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2006).

The data was codified in the *N-vivo* software (ed.14) and thematic analysis was carried out to explore the data and cross-check it with the previous literature (Charmaz, 2008, 2009). The sample size was based on the theoretical saturation of the *N* analysis.

Results and Discussion

In order to explore individual perceptions and address their social meanings in light of the scientific literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2009), it was decided to present and discuss the data simultaneously.

Use of the Digital Space to Connect with Emigrant Family Members

The participants indicated a total reinvention of the contact space with their adult children after migration. When we explored the presence, the form, as well as the usefulness of this contact for developing a connection in these families, 96 references emerged in the coded interviews.

All the participants reported that their presence in the family is very frequent and intense. Family rituals (whether daily, celebratory, or occasional) are experienced both in person and digitally, in turn changing the classical view that geographical proximity reflects the ability and willingness to interact (Shaw, 2023). This evidence is in line with more recent approaches to the perception of space, specifically in transnational families, stressing the importance of hybrid connections (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Furthermore, this data points to possible reciprocity in the perception of cohesion felt by both parties, since previous studies exploring the perceptions of adult emigrant children found the same pattern (Barros, 2023).

The digital connection not only allows for a new way of bonding but also makes it possible to plan face-to-face meetings in a virtual space. Video calls and message boxes—particularly using the *WhatsApp* and *Messenger* apps—were seen as a more private form of contact/presence used mostly on a daily basis; on the other hand, *feeds* of *Facebook* and *Instagram* apps were used as a way of sharing content with family members in different geographical locations, although less specifically aimed toward storytelling or the exchange of support between family members.

All the participants emphasized how important it is for family cohesion to meet their families at celebrations (e.g. Christmas or Easter), as Matilde (P10, 62 years, living in an urban location) says.

At Christmas he always comes, always, always, always... there's even a long period at Christmas, and I combine the holidays to be with him at home, his brother also gets a few days' holiday, because otherwise [...] we want to take advantage of every moment to be together, so I have a holiday at Christmas to be with him and then he usually comes too... he comes here for a while in the summer but in some moments of celebrations are more important.

However, almost one-third of the parents interviewed explained how they have started to become more flexible in relation to the dates on which traditions are celebrated, in order to reconcile the demands of life their children have in the country they live with the importance of having more quality time. As indicated by Margarida (P13, 52 years old, lives in a rural area):

Although I always want to, we're together when it's possible, I like her to come here at Christmas, but I understand... I'm a very festive person, but I completely understand if there's a year when it's not possible for her to be here and it's even happened when she doesn't come, we make a video call on the official day and then we have a Christmas of our own when she comes to Portugal.

Furthermore, one-third of the participants said that it was important to meet during festive seasons and that they need to preserve those meetings, but that, when possible, they also visit the country where their children live, to join together. As illustrated by Bento's (P16, 68 years old, lives in an urban area) narrative:

They've also come to Portugal at that time [...] but when it's not possible my wife and I go there. It's cold, it's cosy to be all together at home, we have meals together, we go for a walk at the end of the day [...] that makes it a special time of year.

It is important, however, to clarify that although this unity exists at more culturally marked occasions of the year, physical presence also occurs on birthdays or simply at holiday breaks from both parties—either from those who have emigrated or from their parental figures, who have stayed in Portugal.

Although the vast majority mentioned using the digital/presential context to share and be present at various family rituals, some participants mentioned that video calls are also used as a way of supporting both parts if illness occurs.

Even though it was indirectly approached by almost half of the participants, only two stated explicitly that digital contact allows them to have more control over family dynamics—so as to ensure that their lives are not disconnected from their children's—which allows them to reduce stress and isolation. Margarida (P13, 52 years old, lives in a rural area) says in this extract:

It was complicated during the pandemic, because at first she chose to stay there, she didn't want to come, so naturally it confused me and her father when she was home alone [...] after this more tense moment I know she's much stronger than I thought, but I need to keep up with simple things like colds and try to be part of what she allows me [...] possibly, because I know she's doing very well and she's doing what she likes and I want to be part of it. Accepting this makes me feel less bad about not having my daughter with me.

The vast majority of the participants also indicated that while hybrid communication enhances the space and time for relationships to be strengthened, the dynamic only works if there is a digital connection mediated by face-to-face.

From Family to Social Context

When analysing the impact of the use of new communication technologies, we have to consider not only the perception of relational space with their migrant children (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) but also the other social contexts that interact with family members (Cela & Fokkema, 2017). In this section, most of the interviews were coded $n = 17$, with a total of 57 references.

The participants pointed out that though the use of digital means began mainly with the purpose of contacting their emigrant children, it ended up having an impact on the way they felt they belonged to their family networks and, subsequently, allowed them to connect with other networks. As one participant Helena (P3, 73 years old, lives in an urban area) illustrates:

Since I am retired, it has been more difficult to cope with the absence of a son and the isolation, which has worsened after COVID. Fortunately, with the help of my sons [one emigrated and the other in Portugal], I've been able to use *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, which keep me connected to more people in the world [...] it connects me to him who is away.

Two-thirds of the participants indicated that they use the new technologies to be in contact with other contexts that they did not have previous access to, namely people from the same school, groups from the same parish, and other family members. The same participant, Helena (P3), illustrates how this connection has allowed her to use the digital space to form other connections:

On a usual day, I do my own things, make lunch, go grocery shopping, eat my meals and then go for a coffee, I'm there for a while with the group of friends I met in a parish group that went online during the pandemic. We're there for a while, then everyone goes their own way, I get home and we often share what we've found with each other [...] and I video call my cousin who is far away.

This data led us to reflect on how the digital space can replace the physical one, not integrating the whole perception of the dynamics of space (Shaw, 2023). However, around half of the participants indicated that they connect digitally but this does not replace face-to-face presence—one type of space does not substitute the other. As Inês (P1, 57 years old, lives in an urban area) tells us when looking back over the last few years of her life:

[...] after the divorce, I retired and Covid came into the picture. When this part of being closed off ended, that's when it changed, but not from a mental point of view, from being involved in activities that get me out of the house and living life to the best of my capacity [...] I exercise almost every day and meet up with family and friends who I talk to on my mobile phone and is this *App's* [...] I really enjoy *Netflix* and videocalls in the quiet of my home, but it's not enough.

In general, digital connections seem to be pervasive in the context of transnational families, although they are not seen as having more weight than face-to-face connections. Nonetheless, digital connection in transnational families has a direct and positive impact on familiar dynamics. That positive impact extends to the use of digital means for those who never had the opportunity to use it, for professional purposes, ending up developing informatic skills to connect with emigrant descendants.

Impact of the Migratory Project on Those Who 'Stay'

In contrast to the literature on previous migratory waves, the connection and solidarity between those members who 'stayed' and those who emigrated is not so much about sending or receiving remittances (Peixoto, 2012), but about the perceived availability of a dynamic social network (Lancee, 2012).

The large majority refers to financial support (or the acquisition of supplies) as merely occasional and relates this dimension with the need to support tasks perceived as essential such as help in the case of illness.

Material exchanges are not frequent, but around half of the participants mentioned the need to mediate ambivalence–conflict in relationships (Lowenstein, 2007). These interviews point to the importance of studying the symbiosis between the solidarity–conflict–ambivalence *continuum* (Bengston & Oyama, 2007), both in its *consensual dimension*—how the members of a family agree or disagree on general values and norms about life and society, as well as in the *normative dimension* of solidarity—how they understand the values and norms accepted within the family should be. An example of intergenerational learning and interaction is given by Matilde (F10):

My father made me learn to be rigorous and to value everything that life offers us, particularly work and the importance it has, both in terms of personal fulfilment and in terms of our way of life, and how important it is for us to fight to have a life. I've learnt a lot from my children, namely to look at the world from a different perspective because many times we try to maintain a certain comfort zone, which is the experience we've had [...] but my [emigrant] son has given me a great deal of help in terms of how I see the world today and situations that sometimes I wouldn't look at in the same way [...] for example, I've learnt to give more importance to the dignity of the many refugees.

Margarida (P13) also said, when talking about her daughter:

I believe she really is a good person, and I think I've achieved that goal. Above all, respect for others, no matter what they are or how they look [...] but it bothered me the way she imposed herself and seeing different people where she lives helped her to be calmer and I realised that there was a lot to understand about life. Sometimes it's horrible to leave the comfort zone, but it's a trade-off for a better world.

Although a large number of respondents said that their experiences with their children have had a positive impact, they also indicate a component of ambivalence and conflict in the consensual domain (in around one-third of the participants). As explained by Bento (P16).

I'm more rigid because I'm from another generation and perhaps I don't have the same flexibility that they [daughters] have in accepting difference, they accept that difference much more easily than I do. I have certain values and ways of behaviour that don't take well to some of the new things in society, so that's where we differ. [...] my emigrant daughter is very active and I feel uncomfortable going to protests or being an activist. I accept it more and more, but I feel there's always tension.

Most of these narratives indicate that the ambivalence or conflict ends up being resolved internally or during a conversation, sometimes recognizing that both have different points of view or that they need time to assimilate the differentials, as Júlia (P4, 64 years old, lives in a suburban area) reports:

[...] maybe, at his age [referring to his son], I was a bit like that too, and with time I've really started to realise that sometimes making some concessions doesn't mean losing the essence, it means being a bit more flexible and living better with others and before it was a bit like 'better to break than to twist' [...] and now I'm able to think... 'look, it's fine, if you want to do it like this, do it'. Sometimes we agree to disagree, sometimes we avoid the subject because I'm maturing the subject, as I hope he will too.

When it comes to the norms and values concerning the family itself and its internal rules, the participants were more reluctant to answer, with only around half mentioning the importance of not being a 'burden' in their children's lives, the use of digital means to keep in touch, and also that they feel more comfortable providing support, whether affective (digital or face-to-face) or material.

It is therefore important not only to analyse the avoidance in addressing this topic but, above all, to consider the directionality of the support. Some authors (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2011; Karpinska & Dykstra, 2018) indicate that when parental figures are female, there tends to be more downward solidarity support, while male figures show more bidirectional or upward patterns. The trend in the data varies according to age and state of health, with the healthier people being more willing to provide support. In fact, in this study, we have a

large majority of female participants, and only they addressed this issue. The fact that they consider themselves to be generally healthy may also be a determinant in this case.

(Re)Thinking Vulnerabilities in Context

During the analysis, we described each participant taking into account socio-demographic variables that could be directly related to the care network and then to the circulation of care or the very absence of it—lack of circulation of care (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Baldassar, et al., 2016). Therefore, we highlighted gender, age, and living in a more or less urban/rural location, as there could be different digital skilling offers and expectations.

Although this is an exploratory study, with no pretence of being representative, we found a recurring pattern that influences the connection between digital and face-to-face—their age.

Participants over the age of 65 tend to have more difficulty using ITC tools and, consequently, in maintaining hybrid connections. Also, regardless of whether they live in an urban/rural/suburban area, a large majority indicated that it was essential that their children (either emigrants or those living in the same country) help them acquire fundamental skills in the use of digital tools.

More than a third of the participants indicated that the existence of learning networks (e.g. senior universities or associations in parishes) made them expand their skills and, at the same time, transfer their digital knowledge to more social contexts. This is illustrated by Rita's interview (P15, 62 years old, lives in a rural area) when telling us about her experience of attending a senior university:

'With my daughter moving to the United Kingdom, I was more quickly drawn to English and informatics, which is a new subject for me and I really like it, I really enjoy being there, because I get to socialise with people my own age and others a bit older. [...] I learn and have fun with other people. Going to the senior university was fantastic!'

Although indirectly analysed (it was not explicitly asked, but it immersed from this data), around a third of the participants were unfamiliar with security issues in a digital context, which brings us to the importance of the above-mentioned networks, as they can promote effective skills for the digital navigation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Considering that Portugal is a highly family-oriented society (Coimbra et al., 2013), it seems important to approach this phenomenon (a) using an integrative view of the various family members; (b) exploring the impact of the migratory project from a transculturality point of view, and taking into consideration the perspectives of those who stay; and (c) exploring the reality of family members, namely in relation to extra-family networks.

For future studies, it would also be important to consider a longitudinal and quantitative study to assess the impact of the digital/presential space over time, with a representative sample.

Conclusions

In line with studies of adult emigrant children (Barros, 2023; Barros et al., 2023), relational space is reconfigured in these transnational families, becoming both digital and face-to-face, in a physical sense. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that this new perception of space is important for maintaining or developing family rituals, as well as for solving problems of connection and support while physically distant from their emigrant family members.

Transculturality embedded in transnational families also brings a new perception of the world they live in, through the daily dynamics of their emigrant children. This learning seems to have positive impacts such as challenging pre-established prejudices held by parents in Portugal. Furthermore, the contact via digital/in-person extends to other relationships and social dynamics, allowing a large proportion of parental figures to reduce isolation and increase their perception of belonging to the communities in which they participate.

Although we do not have data on whether this dynamic has been boosted as a cause-consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it does appear that this hybrid interaction with family, and other extra-family networks, can be a way of reducing the impact of isolation, still a crucial factor affecting the well-being of many aged people.

Acknowledgements The authors thank the participants in the study and the research experts at the Portuguese Catholic University, University of Lisbon, University of Porto, and Luxembourg University who helped to reflect on this paper.

Author Contribution Conceptualization, C.B., P.H., and A.S.S.; methodology, C.B. and P.H.; software, C.B.; validation and formal analysis, C.B.; writing—original draft preparation, C.B.; writing and editing, C.B.; supervision, P.H.; review, C.B., P.H., and A.S.S.; consultancy on research, P.H.

Funding Open access funding provided by FCTIFCCN (b-on). Data collection and elaboration of the article with a Post-Doctoral Fellowship from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa/PORTICUS, with reference GR-074770.

Availability of Data and Materials The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available since they constitute an excerpt of research in a Post-Doctoral Study, with ethical protection of participants' interviews, but general data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. It has to state that at this research the transcribed interviews are available in Portuguese.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate In accordance with the ethical principles of research, the project was approved by the Committee on Ethics in Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities (CETCH) of the Portuguese Catholic University, under reference CETCH2022-08. Also complies with the code of the American Psychological Association (2018). Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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