

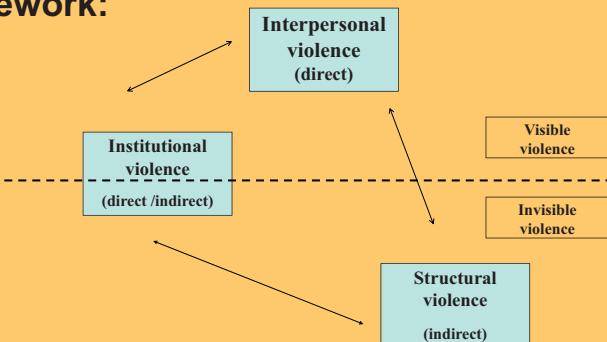
# Institutional violence towards immigrants, meaning making and life-course: intertwining biographical and historical timings

## Theoretical framework:

**Institutional violence** - a type of violence perpetrated in the name of institutions, taking place in organizations (schools, factories, hospitals, prisons, courts), creating or maintaining social injustice (Barbeiro & Machado, 2010; Van Soest & Bryant, 1995).

**Legitimization theories** (Jost & Major, 2001) - understanding of how social injustice is justified and normalized either by dominants or by the dominated within the social structure.

**Life course perspective** - aiming to clarify the interplay between social structures that shape migration paths and agency of social actors on dealing with macro-social determinants and on building their migration projects – **agency within structures** (Elder, 1994; Settersten & Gannon, 2005).



## Aims & Method:

- To identify concrete forms of **institutional violence towards immigrants**.

- to focus on the point of view of the victims:

- their understanding of this type of violence
- the ways they cope with it.

**Biographic accounts of Portuguese immigrants in Switzerland**, collected through **semi-structured** interviews and the filling of a **life calendar**.

### Data analysis:

- Preliminary content analysis of biographic accounts and calendars of 8 participants (4 men and 4 women; aged from 26 to 70; lengths of stay in Switzerland from 1 to 27 years).

## Preliminary results

### Immigration policies, "injustices committed by the institutions" and their meanings:

#### Before 2002:

seasonal work permits (9 months), no family reunification, no free circulation in Swiss territory; mostly **low skilled jobs** (traditionally tourism, house cleaning or construction):

#### Dependency; segregation :

"during the 9 months contracts (...) you were owned by the boss..."

"working in construction, you live in the site, you eat and sleep there, and during the weekend maybe you can get to go to town, and drink in the bars with your work colleagues, who are also Portuguese."

#### meanings negotiated between 2 poles

#### A provisional situation and hard conditions ... but jobs with good wages

"I wouldn't consider it as violence, but sometimes it hurts... but you don't think about it, you are here to work."

#### After 2002:

full access to the labor market; low skilled jobs (sometimes below the professional and academic competencies), but **better wages** than in Pt; also **highly skilled jobs**

Being a foreigner, facing mistrust of authorities and other citizens, Trying to take the best of Switzerland

"I was in the University, and here I work in a cafeteria. It's not my universe, I have nothing to talk about with my colleagues... but what else can I do if it's so difficult to speak French?"

"I'm working on what I like but with better work conditions. Couldn't say the same thing about social conditions: bureaucracies seem to have no end, authorities seem to mistrust foreigners, it's hard to rent a flat and to make friends..."

### Migration projects:

#### Focusing on going back to Portugal:

Upward (economic) mobility, even if only achieved in Portugal

"you work and save money; in Portugal, work is as hard, but it's difficult to find a job and you never get enough money... I've already built 2 houses down there."

focusing on family (in Switzerland and/or in Portugal);

focusing on the injustices and politics in Portugal.

#### Focusing on staying in Switzerland:

Integrating and enjoying the place, upward mobility

#### Collective concerns

"I joined the Portuguese association... when I was unemployed... I felt close to these people that come here with nothing, don't speak French and are convinced that finding a job is easy. Helping them to the most simple things, such as translating when going to administration offices, helped me a lot to deal with my own situation."

### Coping with injustice:

#### Instrumental strategies

- focusing on work, family and earning money to save;
- Using the Portuguese social network to get along (informal strategies for finding jobs, housing...)
- denying of personal discrimination (Crosby, 1994);
- justifying the system (Jost et al, 2004).

#### Identity strategies

- focusing on the belonging to the Portuguese community
- focusing on integration in Switzerland
- Keeping contact with the Portuguese community and enlarging the social network to other communities; enjoying the Swiss pleasures. Being Swiss and Portuguese.
- individual upward mobility - tokenism (Wright, 2001)
- collective action

## Discussion:

### Different immigration policies (before/after 2002) shape:

- relationships with institutions
- experiences of migration of different cohorts of immigrants.

### Different legitimization theories seem to explain different aspects of coping mechanisms to deal with social injustice.

The types of coping strategies that participants put forward seem to be related to migration projects, which concern mainly individual (and family) social upward mobility – in this perspective, immigrants can be viewed as tokens (Wright, 2001).

## Next steps - Testing results:

- Recruiting of new participants, based on criteria that allow to contrast:
  - Migration cohorts (before/after 2002);
  - Migration projects (staying/going back);
- Focusing interviews on coping strategies;
- Using standardized instruments on system justification, social identity and identity strategies constructs.