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MIGRATION NARRATIVES IN THE FIRST PERSON: LIFE STORIES OF BRAZILIAN IMMIGRANTS IN PORTUGAL

Patricia Posch and Rosa Cabecinhas

Considering the increasing number of Brazilians migrating to Portugal in the last years, we conducted Life Stories interviews with 25 Brazilians who migrated to the North of Portugal from 2015 onwards, analysing their perceptions about their migration experience. The findings were analysed in the light of Cultural Studies and Social Psychology theories, uncovering texts and contexts about the case of Brazilian migration to Portugal.

Brazilians are currently the largest immigrant community in Portugal, representing 27,8% of the total immigrant population in 2020 (SEF, 2021). In the middle of 1980s, what is now known as the first migratory wave of Brazilians to Portugal began, driven by the economic slowdown in Brazil and by the perception of more favourable economic conditions in Portugal for joining the European Economic Community (EEC). Among those who migrated were highly qualified professionals, political exiles, and Portuguese relatives who returned to Portugal.

In the mid-1990s, a new phase of this migratory flow began, known as the second wave. Portugal's entry into the Schengen Area, together with the country's transition to a service-based economy, have attracted many Brazilians. This flow was marked by its feminisation and by the migration of individuals with low qualifications, who would fill vacancies with low qualification requirements in construction, the food industry and tourism. With the global economic crisis in 2008, this flow began to slow down, giving way to new migrations of these now Brazilian immigrants in Portugal or their return to Brazil.

This situation started to change in 2017 when the flow of Brazilians to Portugal grew by 5% compared to the previous year. That growth continued, reaching the 44% mark in 2019 (SEF, 2018; 2020), shaping what researchers have designated as a third migration wave (França & Padilla, 2018) or even a fourth wave (Fernandes, Peixoto & Oltramari, 2021). Following this growth, some questions arise: Why have Brazilians been migrating to Portugal in the last years? What are their migration trajectories? How is their life in Portugal? Questions like these gave rise to the research underpinning this paper.

Although we can find the answers in various spheres, such as in the media or in institutional discourses, we have chosen the Life Stories method to seek these answers from another viewpoint: the perspective of immigrants themselves. This method is significant for Migration Studies because it conceives individuals as a synthesis of contemporary subjectivity. Their perception of their own life is not exempt from the influences of the values and meanings that they inherit through culture. Thus, the narratives and discourses they construct about themselves can be a valuable data for studying broader social phenomena.

With that in mind, the fieldwork consisted of Life Story interviews with Brazilians who migrated to Portugal from 2015 onwards. Hence, the findings of this paper relate to a recent migration flow. There

was also a geographical filter given that the research focused on immigrants living in the Northern Region of Portugal due to the remarkable growth of this area as a destination of choice for Brazilians migrating to Portugal in recent years. Between December 2020 and April 2021, we interviewed 25 Brazilian immigrants that matched these criteria.

Looking back on their life in Brazil, interviewees recalled it as fast-paced, having to deal with their professional and personal responsibilities at one time - especially those who lived in large central areas such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Interviewees also recalled that their lives were structured and stabilized, with few financial struggles. It is interesting to note that some of them even used the term "privileged" when recalling their living conditions in Brazil in times before their migration.

As for the reasons prompting their migration, there is a significant shift: the predominance of economic reasons for second wave immigrants, as found in Góis and Marques (2015), changed to those like safety and the political context of Brazil. The perceived cultural differences also played a great weight in these people's decision to migrate, reflected in the divergence with "the moral values of the Brazilian culture" and the affinity to the so-called "European culture" mentioned by some participants.

The actual decision to migrate is mostly made within the family. However, it was noted that men played an important role in many cases by sparking the first idea of migration or making the final decision about it. Moreover, this situation contrasts with that of second-wave immigrants, for whom, according to Góis and Marques (2015), migration was a decision made suddenly. For those who migrated in the last years, migration is a strategic and planned movement, and this planning sometimes begins two or three years earlier as part of a broader life project.

The primary sources of information used were social networks and online content. Those produced by Brazilians already living in Portugal were the preference, specially YouTube videos and personal blogs. These future immigrants wanted more practical information about the changes that migration would bring to their lives, such as obtaining documents, living conditions and job opportunities in Portugal, information that they claim they were not getting from the media in general. Moreover, although Capono and Barros (2021) suggest that the urge for more practical and closer-to-reality information increases as the date of migration approaches, the participants in our research seem to have used it throughout the planning period.

Hiring consultancy services was also frequently mentioned in the planning phase. These consultants were often, in fact, Brazilians who already lived in Portugal and who helped, usually for large sums of money, those who were still in Brazil with the bureaucratic procedures of migration both in Brazil and in Portugal. Some also relied on this service for more practical issues, such as renting apartment flat, buying kitchen utensils or even tips on the best supermarket.

When addressing their current life, it was interesting to note the immigrants' awareness that there was a profile of "the Brazilian immigrant" back when multiple social representations emerged, which now underlie discrimination. When our interviewees acknowledged the existence of this stereotype, their explanations revealed they sought distance and distinction between them and the idea of a Brazilian immigrant from other times. As seen in Festinger (1954), changing personal opinion within a social group is a process within the framework of comparisons. It is not an arbitrary process but rather influenced by social relations. On the other hand, when it comes to differentiation between Brazilians and Portuguese, language, especially accent, seems to play an important role, confirming previous studies on this topic (e.g. Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2018). Some interviewees mentioned that they tried to change the way they spoke to fit in more smoothly, while others stressed that the Brazilian variant of Portuguese language is part of a culture they did not want to leave behind.

Regarding work experiences, professional disqualification, a situation observed in several studies on international migration, was also widely reported. This means highly qualified professionals in Brazil who did not have their diplomas and previous experiences recognised in Portugal, or even who accepted job opportunities below their qualification as a way to enter the labour market. They also refer to the "Brazilian employee" stereotype and how this impacts the lives of recent migrants in Portugal, who face prejudice based on the negative experiences employees and co-workers have had with Brazilian immigrants they have worked with before.

The interviewees also mentioned prejudice and discrimination within social relations in general, although amid an ambiguity of conceptions that led to different valuations of discrimination experiences. There was a reference to different "nuances" of discrimination, which made it hard to recognise and assert beyond doubt that such a situation had occurred. According to Corsby (1984), the reluctance to admit a situation of discrimination on an individual level could mean a way of avoiding personal discomfort at having to assume the role of a victim and, consequently, naming the perpetrators for the experienced situation. Moreover, although prejudice can be described as a judgment about an individual or a group as a result of the process of social categorisation (Eagly & Diekmann, 2005), discrimination occurs when prejudice acts through their effective exclusion from specific domains of social life. In this sense, some immigrants claimed to have experienced discrimination from the Portuguese, but even when they related, they did not undergo any form of exclusion from society.

Furthermore, participants sometimes justified prejudice against Brazilians stemming from the Portuguese experiences with Brazilian immigrants from previous migration waves with a different social status than newly-arrived Brazilian immigrants (Posch & Cabecinhas, 2020a). By doing so, these immigrants feel that they can establish social relations with the Portuguese and maintain their belonging to the Brazilian community for fear of social sanctions (cf. Tajfel, 1974) on the part of other immigrants. The analysis of these findings in the light of immigrants' acculturation strategies (e.g. Berry, 2001; Sam & Ward, 2021) suggests that misconception or attenuation of discriminatory situations might be a way to mitigate situations that could consolidate the distinction between Brazilians and Portuguese.

As to the relationship with other Brazilian immigrants, an aspect that stood out was the reference to what the immigrants called the "Brazilian ghettos": groups of Brazilian immigrants who intentionally interact mainly with each other and perpetuate their Brazilian cultural practices in Portugal. It is interesting to note that these alleged "ghettos" were mentioned as both a cause and a consequence of Brazilians integration with other social groups in the country. Some interviewees believe that immigrants should adopt Portuguese culture instead of perpetuating Brazilian cultural practices since they perceive this is one of the factors causing integration difficulties with other social groups. Others consider that Brazilians have no other option but to interact with other compatriots in a culturally different social relationship dynamic. Nonetheless, there is also a perception of the Brazilian immigrants with different perceived social status among the broader Brazilian community in Portugal, who now share a common social position: to be an immigrant in Portugal. Such perception was often used to justify the challenges in interacting with other Brazilians, leading to prejudice within the Brazilian community.

As for the future, there were notably different perceptions of time. Some immigrants understand the medium-term to be three months, while it is six months or even a year for others. We infer that these different perceptions stem from migration experience itself, related to the experiences and the pace at

which things happen in their lives.

Focusing on medium-term objectives, especially as it is a valuable information in the backdrop of COVID-19, the return to Brazil emerged as a tangible possibility for many of these immigrants (Posch & Cabecinhas, 2020b), although the reasons for it vary. While some plan to return because they miss their family, others have decided to return because they feel that Portugal is not their place and can be "more themselves" in Brazil. Also, it is worth noting that this return was a certainty for some who migrated to study and intend to return to Brazil as soon as they complete their study plan. Getting a job was also within the medium-term horizon of these immigrants. However, it is interesting to note that while for some this was a matter of financial need, for others, getting a job was an option, something that relates more to their mental health and idleness than their income. Entrepreneurs, especially those who migrated in 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, planned to invest further in their businesses and fulfil a business plan that the pandemic hampered. Also, those who had to work in areas other than their area of education hoped they would soon have an opportunity to work with what they graduated.

These were some of the main findings of the referred ongoing research. The following stages of the research include developing further analyses based on the collected data, comparing to the results with the previous migration waves, and linking them to the social, economic and cultural contexts that led to the current state of the situation. An intersectional analysis (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; Bastia, 2014) is also considered to understand how other variables and their intersection can help discern the overall results and unveil many others.

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