



Solidarity or Exclusion? Migrants and Migrant Communities

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Even if many, but not all, Latin American countries have a long history of being an immigration country, there also exist a long tradition of regional migration, that is, migration among countries of Latin America. However, during the last decades of the 20th Century, migration patterns began to change to the south-north direction. Factors that influenced the trend were of different types, on the one hand many people from Latin American countries became political refugees, leaving their home countries due to dictatorships and persecution.

Later, changes in the European labor market, especially in countries such as Portugal and Spain, open a new niche for Latin Americans, which included a demand for both qualified and unqualified labor force (dentist, some professionals such as publicists, computer expert, among the qualified, and agricultural, domestic and service workers among the unqualified). Starting in the 1990s, many talk about massive immigration of Latin Americans to Europe, although when compare to their immigration to the United States, it is less significant.

Apparently, former colonial ties define the relationship, as most Spanish speaking go to Spain while Portuguese speaking prefer Portugal. In relation to Brazilians immigration to Portugal, in addition to having a long history, there are some factors that deserve to be mentioned. Brazil, throughout history was always a main destination for the Portuguese, including after the WWII, even if it had slowed down. Thus contacts and trips back and forth had always been present. Decolonization and the 1974 Revolution also meant a new wave of Portuguese emigration to Brazil, enforcing those ties. Thus, it comes to no surprise when either Portuguese, with their Brazilian

families (return migration), or qualified Brazilians came to Portugal, especially by the time Portugal entered the European Community when there was a significant demand of labor force.

According to most immigration scholars, even if there are many factors that encourage migration, the existence of immigrant networks is nowadays a defining factor. With that long history of immigration both ways, it is normal that networks reinforced stronger migration. Moreover, the demand for labor enhanced even more Brazilian immigration: the World Exposition known as Expo 1998, new highways, the new bridge, the European Football Cup in 2004, all of these translated into urgent need of labor that domestic labor force was unable or unwilling to meet.

So, who are the Brazilians living in Portugal today? Recently, it was recognized by the Director of Foreigner and Frontiers Services that Brazilians are the main immigrant group in Portugal, which it is a novelty. However Brazilians living in Portugal hold different status, many live here as residents, and others have more precarious legal status, including those who have overstayed their tourist visas. Their status depends on several and complex elements such as date of arrival and effective legalization processes available to them (1992, 1996, 2001, 2003), whether they are married to a national, level of education, having Portuguese (or other European) ancestors, etc. Official numbers (*Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*) indicate that in 2004 there were 28.956 Brazilians living as legal residents, and other 37.951 had authorizations to stay, making a total of 66.907 people. About 15.000 were able to legalize in the last legalization process that was opened as a consequence of a bi-national treaty known as the Lula Accord, signed in 2003, thus there are over 80.000 in

legal situation. The number of undocumented is uncertain, but we can assume that they are many, including over the 15.000 people who pre-registered for legalization but who were unable to do it, many others who have arrived after July 2003 thinking that legalization was still possible, and those who continue to arrive. Table 1 illustrates the presence of Latin American citizens living in Portugal. As numbers show, Brazilians are by far the outstanding group, follow only by Venezuelans. While Brazilians come to Portugal due to many reasons, as already explained, Venezuelans are certainly a consequence of return migration, as Venezuela was an important country of destination for Portuguese. Table 2 summarizes the numbers of Latin Americans holding authorizations to stay in Portugal. In this case again, Brazilians are the largest group.

Brazilians when they first arrived held a privilege status, comparable to other Europeans residing in Portugal. Once immigration became more numerous and with the proletarianization of the fluxes, their status also changed. Starting in the 1990s and through the new millennium, Brazilian started to hold less qualified jobs, although in comparison with other immigrant communities, they hold a middle position. Today Brazilians work mainly in the service sector (catering, hotel and tourism, client services, selling, etc.), in addition men work in construction and women as domestic workers, thus somehow we see who the labor market is segregated by sex.

According to my own research, there are many problems that Brazilian immigrants face, however discrimination, racism and exclusion is the most relevant. Discrimination, as we shall see, is encountered in many different edges: in the labor market, in relation to legalization, in society in the overall. In the labor market, discrimination is experienced in several ways, mainly in what is known as work conditions: lower salaries, informal jobs, employers do not pay social security which hinders workers access to legalization, employees have to work extra hours with no retribution, no rights to have sick days, no

vacation or holidays, extradition threats, among others. The worse situation seems to manifest in the construction sector.

In addition, Brazilians feels discriminated against due to the stereotypes and negatives images that exist in Portuguese. Among those images, we can cite: Brazilian are lazy, party people, irresponsible and non-reliable. Some of the existing images are gender specific, while men are thieves and crooks (malandros), women are prostitutes, sensual and always available. These ideas and stereotypes about Brazilians have an impact on Brazilians when trying to integrate into the host society.

With regards to discrimination to access legalization, according to what Brazilians say, the problems seem to be the old problem of the chicken or the egg. Employers want to hire workers who already have work visas, and employees want to get a job that would offer them a work contract, thus it gets into a complicated situation, as those who can are not willing to take the first step.

One common misconception is that immigration is a threat for society. This idea is based on ethnocentric views which do not look back to history. Europe needs immigrants for many reasons, one of them being a demographic one. Others relate to labor markets. The long relation between Latin American countries and Europe should be enhanced by migration and exchange. As Saskia Sassen has said, migration and migration policy is a transnational issue that have to be solved or understood in a transnational dialogue, otherwise we just keep kicking the ball hoping that somehow the problem will find a magical solution, but it will not. Thus Latin American and Europe, or Brazil and Portugal have to discuss the issue and come to a solution in a common table, it will not help that each country manage their policy on their own, if not Brazilians will keep coming and will stay undocumented, and Portugal will keep excluding them from full integration into society.

One step that was given, even if it partially failed during implementation, was the

binational agreement signed between the Brazilian and Portuguese governments in July 2003 which indicated at least some interest in solving legalization for many citizens. Bureaucracy among others factors contributed to slow down the process and its efficiency, but it was a first good step.

Due to relative similar cultural roots, welcoming immigration from Brazil is a way to capitalize the good existing relation between the two countries, considering that integration, for example, of Brazilian immigrants has been smoother than groups coming from totally different backgrounds. In my study, even if Brazilians complain about discrimination and racism, most of them considered themselves integrated to Portuguese society, and inclusively, some manifest their preoccupation that it would be difficult for them to go back to Brazil.

Another suggestion it raises is in relation to social networks. It has been proved that immigration takes place for many reasons, but the existence of networks is one of the main explanations for migration, thus it is important to understand and be aware of the functioning of those networks when designing a policy. One reason that makes them important is that some networks are illegal and deal with human trafficking and smuggling, thus we need to be aware and fight those networks. However most networks are not illegal and beside recruiting people informally, they are the main support in the host society, thus need to understand its functioning to capitalize them. Knowing how they function could help control the circulation of information such as opportunities in the labor market, opportunities for legalization, resources available to immigrants, etc. These would lead to give immigrants more information and resource in order to make a more informed and knowledgeable decision when migrating, for example.