

African and Haitian immigrants in the western and southwestern regions of Paraná in the 21st century

Imigrantes Africanos e Haitianos no Oeste e Sudoeste do Paraná no século XXI

Antonio de Padua Bosi*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0733-1780>

Fagner Gulhielmi Pereira**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6179-7218>

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é discutir a presença de haitianos e africanos empregados em frigoríficos nas regiões Oeste e Sudoeste do Paraná durante o período de 1990 a 2020. A ideia inicial que organiza essa proposta pressupõe que migrar não é simplesmente deslocar-se de um lugar para outro, mas implica ter expectativas positivas de encontrar trabalho e de melhorar a vida. Pressupõe também perder laços de sociabilidade, relações de afetividade e os lugares onde se produziu a memória, os costumes e tudo que constitui os imigrantes de que trata este projeto. Imigrantes esperam conseguir emprego e criar estratégias que os ajudem a sobreviver em contextos culturais diferentes aos seus costumes, práticas e crenças.

Palavras chave: Imigrantes; Haitianos; Africanos.

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the migration of Haitians and Africans who were employed in meatpacking plants in the western and southwestern regions of the state of Paraná from 1990 to 2020. This study presupposes that migration can not be described as merely moving from one location to another since it also encompasses expectations of enhancing the quality of life and finding employment. Additionally, it assumes that this process is characterized by the loss of social ties, relationships, and connection with places related to memories, customs, and everything that constitutes the migratory experience addressed in this research. Immigrants expect to secure employment and, for this purpose, they develop coping mechanisms to assist their survival in different cultural settings that differ from their traditions, practices, and beliefs.

Key word: Immigrants; Haitians; Africans.

* PhD in History at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF). Associate Professor at the Western Paraná State University (Unioeste). E-mail: antonio_bosi@hotmail.com

** PhD in History at the UNIOESTE. E-mail: fagnergulhielmipereira@gmail.com

Introduction

This article aims to analyze the migration of Africans and Haitians in the western and southwestern regions of the state of Paraná. Our historical analysis focuses on the experience of living and working as an immigrant.

This approach is neither new nor recent. The importance of international migration has been well documented and recognized over the last 50 years; there are studies regarded as classical in this research area, numerous institutional reports, censuses (International Labor Organization, United Nations, Observatory of International Migration, etc.), as well as research focusing on regional aspects. Its importance is evident in the interdisciplinary nature of publications on this subject, which encompass a diverse array of issues. I will illustrate this point with some examples.

In addition to research focused on human mobility, some studies delve into the stratification of migrants based on factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background¹. These studies address income and remittances sent to family members in their country of origin², pathways to entry to the country³, reception in the new country⁴, visa-granting legislation⁵, the impact of religious beliefs in social identities⁶, diversity in culture and religious affiliations⁷, identity and citizenship⁸,

¹ JADOTTE, Evans. International migration, remittances and Labour supply: the case of Republica Haiti. Research Paper. May 2009. Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/unu/wpaper/rp2009-28.html>. Accessed in: 4 may. 2018.

² OROZCO, Manuel. Understanding the remittances economy in Haiti. Inter-American Dialogue. Paper commissioned by the World Bank. March 15, 2006; RAPOPORT, H. & DOCQUIER, F. The Economics of Migrants' Remittances. Discussion Paper No. 1531 March 2005. Bonn, Germany. IZA - Institute of Labor Economics. Available at: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/21307/1/dp1531.pdf>. Accessed in: mar. 2018.

³ SILVA, S.A. Brazil, a new Eldorado for Immigrants?: The Case of Haitians and the Brazilian Immigration Policy. In *Urbanities - Journal of Urban Ethnography*. Vol. 3, No. 2., November, 2013. Available at: http://www.anthrojournalurbanities.com/docs/tableofcontents_5/2-Sidney%20Antonio%20da%20Silva.pdf. Accessed in: 12 apr. 2016.

⁴ DIEME, Kassoum. Imigração haitiana e política de acolhimento institucional na cidade de São Paulo: 2010-2015. (Dissertação). Dissertação de Mestrado submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sociologia. Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas. Universidade Estadual de Campinas. 2016.

⁵ SILVA, J. Por razões humanitárias: cidadanias, políticas públicas e sensibilidades jurídicas na reforma migratória brasileira. (Doutorado) Tese submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Direito, Estado e Constituição da Universidade de Brasília. Sociologia. Brasília, 2017.

⁶ WARNER, R.S.; WITTNER, J.G. (Ed.) *Gatherings in Diaspora. Religious, Communités and New Immigration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

⁷ MAHLER, S.J.; REY, T.; STEPICK, A. (Ed.) *Churches and Charity in the Immigrant City*. Religion, Immigration, and Civic Engagement in Miami. New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2009.

⁸ PORTES, A.; RUMBAUT, R. *Immigrant America. A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

social networks⁹, the visibility and invisibility of undocumented or illegal immigrants¹⁰, the political and emotional implications of exile¹¹, as well as the process of acquiring proficiency in a new language in a multicultural context¹². These issues persist over time, reflecting enduring conflicts still embedded in society.

Contrary to common assumptions, the reinforcement of border control in the United States and European nations during the past decade, regions that constitute prime destinations for migrants and refugees, has not effectively interrupted the mobility of laborers from economically poor regions. These individuals pursue opportunities of employment in these countries, as well as in ones that host populations affected by conflicts, ethnic persecution, and similar circumstances. Thus, the United States and Germany have almost a third of the world immigrant population, comprising around 63.7 million people out of a total of 272 million¹³.

This immigration occurs in parallel with employment opportunities in countries such as Brazil. For instance, for Haitians, there are more benefits in securing employment in Brazil when compared to their experiences in their home country, Haiti. The possibility of getting a formal job that guarantees on-time monthly payment is considered favorable. They find such conditions in the meat industry, particularly in slaughterhouses. The fact that they are most frequently employed in the meat industry shows the connection between immigration and globalization of capital, since this industry is entirely globalized¹⁴. It is possible to say that for the capital, one of the structural characteristics of immigration is to expand the supply of cheap labor¹⁵.

⁹POROS, Maritsa. *Modern Migrations. Ujarati Indian Networks in the New York e London*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

¹⁰GENOVA, N.P. Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31 (2002), pp. 419-447. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4132887>. Accessed in: 21 jul. 2019.

¹¹SAID, Edward. *Reflections on the Exile and other essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.

¹²DUBORD, Elise M. *Language, Immigration and Labor*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; PORTES, A.; RUMBAUT, R. *Legacies: the story of immigrant second generation*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.

¹³IOM. Word Migration Report. International Organization for Migration. Geneva: Switzerland, 2020. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf. Accessed in: em 15 fev. 2021.

¹⁴BOSI, A.P. Dos Açougues aos Frigoríficos: Uma História Social do Trabalho na Produção de Carne, 1750 a 1950. *Revista de História Regional*, v. 19, p. 83-103, 2014.

¹⁵PORTES, A.; WALTON, J. International Migration: Conditions for the Mobilization and use of Migrant Labor under World Capitalism. In *Labor, class and the International System*. Studies in Social Discontinuity. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, San Francisco: Academic Press, 1981. pp.21-65.

Thus, Saskia Sassen argues that, since the 1980s, there have been new zones of capital investment in the industrial and service sectors, resulting in the generation of employment opportunities (predominantly unskilled) and an increased demand for labor. These are “suitable” job positions for Haitian and African immigrants. As a result of the flow of capital, the corridors in the Global South not only remain active, but are also expanding¹⁶. Therefore, when migration is depicted as voluntary, it is necessary to associate it to economic and political factors that are beyond the control of the immigrants.

In terms of theory and methodology, this means that the immigrants interviewed in the western and southwestern regions of Paraná articulate their interactions with the Brazilian state agents, with their employers, principals and teachers at their children’s schools, and health workers, in alignment with their respective beliefs and values, which influence their perceptions and actions. Edward Thompson¹⁷ emphasized the importance of the morals, ethics, and traditions of workers when analyzing the relationships between capital and labor: *Is the compensation fair? Is the treatment given respectful?* In general, it involves comprehending how they cope with their subaltern status while living abroad.

Hence, the immigrant condition is defined when they seek employment, attempt to rent a house, endeavor to communicate in Portuguese, are unable to find the food they are used to buying and eating, organize parties and listen to their music, face curious gazes, experience hostility, and experience moments of hospitality. To interpret, to accept, to find odd, to reject, and to resist are verbs used in conditions of ambivalence. If you accept it, you lose something of yourself. If you reject it, you become isolated. Besides acknowledging that Haitian and African groups are structured (and should be studied) at the expense of this *affective* dynamic, it is also important to address these contact situations with the natives (remote or not) as opportunities to shed light on the tensions and social distances experienced by these immigrants. This is the aim of this article.

¹⁶ SASSEN, Saskia. *The mobility of labor and capital*. A study in international investment and labor flow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. SASSEN, Sakia. Three emergente migrations: a epochal change. In *SUR, International Journal of Human Rights*. 23-v.13, n.23, 2016. SASSEN, Saskia. *Expulsões*. Brutalidade e complexidade na economia global. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2016.

¹⁷ THOMPSON, E.P. *A Miséria da Teoria. Ou um planetário de erros*. Editado por Copyleft, 2009.

The rise of international migration during the 21st century in Brazil and the world

The majority of immigrant workers in the western and southwestern regions of Paraná are Haitians, Ghanaians, Somalis, Senegalese, Sierra Leoneans and Bengalis. Many of them are evangelicals or Muslims. They migrated to Brazil in the early 21st century, bringing with them significant life and professional experiences from their countries of origin. Thus, these trajectories did not begin when they sought Brazil or another country to escape poverty. Their stories are stories of workers before they are stories of immigration.

According to a 2020 report by the UN, there was a rise of 51 million immigrants between 2010 and 2019. In 2019, immigrants accounted for 3.5% of the world's population. In 2000, they were 2.8%¹⁸. Additionally, the available data on interregional and interstate migration endorses the argument that workers migrate constantly. In the context of illegal (undocumented) immigrants, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates the current immigrant population at 258 million, of whom 19 million are refugees. Working immigrants (aged 15 and over) totalize 234 million people, representing 4.2% of the world's working class also aged 15 and over.

The global immigration from 1970 to 2019 is presented in Table 1. The ongoing rise in the number of international migrants, both in absolute figures and as a percentage, demonstrates that the phenomenon is a contemporary issue. Over the span of 50 years, immigrant proportion globally increased from 2.3% (1970) to 3.5% (2019)¹⁹.

¹⁸ UNITED NATIONS. Total international migrant stock. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>. Accessed in: 12 oct. 2021.

¹⁹ IOM. International Organization for Migration. World Migration Report of 2022. 17 route des Morillons P.O. Box 17, 1211 Geneva 19. Switzerland, 2023. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022-EN_1.pdf. Accessed in: 12 mar. 2023.

Table 1 – Immigrant Population Trends (1970-2020)

	Immigrant Population	World Population
1970	84,460,125	2.3%
1975	90,368,010	2.2%
1980	101,983,149	2.3%
1985	113,206,691	2.3%
1990	153,011,473	2.9%
1995	161,316,895	2.8%
2000	173,588,441	2.8%
2005	191,615,574	2.9%
2010	220,781,909	3.2%
2015	248,861,296	3.4%
2020	280,598,105	3.6%

Source: adapted from the World Migration Report

It is crucial to add the routes taken by immigrants to this unobstructed upward trend. Several factors, that should be thoroughly investigated, drive the predominant migration routes, mainly oriented in a South-North and South-South trajectory. This geographical division is based on economic and political criteria.

The Global South, from where the majority of international migrants depart, encompasses five regions characterized by significant social inequality, great portions of the population living in poverty, low GDP per capita, as well as fragile economies. These regions are Africa, the Americas (excluding North America), the Caribbean, Asia (excluding Japan), and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand). They are 137 countries, 49 of which are classified as “least developed countries”²⁰. In this study, the immigrants living in the western and southwestern Paraná migrated from countries in the Global South as Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Guinea-Bissau, and Pakistan. Although Haiti is located in the Caribbean, its economic aspects are similar to countries of the Global South.

²⁰ BEKEWELL, O. South-South Migration and Human Development: Reflections on African Experiences. United Nations Development Human. April 2009.

The experiences of the workers we interviewed are related to the dynamics of international migration illustrated in Table 1, highlighting the prevalent trend of South-South migration over the past two decades²¹. This phenomenon occurs mainly because of the complete or partial closure of borders, whether for short or extended durations, in countries traditionally preferred by immigrants. The United States (18.5%), Italy (2.3%), Germany (4.8%), England (3.5%), and France (3.1%) together represent one-third of international migrants, according to the United Nations' 2020 data²².

In the case of Brazil, as demonstrated in Table 2, over the last two decades, migration corridors have been established from three main origins of international migrants: Venezuela, Haiti, and Bolivia. The presence of Haitian immigrants became significant after the 2010 earthquake. Venezuelans and Bolivians, however, have a longer history of migration to Brazil. In contrast, the recent African diaspora does not present substantial figures, consequently occupying lower positions in this Table.

Table 2 – Nationalities with the Highest Number of Migrants in Brazil, 2000-2020

Country of origin	2000-10	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Venezuela	3.809	956	1.112	943	32.245	24.164
Haiti	275	4.278	10.669	42.423	14.214	8.925
Bolívia	45.736	16.275	7.102	6.135	7.851	1.047

Source: adapted from Sismigra, 2021

There are potential migrants from African countries. At the beginning of the 21st century, an estimated 400 million Africans face poverty, structural unemployment, low Human Development Index (HDI) scores, a life expectancy of approximately 62 years, and more than half of this population lives below the poverty line. In 2017, 36.3 million African immigrants lived outside the African continent. Approximately 100,000 of them were in Latin America and in the Caribbean, which is the least favored destination for African migrants²³.

²¹ AWAD, I.; NATARAJAN, U. Migration Myths and Global South. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. (30): 46-55. Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2018.

²² UNITED NATIONS. Total international migrant stock. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>. Accessed at: 12 oct. 2021.

²³ BOMTEMPO, D.C.; SENA, K.B.P. Migração internacional de africanos para o Brasil e suas territorialidades no estado do Ceará. *Geografares [Online]*, 33. 2021. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/>

This study emphasizes the role of African workers, primarily concentrated in the southwestern region of Paraná, where they are predominantly employed in BRF's meatpacking plant, handling halal meat.

The life story of Omar illustrates this situation. Omar, a Senegalese immigrant, lives in the city of Francisco Beltrão (southwestern Paraná), where he is employed in the halal meat cutting department at BRF. Originally, he planned to move to Italy, where his father had lived as an immigrant. Omar's older brother joined his father and provided support for his younger brother. In 2014, however, as Italy tightened immigration restrictions, his aspirations to migrate to that country were frustrated, prompting him to shift his ambitions towards Brazil. He became aware of job opportunities in meatpacking plants, as well as the fact that Muslim workers received enhanced salaries for handling halal meat for export. After traveling to Peru, he entered Brazil by crossing the border in the state of Acre. There, Omar spent two weeks in a refugee camp before taking a bus to the South of the country. The travel arrangements were indirectly made by a meatpacking company, a common strategy for recruiting immigrants, leading him to the city of Maringá in northern Paraná. There, he worked for a short period in the GTFoods slaughterhouse. Before arriving in the city of Francisco Beltrão, where he currently lives, he worked in two other cities in the chicken meat cutting industry.

Omar left Senegal due to his inability to provide food for his family, a consequence of the country's fragile economic conditions. These reasons also prompted his older brother to migrate and, before him, their father. Migration became a tradition within Omar's family and among many other Senegalese. For them, remaining in Senegal is more challenging than migrating. They seek alternative destinations due to economic pressures intertwined with affective commitments, moral principles that entail family responsibilities, a sense of powerlessness, and experiences that undermine their right to have expectations. Hence, when an immigrant moves to Italy or Brazil, the remittances sent are crucial for sustaining their family in Senegal, making the difference between hunger and survival. In 2014, when Omar started working at BRF's meatpacking plant, the first remittances he sent to his mother were added to those from different countries, accounting for 9.7% of Senegal's GDP. In 2020, immigrant money sent to Senegal constituted 10.2%

of the country's GDP²⁴. Omar intends to stay in Francisco Beltrão, although he considers moving to the United States.

Omar illustrates the rapid increase in the population of international migrants in Paraná, a phenomenon observed since the beginning of the 21st century. Despite minor variations in data from different sources such as International Migration Observatory (Observatório das Migrações Internacionais, OBMigra) and General Register of Employed and Unemployed Persons (Cadastro Geral de Empregados e Desempregados, CAGED), there is no discrepancy when it comes to highlighting international migration trends. All the identified sources have indicated a continuous increase in the arrival of immigrants in Paraná and a consistent net migration surplus measured annually since 2001. In this regard, Paraná ranks among the top five states that have received the highest influx of immigrants since 2010. However, this statistic is based on official sources and may not encompass a significant portion of the immigrant population, which is difficult to estimate accurately²⁵. Omar is undeniably one of them.

Paraná holds the highest concentration of Haitian immigrants with formal employment contracts, particularly those who migrated in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. In 2011, there were only six Haitians with formal work contracts registered in Paraná. In 2012, this number increased to 778, then to 3,221 in 2013, and 6,647 in 2014, a conjunctural but significant increase of over 1,774 times in just four years²⁶. According to 2019 data, Paraná accounts for approximately 15% of the total active registrations of Haitians, behind only to the state of São Paulo.

The city of Curitiba is the primary destination for the majority of Haitians arriving in Paraná. The western region of the state is the second most common destination²⁷. Around 6,000 Haitians live in this region, accounting for nearly 5% of the Haitian population in the country. Most of them are employed in meatpacking plants. In the western and southwestern regions, there are a total of eight industrial meat slaughtering and cutting

²⁴ WORLD BANK. Remittance Inflows to GDP for Senegal. Global Financial Development. 2021. Available at: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/DDO111SNA156NWDB#>. Accessed in: 4 dec. 2021.

²⁵ OBMIGRA. Relatório Anual 2020. Observatório das Migrações Internacionais. 2020. Available at: <https://portaldeimigracao.mj.gov.br>. Accessed in: 14 feb. 2021.

²⁶ OLIVEIRA, M. et al. Política Migratória e Universidade Brasileira: a experiência do atendimento a haitianos e outros migrantes na UFPR. *Périplos. Revista De Estudos Sobre Migrações*, 1(1), 73–91. Available at: https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/obmigra_periplos/

²⁷ BAENINGER, R. et al. (Orgs.) *Imigração Haitiana no Brasil*. São Paulo: Paco Editorial, 2016.

facilities, three major facilities are located in the city of Cascavel and one in Francisco Beltrão. Three meatpacking plants in Cascavel hired 1,160 Haitian workers in 2019, placing the city second nationally, behind only to the city of Chapecó in Santa Catarina. Proportionally, Cascavel became responsible for approximately 15% of the Haitians employed in meatpacking plants in the country²⁸.

There is no need to further examine the statistical data, since the information presented is enough to indicate that Brazil emerged as a destination for foreign workers, and the western and southwestern regions of Paraná played a crucial role as destinations for Haitians and Africans who sought refuge outside their countries. Therefore, it is important to delve further into the trajectories of immigrants such as Omar, who shaped their expectations under arduous economic pressures.

Those who leave and those who stay

A vivid imaginary persists in the western and southwestern regions of Paraná that these territories were originally settled by foreigners.

It is common to encounter men and women in Paraná who consider themselves as Germans, Italians or Polish, for example. In fact, their grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents emigrated from Germany, Italy, and Poland to the far south of Brazil (Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul), and bought land, known today as “colônia”, for agricultural purposes. In these regions, districts emerged during the mid-20th century, which would later evolve into municipalities, such as Toledo, Marechal Cândido Rondon, Palotina, and Francisco Beltrão, among others. However, this narrative encompasses two myths.

The first one advocates the idea that this place was a non-place, a demographic void. This thesis disregards and omits the presence of indigenous people and caboclos, communities with histories prior to that of these immigrants. This happens not because there is no awareness about it. The second myth reconciles the arrival of these same immigrants to these regions by asserting that the state of Paraná (its state apparatus) embraced and continues to welcome diligent foreigners with a strong work ethic, assuming that this was the spirit that inspired and motivated all families of foreign heritage who emigrated from the far south. Therefore, ethnicity would

²⁸ RAIS. Relação Anual de Informações Sociais. Ministério do Trabalho e do Emprego. Available at: <http://www.rais.gov.br/>. Accessed in: 09 jan. 2020.

act as a guarantee of moral integrity and helpfulness. Over the past three decades, an extensive and well-documented historiography problematized the first myth and discredited the history of the colonization of the western and southwestern regions, showing the preexisting human presence in these areas. There is no need to delve into it here.

However, concerning the second myth, immigration has mostly been treated as a biblical event, disconnected from the past, characterized by captivating narratives, dramatic conclusions, and a cast consisting only of European descendants, portrayed with simplified characterizations. Haitians and Africans are not considered typical immigrants to Paraná, as are Italians, Germans, and Poles, who have planted their residual cultural roots in festivals, dances, and languages. Drawing upon a concept from Raymond Williams, the recognized and questioned presence of Haitians and Africans can be interpreted from a cultural perspective as emergent due to its relatively recent occurrence and, most importantly, due to its potential to assert influence, despite not being given an equivalent cultural and political status by the dominant classes as the mythological presence of Germans and Italians²⁹. Therefore, when they migrate to this region, Haitians and Africans lay claim to their lived experiences in their countries of origin and embrace their experiences in Brazil, a topic examined next.

Omar migrated primarily for economic reasons, it can be explained by the typical financial demands. Outside their home country, these workers expect to secure decent work, to be compensated adequately to cover rent, food, and to send regular remittances to their family or dependents who stayed behind. Healthcare and education are special cases since the free access to the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde) and public universities surprise immigrants. But these are two elements that are not a priority for the Haitian and African immigrants who were the subject of this research. The prospect of sending financial remittances is one of the key factors that drive the international migration experience. There is no novelty in this, except for its implications for their families, their countries and themselves.

International institutions and academic studies observe this phenomenon, particularly due to remittances representing a substantial portion of the GDP of countries such as Haiti, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. From 1970 to 2019, on a five-year scale, the aggregate of US dollar remittances

²⁹ WILLIAMS, Raymond. Dominante, Residual e Emergente. In *Marxismo e Literatura*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores, 1979.

sent by immigrants to their countries of origin increased from 1.9 billion to 656.4 billion. During the Covid-19 pandemic, these remittances declined but resumed growth in 2023, according to an estimate published in 2023 in the “World Migration Report 2022”³⁰, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Personal remittances received worldwide (1970-2023)

Year	Remittances received in billions of US\$
1970	1,9
1975	10,2
1980	37,0
1985	35,8
1990	68,4
1995	94,5
2000	121,7
2005	253,1
2010	419,4
2015	568,2
2019	656,4
2023*	656,1

Source: World Bank, 2023

*Estimated value

The countries of origin of the immigrants interviewed are heavily reliant on remittances. In 2018, for example, remittances accounted for 5.67% of Bangladesh’s GDP. In Ghana, they accounted for 5.37%; in Guinea-Bissau, 8.7%; in Pakistan, 6.73%; and in Senegal, 10.44%. In 2020, Haiti received remittances equivalent to 22% of its GDP, ranking as the third highest percentage in Latin America³¹.

³⁰ IOM. International Organization for Migration. **World Migration Report of 2022**. 17 route des Morillons P.O. Box 17, 1211 Geneva 19. Switzerland, 2023. Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022-EN_1.pdf. Accessed in: 12 mar. 2023.

³¹ WORLD BANK. Remittance Inflows to GDP for Senegal. Global Financial Development. 2021. Available at: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/DDO111SNA156NWDB#>. Accessed in: 4 dec. 2021.

These financial remittances constitute a substantial component in the agenda of international organizations overseeing migrations because they provide essential support to around one billion individuals worldwide. They have continued to expand since the 1970s, despite unfavorable economic circumstances. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than 50% of remittances are directed towards rural areas, where 75% of the impoverished population resides and faces food insecurity. These remittances are related to acquisition of food and meeting expenses related to housing, education, and healthcare. These indicators offer valuable insights into the social, political, and economic impacts of international migration (the remittance dynamic extends to regional levels as well) on the economies of impoverished and developing nations, such as Mexico.

However, as stated in the introduction, we can draw on this material and combine it with the lived experiences and narratives of immigrants to delve deeper into the issue from a historical perspective. While economic pressures frequently influence the decision to migrate, it remains fundamentally an action driven by social ties, affective relations, by emotional connections with family, and as a form of resistance against poverty. Saving part of one's earnings to send to a family member who lives thousands of kilometers away is a gesture of affection, of solidarity.

It should be considered that remittances are frequently employed to repay migration-related debts. Nonetheless, once these financial obligations are satisfied, the remittance flow tends to persist, whether on a regular basis or for specific purposes, such as covering medical or funeral expenses. The immigrant's departure does not seem to be permanent, as it engenders both financial and affective commitments that require eventual resolution. According to Edward Said, "exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out: but only sometimes"³² (SAID, 2003). Furthermore, the author highlights, and this is a critical analytical insight, that the imposition of both physical and emotional distance experienced by the immigrant represents "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted". Being far from home constitutes an interdiction, even as new ties of belonging are established in the foreign nation. Thus, when we examine the feelings of exile and the physical separation from family, friends, and the places that

³² SAID, Edward. *Reflections on the Exile and other essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.

support memory, we observe that the boundaries distinguishing exile from migration are subtle.

Jaber Ahmed is a Bengali employed in the halal meat cutting department at the BRF's meatpacking plant located in the city of Francisco Beltrão. In an interview taken in 2021, we inquired about his monthly remittances. He explained that he sends money to his brother and mother, his family in Bangladesh. "I always help them every month"³³. He argues that until 2013 "it was very good here. Brazil's economy was doing well when I arrived. It was almost two Brazilian reais for one dollar. Now... it's five reais for one dollar, I think"³⁴. Jaber understands how the floating exchange rate system operates, and he is aware that this policy affects immigrants, including him. "This problem is not exclusive to us, Bengalis. All foreigners here in Brazil are suffering a lot. Because every month they need to send there... to those countries, Africa, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Arab countries, anything... all of them"³⁵.

Jaber, however, does not consider emigrating again under illegal circumstances, which could potentially lead to deportation. Therefore, he prefers to send less money to Bangladesh and remain in Brazil, employed in the meatpacking plant. He is determined to stay in the country for as long as possible, as he fears being deported to Bangladesh if he fails in another migration attempt, which would disrupt his remittances to his mother. Work and affection are intertwined.

Gerson, a Haitian, holds a significant position in articulating Haitian communities in the western region of Paraná. Until early 2022, he lived in Cascavel, Paraná, with his family (wife and a baby), and his enthusiasm and commitment ensured the creation of two courses of Portuguese as a Second Language. The students needed to develop the abilities to speak and understand basic conversations in order to do job interviews, shop in supermarkets, communicate with Brazilian authorities, and, above all, to get the necessary documentation from the Federal Police to stay in the country.

In 2020, the course was offered virtually for four men, which later expanded to a group of approximately 20 participants, predominantly men.

³³ Originally in Portuguese: "Eu sempre por mês ajuda lá."

³⁴ Originally in Portuguese: "aqui muito bom aqui. A economia do Brasil tava muito bom quando eu cheguei. Quase, eu acho, dois real aquele um dólar. Agora... cinco real por um dólar, eu acho."

³⁵ Originally in Portuguese: "Esse problema não é nosso, Bangladesh. Tudos os estrangeiros aqui no Brasil tá sofrendo muito. Porque tudos mês eles precisam mandar lá... nesses país, África, Bangladesh, Índia, Paquistão, arabianos, qualquer coisa... tudos."

As a result, we were able to transfer the course to the campus of the Western Paraná State University (Unioeste) and have on-campus classes. We established a protocol with the Federal Police for the production and validation of certificates. From 2020 to July 2023, we certified three hundred Haitians, and more recently, Cubans and Venezuelans also attended the course. However, Gerson moved to Toledo, a city in Paraná located 40 kilometers from Cascavel, to work in another meatpacking plant and earn a higher wage. Despite his consistently serious look, he appeared to enjoy talking about his compatriots: “Haitians are difficult”³⁶. Indeed, Haitians frequently argue *among themselves*. They engage in loud disputes over minor issues, but without escalating to physical contact. The expression “Haitians are difficult” sounded as a polite apology. Gerson advocated for the demands of his people for as long as he could. These demands only appeared as he acquired a deeper comprehension of the Brazilian society. His ability to navigate between these two worlds and connect them was critical to the success of the course of Portuguese as a Second Language.

Gerson, who currently resides and works in Toledo, was informed by his younger brother that their mother was hospitalized in Haiti. The family members who remained in Haiti did not have sufficient funds to cover the expenses, so Gerson had to borrow money from a friend in Brazil to pay off the debt. However, his mother’s health did not improve, and she passed away. Therefore, Gerson took out a new loan to cover the costs of the wake and burial. He was unable to bid farewell to his mother, but he seemed to believe that the last remittance for his mother’s care sealed his commitment to his migration to Brazil. Gerson’s daughter never met her grandmother. She was born in Brazil and holds a Brazilian citizenship. She will inherit the values of Gerson and her mother’s, an education that encompasses both Brazilian and Haitian influences. This is her way of connecting with her unknown grandmother.

The Senegalese Bubakar, born in 1991 and interviewed at the age of 29, had established a regular pattern of engaging in informal, part-time jobs in Senegal, often referred to as “odd jobs”. This path aligns with a prevailing tradition, as his father and other family members worked and still work without formal employment agreements. The economic and population dynamics that impact the labor market in his country of origin compelled Bubakar to emigrate to Dakar, the capital of Senegal. He departed from

³⁶Originally in Portuguese: “Haitiano é difícil”.

Kébémér, a city with less than 20,000 inhabitants where agricultural and horticultural activities, as well as peanut cultivation, are prevalent.

During our conversation, Bubakar conveyed a well-elaborated understanding of his personal history within the broader context of his country's history and its place in the global economy. Agricultural and pastoral labor is traditional in Africa, an age-old mode of production that exports products to core capitalist nations such as the United States. Peanuts, gum arabic, and wax, for example, are Senegalese commodities that have supplied international markets since the first half of the 20th century. The country occupies a peripheral position in the context of globalization, supplying raw material to dynamic economies at low prices, enabled by informal labor exploitation.

During the period of Bubakar's emigration, the count of salaried positions dropped from 390,420 in 2012 to 300,284 in 2018. However, in Senegal, there was a "modernization" process whose counterpart for international guarantors agencies resulted, in the same period, in an increase in spending from 2.2% to 4.4% of GDP on interest payments on external debt, transfers of profits and dividends, remuneration of foreign consultants, and other similar expenses³⁷. Thus, Bubakar is also a product of the expansion and rearrangements of capitalism. Culturally, he is a Senegalese of the Wolof ethnic group who has a habit of emigrating. Bassirou, Bubakar's father, migrated to Italy in the late 1990s. He later sponsored the migration of his eldest son in 2007, who, in return, financed Bubakar's move to Brazil in 2015 due to the difficulties of bringing him to Europe. The family continues to be geographically dispersed and distant but their connection remains strong.

There are documented cases of other Senegalese ethnicities who have migrated to Brazil in this century. Such is the case of Diallo, a Senegalese from the Fulani (Peuls) ethnic group, who resided with his family in Dakar. He worked as a welder for a company that produces iron doors and gates until he received an inheritance from his father. As the eldest son, "it's called miraz, the father's first son. For example, if my father passed away, all of his money would be given, the Sheikh would take care of it, divide it [...]. So, I left it there and told my mother: 'I'm going to travel'"³⁸. The father's inheritance also brings the responsibility of providing for the family. For Diallo, it represents a

³⁷ TEDESCO, J. C. (Org.) *Imigrações senegalesas: múltiplas dimensões*. Vol II. Porto Alegre: ETS Edições, 2019.

³⁸ Originally in Portuguese: "chama miraz, o primeiro filho do pai. Por exemplo, se meu pai faleceu todo dinheiro dele ele dava, Xeique vai ver, divide [...]. Aí eu deixei lá e falei pra minha mãe: 'vou viajar'".

moral and emotional obligation that intensifies the importance of migration. “To go far away is to help our family. My grandfather takes care of my father, then my father takes care of my grandfather, then my father takes care of me, and then I take care of my father”³⁹.

In 2016, following ancient traditions incorporated by syncretized Islam, Diallo purchased tickets to migrate to Guayaquil, Ecuador. From there, he crossed the border into Bolivia and Peru, finally arriving in Brazil. Due to the low salaries and the lack of expectations in Senegal, Diallo chose a path that friends and acquaintances had been taking since the early years of the second decade of this century. At the same time, the demographic pressure in the capital, which accounts for 22% of the total population of the country and 53% of its urban population, concentrated in an area covering just 0.3% of the national territory, imposes a harsh reality on the local population: migration becomes a way to maintain ties with home and family.

Sayad helps to understand and explain Diallo’s experience by saying that immigrants experience a phenomenon of “double absence”⁴⁰. To *be* in Africa, you have to *be* in Brazil. This feeling can be translated by the expression: “I did not come here to waste time, I came here to help my family”⁴¹. Living abroad has evolved from being merely an aspect of a “migration flow” in search of employment to also encompass the reaffirmation of values and customs that migrants, such as Diallo, uphold. This form of familial relationship and traditional obligation also emerges in stories such as Issa’s.

Issa was born in Ghana, in the city of Kumasi in 1980. He is a member of the Muslim community and the Hausa ethnic group in a region predominantly influenced by the Asante tradition⁴². He spent his childhood between two cities, Kumasi and Atebubu, in southern Ghana. He used to accompany his father, who traveled to work on seasonal jobs, alternating between regional markets. Typically, his father would take up odd jobs as a vendor in the *Kejetia Market*, then move on to the charcoal factories in Atebubu before returning. His father passed away when Issa was young, then his mother became the

³⁹ Originally in Portuguese: “Essa de sair pra longe é pra ajudar nossa família. Meu avô cuida de meu pai, depois meu pai cuida do meu avô, depois meu pai me cuida, depois eu cuida do meu pai”.

⁴⁰ SAYAD, Abdelmalek. *A Imigração ou os paradoxos da alteridade*. São Paulo: USP, 1998.

⁴¹ Originally in Portuguese: “Não vim aqui para perder tempo, vim para ajudar minha família”.

⁴² The term Asante refers to a group of individuals with a shared history of migration from the Sahel to the southern equatorial African forest between the 10th and 13th centuries, a location that corresponds to the present-day city of Kumasi. The Asantes occupy one-third of the total territory of Kumasi and assert cultural dominance over the minority Muslim population.

family's main provider, selling vegetables and dried fish at the central market along the railroad, the same railroad where his father worked for the "white" English employers in the 1970s. Shortly after his father's death, Issa became a carpenter. The amount he earned as an assembler of plywood furniture, plus with his mother's earnings from her market sales, was not enough to pay for their rent, a house where they lived with five other siblings and two younger children. These circumstances led Issa to leave Kumasi and explore migratory routes as a means of survival outside Ghana.

In the early years of this century, Issa attempted to emigrate to Spain and the United States, but was unsuccessful due to the tightening of (anti) immigration laws, which also impacted refugee immigrants. In 2009, he moved to São Paulo. During that year, he secured a permanent residency visa and worked in unattractive, unstable occupations, such as bagging groceries in supermarkets, in the construction sector, and at halal meatpacking plants. However, it was under these circumstances that his mother was able to build a house in Ghana with the money he sent her on a monthly basis. Certainly, there is an emotional price to be paid, as Issa had to leave his country, his place and his family. It is from afar that he shares the happiness of his mother and his children.

Final remarks

The heritage brought by immigrants holds significant importance for both them and us. They identify themselves through these heritages while being far from their home country (or to safeguard their identity from being compromised). From an external perspective, such as ours, these heritages serve as valuable research materials that help to comprehend the history of contemporary immigration and to address the questions: why do individuals leave their countries? What commitments are made with the families regarding regular remittances? How do they perceive their place in southwestern and western Paraná? How and in what ways are they assimilated? What stories do they have to share after their departure from their home countries?

At the same time, they face a zone of obscurity, akin to what many workers from diverse parts of the world experience. They may live their lives without protesting against similar situations, or they can react and change the conditions that affect them. Neither light nor darkness. It will always be a difficult choice, which depends on how they handle their experiences, their perception of capitalism, and the values that guide their interpretations and

decisions. In other words, the question addressed in this study, which we maintain as a hypothesis, is *how* workers unravel this situation⁴³.

Finally, the perceptions of those who leave and those who stay are similar. Their shared aspiration is to enhance their quality of life, benefiting both those who depart and those who remain. Thus, our interviewees send part of their salaries to their families back in their countries of origin. They do not sever their ties with Africa or Haiti. These affective ties, albeit not uniform, are the subject of our study. At the same time, the Africans and Haitians who were the subjects of this study arrive in the southwestern and western regions of Paraná with minimal or no financial resources, few personal belongings, and a blend of hope and apprehension, after a long journey full of real and imagined dangers. Their most common aspirations include employment, food, housing, and the possibility of sharing their salary with their families back home. They arrive *without anything*, a condition similar to that of many Brazilians. The preposition “without” points to the daily lives of poor Brazilian workers. Without land, without housing, without a job, without access to education, without dignity, without respect, without security, without healthcare, and often, without hope.

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