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**Master's Thesis**

**Brazilian migrants**  
**in The Netherlands**

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# CHAPTER 1

## First steps

## **1.1 Acknowledgments**

This Thesis is dedicated to all the interviewees who kindly shared with me the stories of their lives, narrating the matters that they, South American citizens like myself, experienced while migrating to The Netherlands. Nothing could have been done if they had not invited me to their homes to talk or shared with me some coffee or a meal and a rich conversation about their life stories.

I would also like to thank Lana Dodig for the proof-reading of this document and my supervisors for their unconditional support.

## 1.2 Introduction

*I'm tired of always going out prepared for the worst, always with a speech prepared or an excuse, just in case the police stop me. But at this point, I have everything under control: I know what to say in each situation in order not to be caught.*

*When a Dutch friend calls me to invite me for dinner four weeks in advance, I just refuse it and say: "No, I want to see you but come tomorrow to my place and we can order a pizza if there isn't anything in the fridge. I want to be friends with them but I don't want to lose my spontaneity and be trapped in an agenda that rules my social life.*

This Master thesis about Brazilian migrants in The Netherlands consists of a descriptive analysis of the Brazilian population currently living in the country, as well as a comparative analysis of the situation of documented and undocumented Brazilians, the problems that they have to deal with and their social integration into the Dutch society.

Brazilians constitute the biggest migrant group from South America in Holland and their presence is increasing and becoming more visible, but not much research has been done regarding this topic, even though the issue of migration has been on the top of the Dutch agenda for at least 10 years.

This is one of the reasons why I became interested in doing this research. I was mainly curious to know what their situation in the country is like, why they migrated, their legal status, what kind of jobs they have, where they live, who their main contacts here are, what the main troubles they face when they arrive are and how they overcome them. These questions were

addressed in the semi-structured interviews that I conducted face to face with Brazilian migrants.

After a descriptive portrayal of the situation of Brazilians in The Netherlands, I analyzed the coping strategies that this group develops in order to carry on with their lives in a different and sometimes adverse context. These strategies, as we see from the examples cited above, are crucial in the daily survival life of migrant groups, since they help them to manage the new internal and external expectations and demands.

Important attention was paid to the integration aspect in terms of social networks, trying to see to what extent they integrate into the Dutch culture and society. The socioeconomic background of the interviewees, as well as their legal status, were also taken into account in the analysis.

My initial thoughts were that Brazilians do not integrate very well into the Dutch culture in terms of social relations and networks and create their own spaces for relationship and socialization, but they still stay in the country looking for new possibilities to work and earn an income. I also believe that there are significant differences between the integration of documented and undocumented Brazilians.

Some of the factors that I took into consideration about the habits of Brazilians living in Amsterdam were: work, education, housing, religion, remittances, language, friends, relatives, daily routine, leisure, hobbies, etc.

Interviewees were 18 Brazilian migrants living in different parts of the country, males and females, of various ages and different legal status

(documented and undocumented migrants). I will describe this process in detail in the Methodology section of this thesis.

### **1.3 Theoretical framework**

In this section, I shall define the main concepts that will be used in the research, following theoretical concepts of different authors, as well as personal elaborations.

#### ***Stress, discrimination and coping***

Since I am analyzing the coping strategies that Brazilians employ in situations of stress, discrimination and other situations, I consider it pertinent to clearly define these terms.

Any migratory process involves a certain level of stress per se and this is not an exception. According to Smith (Smith, 1997:232), stress is defined in terms of stressful life events or stressors that demand adaptation but also regarding the intervening role of cognitive appraisal in defining an event or situation as stressful. In short, stressors are issues that cause a stress reaction. They have different intensities and can originate both from the individual as well as from the own environment.

Predictable stressors that arise from migration processes are linguistic and cultural disparities, anxiety, pressures, discrimination, difficulties in procuring suitable employment and climatic adjustments (Spitzer, 2003:1). But there are other stressors that can appear in some cases such as changing gender roles, downward mobility and frustrated ambitions (ibid).

Discrimination is one of the stressors that I wanted to investigate in more depth. Bruss defines discrimination as “a process by which a member of a socially defined group is treated differently (especially unfairly) because of her/his membership in that group (...) Discriminatory behaviour ranges from avoidance, rejection, antipathy and differential allocation of resources to physical attacks” (Bruss, 2005:877).

In order to overcome stressful situations, discriminatory experiences and other challenging processes that migrants have to face, they tend to develop different coping strategies. Folkman and Lazarus define coping as “changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (in Smith, 1997:236). The authors identify four steps in the coping process: 1) appraisal 2) selecting a coping strategy 3) carrying out the coping strategy and 4) evaluation of the coping efforts (ibid).

Gall (Gall, 2005) considers that the first step towards coping behaviours is the initial appraisal that the individual has with the attempt to making sense of the stressor, that is how the person can explain the situation he or she is experiencing. The author affirms: “Such attempts at making meaning may help the individual to reduce initial levels of distress enough to engage in coping behaviour” (Gall, 2005:90).

### ***Integration***

The ability to develop coping strategies will influence the level of integration that one migrant has with the receiving society. Being able to successfully cope with stressors will provide the individual with more

chances of feeling better with her or himself and with the new environment as well. This being said, the attitude of the receiving society towards migrants will also influence the integration process of new migrants.

Since I want to observe the level of integration of Brazilians in Dutch society, I consider it essential to have a pertinent definition of what integration means.

The definition of integration of the European Commission is the following:

*“Integration should be understood as a two way process based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of legally resident third country nationals and the host society which provides for full participation of the immigrant. This implies on the one hand that it is the responsibility of the host society to ensure that the formal rights of immigrants are in place in such a way that the individual has the possibility of participating in economic, social, cultural and civic life and on the other, that the immigrants respect the fundamental norms and values of the host society and participate actively in the integration process, without having to relinquish their own identity” (in Barajas, 2008:11).*

Integration is composed by different elements, including cultural aspects such as language, interaction with natives, understanding of habits and values, and socio-economic aspects such as employment, income, housing, education, and political participation.

As Michalowski affirms (2005:3), the integration into the labour market is one important aspect of integration which is also easy to determine. In addition, she affirms:

*“Also crucial is the level of social interaction between immigrants or ethnic minorities and the wider society; and the degree of identification with various norms and values prevalent in the host country. Such elements are clearly more difficult to measure, but they are nonetheless important aspects of successful integration”.*

These aspects are very relevant as well. As Van der Leun affirms “official policies have a limited influence on illegal immigrants’ life chances. In this respect, an immigrant’s embeddedness within the labour market and within ethnic communities are often more important” (Van der Leun, 2006:311).

According to Vermeulen and Penninx (2001), the notion of integration is composed by a social and an ethno-cultural position. The social position is measured with factors such as labour and income, education and housing. While the ethno-cultural position is more difficult to measure, it can include subjects such as religion, language, contacts and attitudes within the immigrant group and the receiving society.

Some key factors that determine a good integration into a foreign society is speaking the language and having legal permission to work in the country. Through speaking the local language and having a job in the receiving society, people have bigger chances of understanding how society works, experiencing its culture, building more relations with citizens from the country, renting or buying a house, and progressing in their professional career. In a further step, they would be able to get involved in typical social activities as well as participate civically.

Apart from that, as De Wind points out (De Wind, 1997:1102), and as redundant as it may sound “an immigrant’s willingness to assimilate obviously depends in part on the terms under which the host society is willing to have him or her do so”. Besides, as the author mentions regarding migrants in the United States: “Not only does American culture limit the choices that immigrants can make (...) so too does the culture that immigrants bring with them to the United States” (De Wind, 1997:1102). A similar case may occur with Brazilian migrants who come to The Netherlands, with such a particular culture that contrasts with the Dutch one.

Moreover, as Van der Leun affirms “incorporation is a multilevel process in which not only the individual immigrant plays a part, but in which the influence of the wider context –the institutional environment– is also taken into account” (Van der Leun, 2003:24). The author also establishes a difference between the subjective dimension and the functional dimension of integration. The first is related to feeling part of the society, while the second has to do with the participation in the labour market.

Different authors who have studied migratory groups have noticed that there are significant differences between middle class groups and lower class groups that undertake migratory processes. These differences are mainly seen in motivations, expectations, goals, and social capital, among others. In different literature about Brazilians living abroad (Jordan and Vogel, 1997; Margolis, 1993; Sales, 2008; Various authors, 2007), class is mentioned as playing a decisive role in the integration process. Therefore, we can infer that for the case of Brazilians in The Netherlands, different socioeconomic backgrounds may determine diverse integration patterns.

## ***Undocumented migrants***

The coping strategies developed by documented and undocumented migrants vary significantly, since the situation of each group and the matters that they have to deal with are very different. Hence, the integration process of each group will also differ. That is why in order to understand and better describe the characteristics of the documented as well as the undocumented group, I decided to analyze each group separately.

Following Van der Leun, I define undocumented migrants in The Netherlands as “individual immigrants who do not have official permission to stay in the country according to the Aliens Act” (Van der Leun, 2003:19). The author also points out that, in the case of migration, there are three forms of illegality: entry, residence and employment.

According to different studies regarding Brazilian migrants in New York, Boston, Germany and London (Margolis, 1993; Sales, 2008; Jordan and Vogel, 1997; Various authors, 2007), the majority of them goes abroad and remains undocumented in the host country. Not driven by extreme poverty conditions or political repression, they escape from a fluctuant economic situation that does not allow them to attain middle-class levels.

Even though in many cases they migrate with an education and they belong to the middle class, their lack of knowledge of the local language and mainly their lack of authorization to legally work in the host country, leads them to accept unskilled jobs that they would never have performed in Brazil.

As Alba and Nee affirm referring to the undocumented migrants in the United States, “undocumented status restricts their labor market mobility since it effectively closes off opportunities to find jobs in the regulated portion of the urban labor market” (Alba and Nee, 1997:856). And, as Van der Leun explains regarding the Dutch case, “the highly regulated Dutch labour market certainly has its loopholes. These loopholes exist in certain well-known sectors of the labour market, such as horticulture and construction, where the advantages of dodging the rules are high for employers who are willing to take the risk” (Van der Leun, 2003:57).

### ***Undocumented migrants in The Netherlands***

Van Liempt and Doomernik (Van Liempt, Doomernik, 2006) affirm that the general attitude towards illegal migrants has become more negative in Western Europe in the past years, and The Netherlands is not an exception. The authors conclude that the restrictive immigration policies have not reduced the number of irregular entries, rather the opposite. “In this sense, policy is part of the problem rather than the solution” (ibid), they affirm.

Coinciding with this, van der Leun says: “The large gap between these policies and the observed outcomes has led to a heated debate about the abilities of states to control migration” (Van der Leun, 2006:311).

Currently, about 10 percent of the population of The Netherlands has a non-Western immigrant background (born abroad or with one of their parents born abroad). According to different sources and estimates, around 7 per cent of them remain in the country illegally (Van Liempt, Doomernik, 2006).

Castells makes reference to how different dominated groups build “trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society” (in Tsuda, 2000:56). As narrated in several sources, undocumented migrants work, get accommodation and survive thanks to different mechanisms that do not belong to the formal institutions of a certain country.

The social networks that they create to do so are crucial. Sales for example points out the importance of social networks for Brazilians who migrated to Boston (Sales, 2008). These networks helped them to obtain the first house, the first job, and the first contacts in a foreign country.

I believe that the situation that Brazilian migrants experience abroad, as described by the authors mentioned above, can provide a hunch of what the situation of Brazilian migrants in The Netherlands is like. But before extrapolating any conclusions, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews to obtain an in-depth insight into how this community lives in Holland.

## **1.4 Research question**

The two research questions that guide this thesis are: “What are the main issues that Brazilian migrants face when they arrive to The Netherlands and how do they deal with them?” and “How do they socially integrate into Dutch society?”

In this research, I use the term integration as defined by Vermeulen and Penninx (see above), taking into consideration the social and the ethno-cultural position of the Brazilian community in The Netherlands.

The sub-questions are:

- What is the situation of Brazilians in terms of social and cultural interaction within Dutch society? (language, housing, job, friends, attitudes towards the receiving society, sense of belonging, habits and values)
- Which are the coping strategies of documented Brazilians in relation to the problems they face?
- Which are the coping strategies of undocumented Brazilians in relation to the problems they face?

Apart from answering these questions, I shall make a comparison between documented and undocumented Brazilians in terms of the issues they deal with, coping strategies, labour, studies, housing and social interaction and networks.

## **1.5 Methodology**

For the purposes of this investigation, I conducted a qualitative research employing different methods, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

In this sense, I share the view that Denzin postulates about qualitative research:

*“(Qualitative research is) a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into*

*a series of interpretations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world"* (Denzin, 2003:4).

Taking this definition into account means being aware that a qualitative research always involves a subjective interpretation of the reality and that the role of the researcher is key here. Therefore, it is always important to keep this in mind during the process of investigation and try to represent reality as accurately as possible, always knowing that we will never be able to reflect it or have a 100 per cent objective document.

One way of procuring an accurate description of the issue to be studied is to use different methods and, as Denzin affirms, "hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand (...) Each practice makes the world visible in a different way" (Denzin, 2003:5).

This process is defined as triangulation: "The use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked" (Denzin, 2003:8). And Denzin expands: "(Triangulation) secures an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured" (ibid).

In order to accomplish my objectives, I conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with Brazilian migrants of both genders (documented and undocumented) living in The Netherlands. Apart from these formal interviews, I've talked informally with many other Brazilians that live in The Netherlands who gave me a lot of useful insights and put me in contact with other Brazilians that I later interviewed.

As Abrantes mentions (Abrantes, 2008:11), Brazilian migrants constitute a diverse population in any country that they migrate to, in terms of “size, ethnic, politic and socioeconomic segmentation of their home country”. That is why I considered it useful to make a distinction between Brazilians from different socioeconomic backgrounds who migrate to The Netherlands.

I share the view of Gans who criticizes the preconceptions of the original ethnic researchers who thought that immigrants come “with an old country culture which is so homogeneous and holistic that it could be codified in a textbook (...) Every immigrant family comes with its own ethnic practices, which are most likely a mix of handed-down remembered family, community and regional practices” (Gans, 1997:881).

The sampling was selected using a snowball sample. This is defined as “a non-probability sample in which the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others” (Bryman, 2008:699). Nevertheless, throughout this research I tried to maintain certain heterogeneity among respondents with respect to age, gender, city of residence and city of origin in Brazil, in order to have a broader picture of the different trajectories and life experiences of the interviewees.

I recognize the fact that this kind of sample is not random but, as Becker explains “it would not be possible to draw a random sample, since no one knows the nature of the universe from which it would have to be drawn” (in Bryman, 2008:185). In this case, even though I had official statistics that show the number of Brazilian migrants living in The Netherlands, these

figures do not count the number of undocumented citizens that live in the country, so my universe was not well-defined. Besides, migrants are by definition a shifting population who settles in a new country, come back, is deported, etc. Moreover, as Bryman says: "Concerns about external validity and the ability to generalize do not loom as large within a qualitative research strategy as they do in a quantitative research one" (Bryman, 2008:185).

### ***Profile of the interviewees***

For this research, I've interviewed 11 Brazilian women and 7 Brazilian men, aged between 26 and 50, the average age being 34. Most of them were from the South East of Brazil, which goes in line with what diverse studies confirm that the majority of Brazilian who migrate abroad are from that region of the Coast of Brazil (see for example Fusco, 2008; Piscitelli, 2008). They were from heterogeneous socioeconomic backgrounds, from urban areas. 11 of them were documented and 7 undocumented.

The earliest migrant came to the country in 1999 and the majority of the others came in 2003. They came for different reasons: most of the documented migrants came because they married a Dutch citizen and some of them for work or education, while all the undocumented individuals came for economical reasons and work, mainly in construction (men) and domestic help (women). All the undocumented individuals –except for two interviewees who had recently arrived to The Netherlands– send remittances to their families in Brazil, as do some of the documented migrants.

The interviewees live in different parts of the country, but the majority resides in Amsterdam.

### ***Questionnaire***

There was a questionnaire that guided the interviews but other questions also arose in each case (See annex 1 for the complete questionnaire).

The first questions that were asked aimed to obtain a general picture of the interviewees and include questions with topics such as age, place of residence in Brazil, reasons for migrating, family composition, expectations and motivations for leaving the country, what the migratory process was like (if they migrated alone or not, if they left their families behind, if they knew someone in the country of migration, etc.), and their plans for the future (in terms of place of residence and other related topics).

These first questions also helped me to understand the initial motivations behind the migrants' arrival in The Netherlands, which was useful for subsequent comparison of these expectations with the actual situation that they experienced when they arrived.

In order to observe the issues that they had to deal with after arriving and how they overcame them, we asked questions regarding the obstacles encountered upon arrival, the help that they received from others and if they experienced any discrimination, among other related matters.

As seen in the theoretical framework, integration is composed of many aspects such as language, housing, job, legal status, friends, attitudes towards receiving society, sense of belonging, habits and values. To investigate these topics, I asked questions regarding the legal status, the

educational background, the labour situation, if they study, if they speak the local language, the friends that they have in the hosting country and the relationship that they maintain with family and friends back home.

Other issues that were discussed in the interviews are related with remittances, trips to Brazil, opinions about Dutch culture, differences between this and the Brazilian culture, and likes and dislikes concerning The Netherlands.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

Bryman postulates that semi-structured interviews happen “in a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from the typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies” (Bryman, 2008:699).

The interviews were conducted individually with each interviewee, in person and in a place selected by her or him, and I always tried to create a comfortable, open and at the same time safe space, so she or he can feel free to talk openly about different topics. Respondents also had the possibility of not answering a question, not talking about certain aspects or not giving specific details if they did not feel comfortable with that and this was clarified beforehand. However, all of them were very open and willing to tell their life stories, maybe due to the fact that anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed and this was especially highlighted from

the beginning of the interview, particularly in the case of interviewing undocumented migrants.

Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and one and a half hour and were conducted in the respondents' first language (Portuguese) and the most relevant extracts were later translated into English. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, except for the ones with undocumented migrants because the recorder seemed to create extra tension in these cases and interviewees spoke much more once the recorder was turned off. In those cases, notes were taken.

### ***Participant observation***

Participant observation is defined by Bryman as "research in which the researcher immerses him or her in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversation both between others and with the fieldworkers, and asking questions" (Bryman, 2008:697).

For this research, participant observation was carried out in different contexts and situations, such as two Brazilian bars<sup>1</sup>, a capoeira class, a football match between Brazilian migrants and a meeting with Brazilian intellectuals who gather once a month in the home of one of the participant's. In this case, I did not immerse myself for an extended period, but I rather made visits to those places and observed and listened to people's interactions there.

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<sup>1</sup> Bamboo bar and Cafe de Kluis, both in Amsterdam.

This method resulted useful in combination with the interviews because, as May affirms: “The aim of understanding is actually enhanced by considering how they are affected by the social scene, what goes on within it and how people, including themselves, act and interpret within their social situations” (May, 2001:154).

### ***Overview of the study***

In chapter 2, I shall present some migration patterns in the history of Brazil as well as a brief description of Brazilians in The Netherlands, based on the information that I gathered from the relevant literature and also from the interviews that I conducted for this thesis.

After presenting the interviews and the participatory observation, I shall proceed to chapter 3 and 4 to systematize the information and contrast it with the theoretical framework and relevant literature, in order to arrive at the main findings regarding the situation of Brazilians, their coping strategies and their integration in The Netherlands. The information on documented migrants is presented in chapter 3, while the one on undocumented migrants can be found in chapter 4.

Following the analysis of the data collected from interviews and observation and its comparison with the existing literature, I shall present the conclusions and main findings in chapter 5, highlighting the most important ones and presenting the new questionings that arise, as well as the principal reflections about the issue, with the aim of advancing towards further investigation on this matter. Finally, the list of references and annexes are included at the end of this document.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Trends in Brazilian migratory flows**

## ***2.1 A brief description of Brazilian migration***

Brazil has been a receiving country in the recent past: between 1890 and the World War I, the country was the third among receiving countries in the region, accepting immigrants mainly from Spain, Portugal and Italy. Between 1908 and 1940, Brazil received Japanese immigrants (around 200,000) and immigrants from other European countries. This migration was possible thanks to the government's integration initiatives which created mechanisms that facilitated the arrival of European migrants to work in agriculture, especially in the coffee plantations. Currently, Brazil receives migrants from Latin America but not in a significant amount.

Brazil is the fifth biggest country in the world and the fifth most populated one. Even though its GNI is the 11<sup>th</sup> in the world, the rent per capita is the 58<sup>th</sup> worldwide and it is a country characterized by regional inequalities throughout its territory. São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília are the most prosperous cities and all the main political and socio-economical activities are concentrated there. Some sociologists refer to Brazil as "Belindia", because in the same territory one can find citizens having a life standard similar to that of Belgium, as well as citizens living like people in the poorest regions of India. The income is unequally distributed and there are serious urban inconveniences mainly manifested as high level of violence.

These regional imbalances inside the country have generated big waves of internal migrations from the poorest states to the richest ones and from the rural areas to the cities. But, according to Piscitelli, "this process has changed to a certain degree in recent times, when part of this migration has been redirected abroad" (Piscitelli, 2008:785).

Due to a grave economic crisis, many Brazilian citizens migrated abroad in the eighties, seeking new labour opportunities and social mobility. According to government reports (in Piscitelli, 2008:785), there were about 3 million Brazilians (1.7 per cent of the total population) living abroad in 2006, the majority coming from the South East of Brazil (Fusco, 2008:11). A large number of them live undocumented, which makes it even more difficult to get accurate statistics. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil estimates that the number of Brazilians currently living abroad is around 4 million.

As Fusco mentions (Fusco, 2008:3), the majority of Brazilians living abroad are in the USA, Paraguay and Japan, and 25% of Brazilian migrants are in Europe. Between 2001 and 2007, the number of Brazilians who migrated increased by 61%. The author mentions that, even though the economic situation of Brazil is better than in the eighties, the social networks and the active recruitment maintain the international migratory dynamic up.

## **2. 2 *Brazilians in The Netherlands***

As Barajas points out (Barajas, 2008), there is little visibility of Latin Americans in the current Dutch context, so the majority of the data cannot be found per nationality and refer to the entire American continent or to countries such as Surinam and the Antilles. Besides, there has not been a lot of research of specific subjects such as employment, illegality, criminality, education, and integration.

Latin Americans are classified by the Dutch state as non-western citizens (*niet-westerse allochtonen*), together with the Asian and Africans. The Latin Americans in The Netherlands stand for 62,055 people, including 13,091

Brazilians<sup>2</sup> - the largest represented country from Latin America in The Netherlands (without taking into account Surinam, which was part of the Netherlands Kingdom, and the Netherland Antilles, currently part of the Netherlands Kingdom).

However, unofficial data estimates that there are about 20,000 Brazilians in The Netherlands, approximately 7,000 of which are undocumented. The incongruity between the official numbers and the unofficial estimates could be explained by the fact that Dutch immigration authorities do not have effective means of tracking people down when they enter the country, nor do they record their exit (they do this only in cases of deportation). Besides, since the passport is not stamped once a Brazilian citizen enters The Netherlands, if the police stop this person and ask for identification, there is no prove in the passport of the date of arrival to the country.

The permanence of most Brazilians is limited by the three months that they are allowed to stay in The Netherlands as tourists but many of them stay longer. Without tracking the departures, it is not possible to calculate the number of Brazilians who overstay. As Stienen affirms (Stienen, 2003:29), it is illusory to think that a National State can control and regulate migrations in the current context of globalization. And Van der Leun says: "Once set in motion, immigration flows are often found to be cumulative and self-sustaining and they cannot easily be reversed by legislative measures" (Van der Leun, 2003:21).

The majority of Latin Americans live in the area of Randstad, particularly in Amsterdam (16% of Latinos reside here). According to CBS, about 2,000

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics of The Netherlands), 2006.

Brazilians live in Amsterdam and a significant number lives in the city of Enschede.

All the undocumented interviewees in this research were from Amsterdam, but they also referred to cases of undocumented migrants who work in other cities (Utrecht, The Hague, Rotterdam) or even in the countryside of The Netherlands, working in the tomato plantations or the tulip fields. The documented migrants interviewed were from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Bilthoven, and Hoofddorp.

The interviewees come from different parts of Brazil, but the majority were from the states of Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Goiás and Ceará, all states located in the East of Brazil and generally in the coast. None of the interviewees were from the West part of Brazil, where the population is poorer, often rural, and with less access to travel abroad. The rural population from the West of Brazil usually migrates to the East of the country looking for better life prospects and jobs.

Barajas identifies three main causes of migration from Latin Americans to The Netherlands: the migration of political refugees from Chile, Argentina and Paraguay due to the dictatorships in the seventies<sup>3</sup>; the poor socio-economic conditions from the eighties until 2000; and the events of September 11, 2001 that made it more difficult to migrate to the United States of America, the usual migration point for Latin Americans, and increased the migration to Europe. Due to this last change of scenario, the Latin American population in The Netherlands increased by 47 per cent compared to previous years. Affected by the uncertainty of the economy of

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<sup>3</sup> Since Brazil and Uruguay also experienced dictatorial regimes during this period, part of their population also migrated to Europe, including The Netherlands.

their country, many opt for the “What have I got to lose?” alternative, as Margolis dubbed it while referring to Brazilians who migrate to USA (Margolis, 1993).

The comprehensive study that Barajas did is focused on Latin America, not specifically on Brazil, but Brazilians are included in the study, so her paper could serve as a starting point to know something more about Latin Americans (including Brazilians) in The Netherlands.

Until 2006, the main frequent motives Latin Americans had for migrating to The Netherlands were family reunification and family formation. However, Barajas notes that this will change due to the new legislation that imposes numerous demands on non-Europeans.

It is interesting to notice that, according to the study carried out by Barajas, the Latin American population is mainly female (71%). This goes in line with the feminization of global migration that started about 15 years ago (Stienen, 2003:33), fostered in part by the expansion of the personal service sector (such as domestic help or babysitting), which are tasks that are mainly performed by women.

In the case of Brazilians, there are 2 women to 1 man. The 75 per cent of culturally mixed couples are composed by a Latin American woman and a Dutch man. This was verified when I performed different participatory observations. In Brazilian bars, there were very few men and it was common to see women dancing in couples with other women or in a circle of 4 or 5 friends. The few men that were present remained seated at the bar and occasionally danced with some women.

In fact, as Abrantes mentions (Abrantes, 2008: 17), half of the male newcomers from Brazil leave by the end of the first year, but among female newcomers, between 75 to 80% were still living in The Netherlands after the first few years. This can be related to the higher propensity of women having a legally registered partnership or even marriage with a Dutch citizen.

This also corresponds with what Piscitelli mentions about the feminization of Brazilian migration: "...the racialized and sexualized notions about Brazilian styles of femininity that attract sex tourists to the country also mark female international migrants" (Piscitelli, 2008:784). Currently, Brazilian women constitute 60% of the Brazilians living in Spain and almost 50% of Brazilians living in Portugal.

As cited by Piscitelli (Piscitelli, 2008:786), the majority of migrant women are from lower and middle class, often single or divorced, in their twenties and thirties; almost half of them have children and are "morenas" (dark-skinned). The majority migrates for economic reasons and work in domestic work, taking care of children or elderly or in the sex industry.

This figure matches the profile of the undocumented Brazilian women that I have interviewed: all of them were *morenas* from a deprived socioeconomic background who came to the country leaving their children in Brazil and trying to make money through domestic work.

Piscitelli also mentions the fact that Brazilian women also "acquire a particular value in the marriage market, driven in part by notions about Brazilian femininity that characterize them with sensuality but also with the

valorisation of domesticity and an interest in motherhood" (Piscitelli, 2008:787).

Expanding the facts about mixed marriages, the author affirms:

*"Southern European husbands seem to perceive relationships with these women as an opportunity to recreate traditional patterns of masculinity with the additional spice of enjoying a particular style of sexuality (...) 'Mixed marriages' expose women to risks, particularly for those with fewer resources, who are subjected to more intense degrees of inequality and racism. However, these weddings are most desired since they offer women the main way to obtain residence permits in the context of highly restrictive migration policies"* (Piscitelli, 2008:784).

A big portion of the interviewees from middle class were women who came to The Netherlands to establish a family with a Dutch partner who met either when they were on holidays in Brazil or by online chat rooms.

Apart from these reasons, many Brazilian women come to the country as human trafficking victims. According to studies conducted by the Centre of Information for Latin American, Asiatic and Eastern European women based in Zurich, Brazil and the Dominican Republic are the first countries to traffic women to Europe through organized marriages or prostitution (in Stienen, 2003:35).

Following Barajas study (Barajas, 2008:10), we notice that the population of Latin Americans in The Netherlands is a young one. 40 per cent are less than 18 years old; on average, the first generation is aged from 30 to 39 and the majority of the second generation is 0 to 9 years old. According to CBS

(2006), this composition will change and it is expected that on average 4,000 Latin Americans will enter per year until constituting 200,000 by 2050. Currently, it is estimated that 15% of the Latin American population living in The Netherlands is undocumented.

The level of employment is high (84%) but the income is inferior to the Dutch average. Latin Americans “are on the lowest step of the wage ladder as cheap labour” (Barajas, 2008:39). The majority of the interviewees in this research are employed, but the big difference is that documented migrants are employed in their area of expertise, while undocumented are working in domestic work, child care and construction, always without having a contract. According to Abrantes (Abrantes, 2008:18), OECD statistics suggest that a considerable number of Brazilians in The Netherlands actually work in domestic work, construction and in a smaller proportion in retail, tourism and agro-industry.

Brazil ranks second –after Mexico– among countries in Latin America in terms of the amount of remittances that it receives from abroad (Schweizer, 2008). According to the World Bank, Brazil received around 7.5 billion dollars in remittances in 2006. From the total of remittances received by this country, it is estimated that 42% come from the USA, 34% from Japan, 16% from the European Union and the rest (8%) from other countries.

Based on a study done by FUMIN/BID<sup>4</sup> in 2008, Schweizer affirms that the receivers of remittances are mainly young women (less than 35 years old), with low level of education and from a low-income economic class. 58% of people who receive remittances live in the South East region of Brazil.

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<sup>4</sup> Multilateral Fund for Investments / IDB.

All the undocumented migrants interviewed send money to Brazil, while some of the documented also do, although the main motivations for coming to The Netherlands for the latter group were not economical.

According to Barajas study, Latin Americans have strong links with their countries of origin and are used to travelling there once a year. They feel accepted within the Dutch society, even though they reported having suffered discrimination in some occasions. Dutch citizens interviewed in the study consider that Latin Americans are so immersed in Dutch society that they are not noticed, and they have less cultural differences compared to other migrant groups (such as the Muslim communities).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The situation of documented migrants**

### ***3.1 Arriving to The Netherlands***

In this chapter, I shall analyze the main data obtained in the interviews, including the motivations that the interviewees had to come to The Netherlands, the problems they encountered when they first arrived, the coping strategies that they established to overcome them, and their integration into Dutch society.

Almost all the interviewees who are legal came to the country because they had a Dutch partner and only three came for work or studies. They are all from middle or upper middle class and between 28 and 50 years old. Three of them met their partners in Internet chat rooms and three when the partner was on holidays in Brazil.

Even though their migration was voluntary and not propelled by urgent economic or political factors, there are a lot of emotional costs involved in the process of moving to another country. There are advantages, such as forming a family or advancing in the career and accepting new professional challenges, but also a lot of disadvantages, like leaving the home country, the family, the friends, the job, and arriving in a new territory, with a different language, culture and people, and not knowing almost anybody. This places migrants in a vulnerable situation, at least at the beginning, and they are faced with a series of different troubles.

#### ***First impressions***

Similarly to Nakons' findings in his study of Philippine migrant workers in Hong Kong (Nakons, 2009:28), interviewees considered that "to have a problem is almost taken for granted" and there are recurrent situations understood as troubles such as loneliness, homesickness, language barriers, isolation, depression, illness, unemployment or sub-employment and discrimination. The testimony of one of the interviewees resumes this situation very well:

*I had been living in Maastricht for one year and I hadn't made contact with anyone. My life was from home to work and from work to home. My only contact was the people from the call centre where I worked and from one Irish pub where I went for a beer every Friday after work.*

Another interviewee reinforces this thought:

*In Brazil I was a professor of English and Spanish and a translator, and then I opened my own language school. I was very active but when I got married I left everything to come here. At the beginning it was terrible for me. I was living in the woods, didn't know anybody, didn't work and my husband was away at work all day. I came here and progressively gained 50 kilos; I was very depressed.*

Two other interviewees also reported to have gained weight (one 30 kilos, the other 8) due to depression, isolation and being home all day without going out, except to the supermarket. Alcoholism was also mentioned in one case as a serious addiction that one of the interviewees had to face after some months of living in The Netherlands and feeling isolated.

## **Language**

All the interviewees came to the country with a very good knowledge of English and some of them were fluent in other languages (such as French or Spanish), but none of them spoke Dutch.

The language barrier was difficult to overcome. Even though all of them learnt the language, not only through the obligatory *inburgering* course that they had to take as immigrants<sup>5</sup>, but also with courses at private language schools or universities, some of them experienced difficulties or lack of confidence to speak it.

*I took courses of Dutch at Utrecht University and I understand everything, I can read and write, but I'm still afraid of speaking it because people correct me all the time, or reply in English when I address them in Dutch, and they keep doing that all the time during the conversation.*

And another interviewee added:

*It's very frustrating for me because the Dutch want you to speak Dutch but at the same time they don't have the patience to speak to you if you don't speak the language perfectly. If you talk with some different accent, they reply in English. And that doesn't help. They claim that foreigners don't want to speak Dutch but they don't do their part, they don't collaborate because they reply in English. The first sensation that you have is frustration and then you think: "But if he doesn't care if I speak Dutch or not, why*

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<sup>5</sup> This obligatory integration programme for new immigrants was established in 1998 and includes language classes and career advice. Though largely criticized, the policy is now accepted in society.

*would I learn this language?" Because it's a language that I will not use in other places of the world.*

Apart from these frustrations, only few of the interviewees speak Dutch with their partner and/or at work, so sometimes they do not have the chance to practice it very much.

*I don't feel comfortable speaking Dutch with my husband. I can talk in the supermarket, or to a neighbour that doesn't speak English but that's it. I speak in the street and everything but if I want to find a job, my Dutch will never be good enough.*

### **Getting a job**

Another problem that they faced after arrival was trying to immerse into the Dutch job market. The majority of them had worked for several years in Brazil but found difficulties to get a job and two of them still do not have one.

*I had a very good job in Brazil; I was a professor of Portuguese and English. And I'd worked my whole life, since I was 18 until I was 32. I only stopped when I came here. Now I really want to work because I think that I will meet more people and will feel more at home. I still feel a bit of an outsider because I don't work so people talk about many things in conversations that I didn't experience and I don't know about. I gave some Portuguese classes here but nothing else. I want to find a job as a translator or something, but I haven't yet.*

One interviewee was a psychiatrist who narrated the long process that she had to experience until reaching her goal:

*I thought that my adaptation in the professional field was going to be quicker than it actually was. I was a psychiatrist but they did not recognize my degree at the University. They recognized as if I did only four years of medicine. So then when I wanted to start the fifth year of University here, the examination committee didn't accept me. I was very frustrated because it was a big struggle to learn the language, get all the documents and stuff. I was very sad, almost depressed. But I struggled a lot and was able to work in a hospital in Rotterdam, not as a doctor, but taking care of ill people. I worked there for one year and applied again for University and finally got accepted. And almost 9 years later I started practicing my profession here, I'm starting to work as a psychiatrist. So now I'm at the same level as I was in Brazil in 1994, when I started my career in psychiatry in Brazil.*

Some interviewees also pointed out that they found a job thanks to their social networks (friends, friends of friends, relatives, etc.). For example, one of them said that he got a job in his area of expertise through a Brazilian friend that he met at the gym.

### ***The Dutch culture***

Although they mentioned positive things about the receiving society, such as safe streets, tolerance towards homosexuality, women's emancipation and less corruption, all the interviewees also reported having problems understanding and coping with Dutch culture. They found Dutch people to be difficult to approach in the beginning and they agreed that it takes a long time to get to know a Dutch person and feel accepted by him or her.

*I find it difficult to make friends because people here have a lot of preconceptions just based on the fact that I'm Brazilian; there are a lot of stereotypes. When they first meet me they say: "Oh! Brazilian! Ronaldinho, football, samba". And in fact I like pop music, I work in IT, etc. I don't know why they do that because when I was in Brazil I wasn't asking Dutch people that I met: "Oh! Do you smoke weed? Do you use clogs?"*

They also had to get used to the Dutch structure and organization, such as planning a meeting with weeks of anticipation or not going to someone's house unannounced, as well as with the directness of the Dutch, which some of them consider to be very rude, cold, and unfriendly. One interviewee illustrates this:

*I think people are warmer in Brazil. You go walking in the street and people smile at you even though they don't know you. It's more welcoming. I'm still surprised by how in the train people put their bag on the seat beside them and they don't move it until you actually ask them to do so, even if they see that you are standing there waiting to be seated. There's a ridiculous fight for seats everyday at rush hour.*

And other respondent added:

*Here they are very direct and after a few years I've already got used to that, but what they don't accept is that I can be direct as well. So I think it's a bit contradictory, I don't understand very well how it works. So I still don't perceive the fine line that differentiates being direct and being offensive. I think if you are not Dutch you will never perceive the difference.*

The relationship with family members was perceived to be different and less close:

*The social structure, the family institution is totally different. Here when you are 18 you are already living on your own in a different city, so your connection with your family is weaker. My (Dutch) wife calls her family less than I call mine, and my family is in Brazil.*

Other matters that resulted difficult for them were understanding the Dutch health and education system, getting used to the weather, to the habit of not having a proper meal at lunchtime but rather a sandwich, and using the bicycle as a means of transportation. But after the first years of living in the country, these aspects became part of their own reality. Or sometimes, as other respondent mentions, they accept the culture with resignation:

*I feel ok living in this country but I think that I made big efforts to integrate into the society when I first arrived, and now I just consider myself as a citizen who lives in this country, works and has a life here. I took some distance from the Dutch and started to care only about my life and my partner. It's quite sad and it's a pity, but I think that it's a reaction to the attitudes of Dutch people. I think that they are not open to newcomers. They just want us to adapt to them, they are not willing to change anything.*

Some of the interviewees also expressed an identity "difficulty" –not feeling very Brazilian anymore nor feeling Dutch:

*At this point, after five years in The Netherlands and 10 years away from Brazil, I don't feel at home neither in Brazil nor in The Netherlands. It's a bit sad, but well, I think I have become a "citizen of the world".*

### ***Discrimination***

One final major problem that interviewees identified was having to deal with some situations where they felt discriminated against in different places. These situations included being denied an appointment with the doctor, or being humiliated during a driving test or in the street with the bicycle just for being a foreigner. Some interviewees also described other experiences where they felt segregated:

*One day I was at a social gathering with my Dutch boyfriend; he was talking to some friends and I was near so I listened to the conversation. My boyfriend said: "Yes, I have a Brazilian girlfriend and she is living with me". And one of the other guys said: "Oh...Brazilian..." and laughed, kind of implying that I was a prostitute. He didn't know that I was there and I was his girlfriend, so I went to him and told him very angrily that I was his girlfriend and I was a lawyer, etc. But I felt terrible anyway.*

*When I started to study I had to prove that I was capable, mainly to the people with a lower education level here in The Netherlands, because they thought that I, coming from a "third world country", would have more difficulties.*

Another interviewee pointed out the general discrimination that she feels foreigners experience in The Netherlands:

*My own husband, he is married to me and I'm not Dutch and he still says: "Oh, in this neighbourhood there are a lot of satellite dishes; there are so many migrants..." And I tell him: "Hey, I'm a migrant too!"*

It is interesting to notice that some interviewees themselves had negative preconceptions towards other migrant groups, especially Moroccans.

A number of respondents also mentioned the implicit discrimination that they felt with some words or attitudes from Dutch people:

*I see some attitudes from people and some things that they say to me that I consider being kind of discriminatory. For example, they always ask me when I am planning to leave the country or they get a bit scared by the fact that I'm planning to stay here for a while.*

### ***Perspectives for the future***

None of them has plans to go back to Brazil in the short or middle term, but they still imagine living there in the future.

*I want to raise my children here, give them a good education; I want them to grow up in a safe environment and to have possibilities and opportunities in life. But I will undoubtedly raise them with Brazilian values as well, values such as the love for the family, the solidarity, the importance of being a good person.*

Currently, there is in general a big motivation and focus on spreading their roots in The Netherlands and strengthening their families.

*I have a good life here and it took me about 10 years to establish myself in a place, get a good job, have a partner who can also get a job, etc. So now that I have all that, I want to enjoy it for a while and keep living here.*

*I have plans to come back at some point. Or to be six months here and six months there. There's no better thing in the world than that. But right now I'm looking for options for my kid's education.*

Even though this group of migrants does not remain undocumented in the country, they are also in a vulnerable situation due to the fact that, in many cases, if they separate from their Dutch partners before three years of living in the country, they may lose their legal status and be forced to go back to Brazil. Consequently, their future plans of staying in The Netherlands are subject to their relationship status.

### **3.2 Coping strategies of documented migrants**

As we have seen in the previous section, documented Brazilian migrants had to deal with a wide range of inconveniences and difficulties when they first arrived to the country. These range from language barriers, difficulty to get a job, discrimination, understanding of Dutch culture, as well as the usual symptoms that people suffer in a migration process, such as isolation, homesickness and depression. In order to overcome these issues, interviewees reported to have developed diverse coping strategies.

As Gall affirms (Gall, 2005), the first step towards coping behaviours is the initial appraisal that the individual has in an attempt to make sense of the stressor, that is how the person can explain the situation he or she is

experiencing. These meaning-making attempts help the individual to reduce stress and engage in coping behaviour.

As Mattis relates while researching about African American women (Mattis, 2002:313), the first step of confronting the reality is often painful and left these migrants feeling fragmented. In this sense, the author mentions that turning things over is an important part of the process of meaning-making and coping. The majority of the interviewees narrated how they have changed some of their "Brazilian" behaviours in order to integrate better into Dutch society:

*When I am in a conversation, especially now that I speak Dutch, and I see that the person is being kind of arrogant, I start to show off as well. If you behave more like a Latin American and remain submissive when they are telling you how grand they are, you will not survive in this culture. They will think that you value nothing. Their rationale is: "If this person does not value herself, why should I value her?"*

Some interviewees pointed out situations where they assert their counter identities and cultural differences to differentiate themselves from the Dutch. However, this does not appear to happen as strongly as it does with Brazilians in Japan for example, where, according to Tsuda, the Brazilian community there generates an "ethnic resistance against Japanese assimilative pressures" (Tsuda, 2000:55).

### **Social support**

Interviewees pointed out that the conversations with close Brazilian friends (living in The Netherlands or abroad) and family helped them to evaluate

different situations and identify problems. The majority of them pointed out that they do not share their experiences outside this narrow group. Some of them mentioned not telling their troubles with Dutch people due to their fear of being judged.

Friendship was mentioned in all the cases as an important aspect of life. All of them mentioned other Brazilian friends who helped them in the beginning, understood them and became very close friends.

*Thank God I have my Brazilian friends here, because I have someone to talk to about my problems or if I'm a bit down sometimes, they are always there.*

Some of the interviewees even consider their friends as close as family members:

*The friends that I have here are crucial because when you are abroad with no family, your friends become your family and that is very important to us, coming from a culture that gives so much importance to the family.*

However, I have noticed as well that many interviewees from middle class pointed out that they do not identify themselves with the majority of the Brazilian population that lives in The Netherlands:

*I think that the majority of Brazilians living here have a different reality and situation than mine, so that's why I don't get along with many Brazilians here.*

Other interviewee was more radical in its thoughts:

*The community here is composed of outsiders, you never know who they are, where they come from, their past, how they were raised, so you can't trust them just because they are Brazilians.*

### **Social networks**

As we saw in the previous section, one problem that was common to the majority of the interviewees when they first arrived was that they did not know the language well and they did not understand how the health system works, something that worried them a lot not only because of their own health but also because of their children's health. The social networks established on the Internet were very helpful. Created by one of them, *Curumim* is a social network for Brazilian mothers and fathers raising children in The Netherlands and abroad. The network operates as part of the Orkut website (similar to Facebook or Hyves) and has 1253 members. It is interesting to notice that this website was created by a woman but also has male members, usually Brazilian men raising children abroad.

The Orkut group of Brazilians in Holland has 2469 members and it includes other related groups such as "Enrolado/a com holandés/a" ("In a relationship with a Dutch partner"), "Eventos Brasil – Holanda" ("Brazil – Netherlands related events"), or "Viver na Holanda é 'rezela'" ("Living in The Netherlands is 'nice'").

This goes in line with what Nakons affirms about sharing issues with others as a coping strategy: "The function of sharing in this context is more than just an 'outlet'. Usually the problems shared are then discussed and addressed collectively" (Nakons, 2009: 33). As one of the interviewees mentions:

*Last Sunday we had a meeting with Brazilian women who are raising children in The Netherlands; there were more than 20 mothers and at least 12 kids. Those meetings help a lot. Sometimes you don't know something or you don't speak the language and you can ask other mothers about the best doctor, a good dentist for your children, etc.*

Apart from the coping benefits, participation in social networks appears to have implications for many aspects of migrant's decisions and actions, including their integration into Dutch society, or a better knowledge of the Dutch culture and its institutions (for example the health system).

As Brouwer says referring to the websites created by Dutch Moroccan women (Brouwer, 2006), there these women find a safe place to raise sensitive topics in their own language and these online networks provide them with a sense of belonging that is very important for a migrant. Internet gives them "the opportunity to be the agents of their own meanings", since they can raise their voices through these channels of communication.

It is remarkable that even before coming to The Netherlands, some migrants used the Internet to make social contacts. For example, three of them met their husbands on the Internet, and others also mention that they contacted Brazilians in The Netherlands before arriving to the country to make friends, ask questions and have new contacts prior to their settlement.

Social networks help these migrants to construct meaning from their own experiences and give them a better attitude towards life. And, as Gall says referring to beliefs, but in this case in the context of social networks, this

facilitates an active attitude toward coping and a strengthening of social support in response to stress (Gall, 2005). This is especially the case with one interviewee who instead of staying all day at home alone and doing nothing, feeling isolated and depressed, decided to create a website about Brazilians in The Netherlands:

*I was reading a lot about Holland and decided to write about the country, but in Portuguese. I started it for fun and now the website is very popular and allows me to stay in contact with many Brazilians, offer information and services on the website, doing something useful for our community and make new friends.*

Creating this website allowed this woman to gain status and helped her with the meaning making process of finding an activity to do in her new daily life far from Brazil. The creation of this website implies an action that helped her to emancipate and grow.

A Brazilian sociologist, who created a group for Brazilian intellectuals to meet, debate and discuss several subjects, comments:

*Here we can reflect on our own condition as migrants, as well as on other topics that we choose, and we do it in our own language, with a sense of humour and with that Brazilian warmth that we miss so much. It's a space for reflection from the point of view of Social Sciences that allows us to think about things that in the daily routine we don't have time to.*

### **Meaning making and reframing**

Park and Folkman define meaning making as “a process of cognitive reappraisal that is particularly important for a successful adaptation under circumstances that are chronic or not easily ameliorated by coping efforts” (in Gall, 2005). The ability to make meaning when faced with a stressful experience often promotes successful coping, adaptation and well-being. According to several authors, a stressful situation can be reframed as an opportunity that offers benefits. To place an event within the context of a bigger picture or an overall plan or purpose is a way of dealing with it. This is the case of one interviewee, who identifies her current situation as a specific phase in her life:

*The first years for me were very very difficult. I came here and I was alone, with a child, not speaking the language, I didn't meet anyone. But now with my second child I'm better, I feel more integrated, more at home; I think this is another phase in my life. So I will try to get a job, maybe I'll find something totally different.*

As Gall notices, “hope has implications for one’s emotional well-being as well as the process of cognitive appraisal and coping behaviour” (Gall, 2005:92). People who have developed a sense of hope can then cope better with stress, negative emotions and functional difficulties and “successfully envision and pursue strategies to a desired goal”. As the testimony of one of the interviewees illustrates:

*I would like to work because the days are very long for me here. My husband goes to work at 8 AM and comes back at 8 PM and I have to take care of the kids and stay home all day. That's not how I planned my life to be. But I say to myself: well, it's a phase, let's see what happens later. I think having a job will help me a lot and I think I will get one sooner or later.*

### ***3.3 Integration into Dutch society***

As it is shown in this chapter, documented migrants have had several problems to deal with when they first arrived in The Netherlands. Nevertheless, after some years of staying in the country, they seem to be quite integrated into the society in terms of language, labour, housing and social relations.

Despite the initial difficulties of learning the language and feeling confident enough to speak it, after three years many interviewees were able to have a good grasp of Dutch and some of them even practice it with their partners or at work. Since they all had the time and the money to afford Dutch courses, and they were used to learning foreign languages, it was not that difficult to make the effort to learn a new one.

With respect to the job market, interviewees had more difficulties than they expected finding a job in their area of expertise. However, as it is shown in most of the cases, after some years of trying hard, they are now properly integrated into the Dutch labour market.

All the interviewees lived in homes they owned with their partners and only a few rent accommodations and there was no mention of any housing problems.

Although all the interviewees reported to have experienced a cultural shock when they first arrived, all of them seem to have adapted to the Dutch way of living, without losing any essential aspects of Brazilian culture.

Even though they have many Brazilian friends, after some years living in the country they established friendships with some Dutch people, mainly their partner's friends, and their own colleagues from work.

What I was able to perceive after the interviews is a good level of integration into Dutch society of middle class Brazilian migrants in the context of social and ethno-cultural integration (Penninx and Vermeulen, 2001). After three to five years of living in the country, they managed to become active in the Dutch labour market, have Dutch colleagues and friends, speak the language, establish a family and raise children in The Netherlands.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **The situation of undocumented migrants**

## ***4.1 Arriving to The Netherlands***

The stories of undocumented Brazilians in The Netherlands differ considerably from the ones of the documented in several aspects. Apart from the difficulties and emotional costs of living in a country with cultural and linguistic differences and being away from family and friends, and the economic costs of travelling abroad and surviving until getting the first job, they are in a fragile condition due to the fact that they do not have the official permit to stay in the country and can easily be deported or imprisoned if the police learn their status.

The first obstacle that undocumented migrants have to overcome is passing the migratory controls in the airport. Even though Brazilians do not need a visa to go to The Netherlands as tourists, the authorities are more and more aware that many of them arrive and stay longer than the allowed three months. Therefore, now it is common that authorities ask to see letters of recommendation from a Dutch citizen, credit cards, the return ticket, as well as asking them many other questions regarding the purpose of the trip, why they chose Holland for their visit, how much money they carry, how long they are planning to stay, where they will stay, etc.

Over the past two years, there was a notable number of Brazilians who arrived in Spain to attend congresses, for education purposes or for tourism and were imprisoned and kept around 30 hours with no food, water, chairs, beds, or any kind of assistance, and deported with no specific reason, just on suspicion that they were going to remain in the country. Even the

Brazilian president, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, had to intervene to discuss this problem with the Spanish president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

There is a similar situation in Portugal where, only in 2006, 1,749 Brazilians were not allowed to enter the country, representing 48, 6% of the foreigners who had their access denied (Magalhães Fernandes, Rangel Rigotti, 2008).

The case of the murder of Jean Charles de Menezes on July, 2005 in London is a notorious one. Menezes was a young Brazilian man who had been living undocumented in the UK for three years and was intercepted by the police in a subway station, but he ran away because he did not have a resident permit to show to the police. While trying to escape, he was shot dead because the police assumed he was a suicide bomber who was going to execute a terrorist act in the London underground.

The initial motivations of undocumented migrants who arrive in The Netherlands are economical. The majority of the interviewees were between 25 and 30 years old when they arrived and came to the country leaving their children in Brazil in order to work in The Netherlands and make some money to send to their families. They came with their life savings and sometimes had to borrow money from different sources (friends, relatives).

They arrived with the ambitious dream of saving around 20 thousand Euros to buy a house in Brazil and return there, while sustaining their lives in The Netherlands and sending some money back home as well. Some of them also had the illusion of opening a bar, restaurant or a hotel in Brazil or establishing other kinds of businesses with the money saved abroad.

But the reality shows them a panorama that is in great contrast to their dreams. There are only a few who can make some money and some others who after years of being undocumented are able to obtain a residence permit, but even in this last case, their economical situation does not improve significantly, nor does the quality of jobs they have access to.

As one interviewee points out:

*Lots of Brazilians come with this dream of saving money and coming back but it takes more years than what you think. You have to pay your bills here, send some money home and then you can save something but not that much. It's very hard; it can take you ages to save for a house.*

When they first arrive, they consider their situation of precarious housing and dead-end jobs temporary, but the vast majority continues in this vulnerable condition for years. As Abrantes mentions (Abrantes, 2008:5):

*"The paths to get out of this temporary situation are nevertheless blocked: they never earn enough money to claim victory and return home, nor do they acquire the skills or the capital required to move up in a strongly compartmentalised labour market. By performing 'immigrant jobs' and living in 'immigrant neighbourhoods', they become an object of social stigma by the autochthonous people and even other ethnic minorities".*

As Sales explains (Sales, 2008), there is a "redefinition of the temporal expectation" that these migrants had at the beginning, when they see how the real situation is and they change their original plans of coming back in a few years with money saved.

## ***First impressions***

Coming from a middle class or lower middle class and having to adapt to a different country with a different language and culture and mainly to the fact that one is undocumented, can be very tough in the beginning. It is also challenging to get used to living in a worse socioeconomic condition and all the consequences that this implies (as for example sharing a room with strangers or having a job that they would never have accepted in Brazil). As one respondent commented:

*My first year here was really bad. I couldn't tolerate the weather, I didn't know anyone, I didn't speak Dutch, not even proper English. All that I did was work and go home, but it was difficult because I didn't have my own room, I had only one bed in a room that I shared with two other strangers.*

*I left my daughter; I left the job of 11 years as a nurse in a hospital and came here with 3,000 Euros, my entire life savings. A colleague from the hospital was already here doing housecleaning and told me that I could make good money out of it. So I came in the cold winter, started cleaning in four different houses and rented a bed in an apartment in the Bijlmer<sup>6</sup>. I felt very miserable: I missed my daughter, my old job, my country, my house.*

## ***Language***

The language barrier is much bigger in the case of the undocumented migrants, since the majority of them arrive in the country not only not speaking Dutch, but speaking a very basic or no English and not being used to learning new languages. This puts them in a difficult situation not only

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<sup>6</sup> A deprived neighbourhood in Amsterdam.

when looking for a job (even for domestic work they must speak some English to communicate with their bosses), but also for dealing with the basics of daily life (supermarket, public transport, etc.).

*When I arrived here, I only spoke Portuguese. Now I speak some Dutch because I took some courses at 'Casa Migrante'<sup>7</sup>. But at the beginning it was very difficult because everywhere I went, somebody had to come with me; I didn't understand anything.*

*At first, I only spoke a little bit of English because I had the idea that since I lived in South America, it wasn't useful to learn English.*

## **Housing**

The majority of Brazilians who came to The Netherlands undocumented knew someone in the country, either a relative, a neighbour or a friend. According to surveys conducted with Brazilians living abroad, more than 56% had a relative living in the country of arrival and 24% had at least one friend (in Fusco, 2008: 15).

For that reason, they usually found their first place to live and their first occupation through their contacts, which were already inserted in a social network of Brazilians and other migrants living in The Netherlands. This diminishes the economical costs significantly, since they can stay with a friend or relative until they find a job, and they can find one sooner because they know someone that can recommend them. The emotional costs are also lower since they live with other Brazilians (some of them even friends or relatives).

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<sup>7</sup> Casa Migrante is a NGO for Latin Americans in The Netherlands.

It would have been almost impossible for them to arrive in The Netherlands without knowing someone. For the undocumented migrants, social networks are crucial for everything they do in a foreign country. As Sales says:

*“Social networks give information, indications for jobs, housing and a series of support of different nature. They are a kind of social capital that would allow the access to better jobs or other benefits” (Sales, 2008)<sup>8</sup>.*

However, having to depend on the informal market for getting accommodation always carries the risk of scams, high prices and other difficulties, even when dealing with people from the home country.

*Here there is a Brazilian woman who finds apartments for the Brazilians that come to live to Holland. But she charges you 1,000 Euros for commission, 1,000 Euros for deposit and then the rent. And after 2 months that you are living there with other people, she calls the police and makes something up. For example she says: “In that apartment there are people fighting with knives”. Then the police come, ask for documents, and of course all have passports without residence permit and they are deported. So that woman has the apartment available again to rent it to other Brazilians, and do the same scam one more time.*

The majority of Brazilian migrants –just like many other migrant groups in The Netherlands and in Europe– live with their family members or Brazilian friends, usually squeezed up in one room. One interviewee who lived in a one-room apartment narrates:

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<sup>8</sup> Translated by the author of the thesis.

*I live with my Brazilian girlfriend, her sister, my girlfriend's friend, who doesn't have a place to live, my brother and his Dutch girlfriend, who almost always stays here. We try to accommodate well but it's too small. We are not used to it.*

I did not notice a demographic concentration of undocumented Brazilians in The Netherlands. Although a vast majority lives in Amsterdam, they reside in different neighbourhoods.

### **Getting a job**

Getting a job does not appear to be very difficult according to the testimonies of the interviewees. The majority found one through a friend or relative or the social network of Brazilians in The Netherlands. But the fact of being undocumented places them in a vulnerable position. As Abrantes mentions citing several authors: "Recent research shows that atypical work relations such as temporary contracting, spurious self-employment or informal activity fall heavier on immigrants coming from outside the EU" (Abrantes, 2008:4).

Being undocumented limits them to certain kinds of tasks in the informal job market. For women, it is common to do domestic work or babysitting (although in this case, language is almost always a barrier) and for men it is relatively easy to find a job in construction. The advantage of not paying taxes with this kind of informal jobs is overshadowed by the low salaries, the risk of losing the job from one day to the other without any

compensation, and the lack of social benefits<sup>9</sup>. In the case of construction work, this is a big problem since if the worker suffers an accident, he has no insurance at all and the employer is not obliged to take any responsibility. Long working hours are also common for undocumented migrants:

*When I came here, I started working in construction and earning 5 Euros per hour or 50 Euros for a 12-hour workday. I had to give up the plan to save money and send some Euros to my family in Brazil. But at least I could choose where to work: my sister came here and was forced to work as a prostitute by the man who had brought her here.*

This goes in line with a study of Brazilians in London that mentions that on average, Brazilians in London worked 41.9 hours a week (Various Authors, 2007:14).

Although some of the interviewees mentioned that they earn more now than when they first arrived, their salaries have not increased significantly, they are still working in the same area and with the same vulnerability. As Van der Leun relates, "strong welfare States (as Holland) rely more on protected labour market, a high level of internal migration control and other types of regulation that can put up barriers for the incorporation of illegal immigrants" (Van der Leun, 2003:24).

The majority of the interviewees manage to send some money to Brazil every month, but none of them are approaching the dream of saving

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<sup>9</sup> The Linking Act of 1998 postulates that illegal immigrants were excluded from public services. The public provisions such as social benefits, health care, housing and education were conditional to their residential status.

money to buy a house back home and almost all of them have given up the idea because they consider it unrealistic.

However, some interviewees reported earning more than the minimum salary, since they do not pay taxes and have an agreement with their employers to have paid holidays and end-of-year bonus.

### ***The Dutch culture***

As we saw in the previous section, some of the characteristics of Dutch culture appreciated by documented Brazilians were their openness and tolerance. On the contrary, many undocumented interviewees considered these an excess of freedom.

*Here they are more open with drugs, prostitution and homosexuality. For me it's excessive liberalism. I think it's absurd liberalism made for the tourists, to show an image of sex, drugs and rock & roll.*

*The culture in this country is very different. Dutch people are not funny, content, amusing. They don't dance; they stay home a lot, while in Brazil people go out into the streets, talk with their neighbours, etc. Brazilian people have more solidarity.*

One aspect regarding Dutch culture that was mentioned by some women respondents has to do with male and female roles:

*I find that here women are more rude. They are not very affective with their children. On the contrary, Dutch men are much nicer than Brazilian men.*

*They are more affectionate, loyal, they help you with everything in the house, and they also give you more freedom.*

## **Discrimination**

Most of the interviewees said they experienced discrimination. In the case of this group –undocumented migrants– the situations were much more explicit and aggressive than the discrimination moments that documented migrants had experienced.

*One day I went to an agency to send money to Brazil and they asked me one thing that I didn't understand. So they told me: "Do you speak Dutch?" I said no. "Do you speak English?" I said no. So they shouted at me saying that if I don't speak Dutch or English I could not send money to any country. I went off and started crying immediately. I couldn't stop crying for one hour and I felt paralyzed.*

*I felt discriminated in some stores. Since I have dark skin and kind of look like an Aruban, and here people from Aruba are known for stealing in stores, it happened to me that I went to some shops and they kicked me out. The shop assistant asked me: "Can I help you?" And I said: "Thanks, I'm just looking". And she said to me in a very rude manner: "This is not for looking, it's for buying". I felt very sad also because I was with my baby in the buggy and I left immediately.*

*I perceived some sort of discrimination at my children's school. I think that Dutch mothers are a bit afraid that their children will mix with kids from other cultures. I don't know, maybe it's because my kids look a bit Moroccan but it's horrible to see that.*

As these testimonies show, discrimination was experienced in different places, such as the street, the school, the bank, and also at work.

### ***Living with fear***

One situation that is common to all undocumented groups is the constant fear, especially when they first arrive in the country and are not used to not having the citizenship. Many of the respondents affirmed they live in fear.

*I'm afraid of the police, of the customs officers at the airport; it's always hard, and every time you enter the country you feel that something is going to happen, because you've heard so many stories about Brazilians being deported.*

*I feel insecure. I don't know how people will react towards me because I'm a foreigner and I'm illegal. As an alien you always feel insecure but after some years you relax a bit and feel more confident.*

However, some respondents mentioned that after two or three years of being undocumented, they got used to the situation and do not feel that much fear.

*I don't feel threatened by the police anymore. If I'm afraid, they perceive that and they will stop me in the street for nothing. So I walk in the streets showing a sense of self-confidence. If I'm assertive, even if I'm lying people will believe me. I've learnt that when I was a shop assistant and had to sell things all the time.*

*I know a girl who is always crying, always afraid of the police and of being deported. It's a monster for her. I laugh at her but you can't live like that, you have to relax a bit, otherwise you won't survive here.*

### **Legal status**

Even though they are undocumented, at the time the interviews were conducted many of the interviewees were in the process of trying to get a residence permit, either based on their relationship of over three years with a Dutch citizen or the fact that they have a Dutch child. As Abrantes mentions:

*In The Netherlands today, there are jobs for the documented and there are jobs for the undocumented. If you are an undocumented migrant worker, you do not expect to get a permit to stay through your employment situation. The only hope is a partnership with a legally recognized resident, even if such process requires you to temporarily move back to Brazil and open the regularization procedure from there. (Abrantes, 2008:23)*

However, the initial enthusiasm that they experienced when they thought of getting a residence permit was soon overshadowed by the amount of bureaucratic obstacles that they have to overcome.

*I have all the papers to become legal but I need to speak Dutch, so I've restarted the course that I had abandoned. It's difficult because I forgot everything but I had to leave the course since I was working 12 hours a day.*

*Since my partner is a carpenter and worked on his own all his life, independently, without a contract and without paying taxes, he could not*

*prove that he had the money to support me. So I never had the possibility to become legal, even with 2 Dutch children and 6 years of being here. I hope that by the end of this year, after my partner completes 1 year and a half working with a contract for the same company, I will be able to go back to Brazil and do the test to get my resident permit.*

*Since I have a Dutch son and was married to a Dutch woman, but only for two years, I've initiated a trial saying that I wanted to stay in the country to be close to my son. But the trial took a long time and apparently only just now they will give me a resident permit. But until now, my situation has been very unstable.*

### ***Perspectives for the future***

Similar to what documented interviewees said, all the undocumented migrants want to stay in The Netherlands for some more years, even though they still dream of going back (with money) to Brazil and resettling there. As Margolis noticed with Brazilians living in New York (Margolis, 1993), they are caught up in the dilemma of whether to remain or go back, but the “myth of the return” is always present.

*I would like to go back to Brazil, although for now I think I will stay in Holland. But my life here is very difficult; I had lots of different problems. I saw some Brazilians who came here and made money and bought houses in Brazil, but I think I haven't been lucky.*

*After the second year spent here, you have some nostalgic feelings towards Brazil, your family, and miss home but you start realizing that this is a*

*country with opportunities, that this is a democracy, not a hypocrisy like Brazil, that things work, so I've decided to stay here for a while.*

Despite the amount of difficulties that they have experienced as undocumented migrants in the country and the almost impossible task of saving money, some of them still pursue the dream of doing business between both countries and carrying out an activity that could finally provide them with a significant amount of money to save.

*I want to stay here and do some businesses, bring eucalyptus wood from Brazil and sell it here. I've already tried to buy some land in Brazil and plant eucalyptus but it didn't work. But I'm still trying to do something like that together with my brother who's here, my cousins back there and a Dutch man, a partner who is willing to put some money in the project. At the same time, I can't make long term plans because anything can happen unexpectedly and change the initial idea entirely. So I make plans for the next 2, 3 months, no more.*

## **4.2 Coping strategies**

As we saw previously, the coping strategies that documented Brazilians establish are mainly related with establishing social networks and building social support to deal with Dutch culture and with the stress of migrating to a different country.

The issue of the coping strategies of the undocumented is relatively different, since the main problems that they encounter are related with their status of irregular migrants and all that this implies (no access to a formal

job or the housing market, fear of deportation and of the police, economical constrains).

### ***Social support and networks***

When a migrant has the necessary requisites to enter a country and has a residence permit, his or her labour trajectory in that territory will depend on his or her own abilities and human capital. However, if the migrant does not have a legal permit to reside in that place, his or her social network – mainly friends and relatives– and capital will play a big role in their path abroad.

The exchange of valuable information and favours regarding housing or labour, among other issues, happens through strong and weak bonds. For example, sometimes a friend of a relative can help the new migrant to get a job, because he or she owes a favour to that relative.

Undocumented migrants appear to have stronger social networks than the documented ones, even from the first day that they arrive in the country, since all of them came because they knew another Brazilian who was there (in many cases, a family member).

*My two brothers live here. They are of good support; I can trust them. Even though we fight sometimes, they are my family and we will always be brothers. They help me a lot because I don't have real friends here.*

None of the interviewees had more than two Dutch friends, but the majority said they established good relationships with other Brazilians.

*I only have one Dutch friend. It's difficult for me to communicate with them: they are very individualistic and they say they are very busy all the time.*

The Brazilian friends, who met in Brazilian bars, at parties, on the Internet (mainly on Orkut) or through other friends or relatives, are of good support to each other in their everyday life.

*When I came here I easily got a job cleaning houses because I was recommended by other Brazilian friends who were already working here. You receive a lot of help from other people, other Brazilians, they help each other.*

*When I was living in Rotterdam, I became kind of famous as the "Bahiano" that repairs computers, so I got to know lots of Brazilians, from football players to prostitutes or business men. And from there I made many Brazilian friends.*

In its comparative study about undocumented Brazilian migrants in London and Berlin, Jordan, Vogel and Estrella (1997) conclude that for undocumented migrants it is much more difficult to integrate into the German society than into the British. However, if they manage to establish any type of niche, their social integration is better and more stable. According to the authors, that is due to the high degree of institutionalization of the German society and the extended system of state regulation and control. Therefore, to live in Germany, undocumented migrants need to establish trust and mutual dependence relationships with natives and build broad social networks of support with the locals. The same can be said for the Brazilian migrants living in The Netherlands, a country with strong state regulation and control.

However, as we saw with the group of documented migrants, many undocumented interviewees also pointed out that they do not trust all the Brazilians that are living in The Netherlands, and mentioned to have had some negative experiences with some of them. They have some Brazilian friends but they are not that open to make new ones, having the perception that other Brazilians have the intention of taking advantage of them. As Van der Leun affirms “under harsh conditions, immigrant solidarity may even turn into exploitation” (Van der Leun, 2003:23).

The social networks on the Internet are also quite common for this group. It is interesting to notice that some networks, initially created by documented Brazilians to exchange information and be in touch (such as the mentioned *Curumim* or the website of Brazilians in Holland), are now also used by the undocumented group and provide specific information for them. In the forum of the webpage of Brazilians in The Netherlands there are many questions regarding legal matters, visas, the residence permit, the health system, having children while being undocumented, jobs in the informal market, free Dutch courses, education, etc. The creator of this website said that she receives several e-mails and phone calls from friends or relatives of undocumented migrants, with questions and doubts or asking for help for others who were deported, are in jail or had other troubles with the police.

### ***Meaning making and reframing***

In this case, undocumented migrants had to prepare themselves in all aspects to migrate to a country and overcome the diverse problems that being irregular implies. In this sense, the strategies of meaning making and reframing help them to put their situation into a broader picture and never forget their initial motivations.

*From the very first day that I came here I have been sending money to my mother. My mother is a single mother. I don't want her to be hungry. When I was young there were days when there was nothing to eat at my place and my mother had to struggle very hard to give me at least one piece of bread. I don't want that anymore. So I tolerate everything here because at least I can send some Euros for her food every month.*

*Here I've established the survival mode because I know what poverty is and I don't want to be there anymore. I don't want to be without a meal. I'm like a crab. When crabs go out of the sea into the sand or the rocks, they adopt a survival mode; they become more aggressive and develop tactics of survival.*

In order to survive in a new environment, these migrants create what Castells calls "resistance identities" which are "generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society" (in Tsuda, 2000:56).

### ***Strategies towards the police***

As I mentioned before, one of the biggest concerns that undocumented migrants have to face are related with avoiding the police and deportations. Hence, the principal strategies that they develop are related to this issue. Based on the information gathered from stories of other Brazilians who arrived before them, they try to manage as best as possible in order to go through airports without any trouble.

*What I do when I travel to Brazil is to travel through France, since there they don't stamp your passport (I think now it has changed with the government of Sarkozy). What others do when they travel through Holland is that when they arrive in Brazil, they put their passport in the washing machine so it fades or they just say they've lost it and they go to the police to get a new one. But you cannot do that a lot. I know a case of a woman who did it 4 times in one year and now she is being investigated for passport traffic.*

*You have to enter to the country and feel very secure and also bring money, even though as Brazilians we don't need a visa to come as tourists. Some people come only with a letter from a Dutch citizen but that is not enough; now they ask you if you have at least 80 Euros per day for staying here, if you have credit cards, etc.*

*Now I don't have any plans, but if I want to go to Brazil, I just go to the police and ask them to deport me. I had a friend who did that. He travelled to Brazil for free, stayed there for some months and then came back here to stay living and working without papers as before.*

The undocumented migrants also developed several strategies for their daily lives in order to deal with the police. These everyday forms of resistance are, as Scott defines them "a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms" (in Broeders and Engbersen, 2007:1598).

*One day I was walking along the pavement with my bike and the police stopped me. I apologized for it, I was very nice and kind to them, and they*

*didn't fine me nor asked for my passport or ID. I even told them that I was Brazilian and they talked to me about Romario and Ronaldo<sup>10</sup>.*

*If the police stop you and ask you: "Do you have your ID?", you have to play it cool, stay calm and say: "I'm sorry; I forgot it at home". Or you can even show them your passport, since it doesn't have a stamp, so they cannot see any evidence on when you entered the country. If they ask you what you are doing in The Netherlands, you just have to say that you have been here for 3 weeks, one month, visiting a friend or for tourism.*

*I think that you are always afraid of the police but you get used to it after 6 years of being illegal. What you have to do is follow all the rules, even with your bicycle, have the two lights, etc. I know a girl who was deported because she was using a stolen bike for example.*

In terms of Michel de Certeau, these are the tactics of the dominated to counteract the strategies of the dominant and create a room for themselves in the settings demarcated by these strategies (De Certeau, 1984).

### **4.3 Integration into Dutch society**

In the previous chapter we saw how a group of documented Brazilian migrants managed to integrate well into Dutch society after some years of living in the country. The case of the undocumented group is different for various reasons and the level of integration is lower.

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<sup>10</sup> Brazilian football players.

Undocumented migrants come to The Netherlands with a basic knowledge of English and without speaking Dutch. In general, they are not used to learning a new language and the amount of hours that they work does not allow them to take time for a Dutch course. Besides, many courses are pricy and migrants cannot afford them, especially in the beginning, when they arrive with little savings and their job situation is unstable. Some of them learn some basic Dutch in the street or attend some free courses at different institutions that provide them, such as Casa Migrante. However, their level is not good enough to get a job in the Dutch labour market and it does not seem to improve significantly over the years.

Since they do not have a work permit to have a job in The Netherlands, the undocumented migrants remain trapped in the informal job market, accepting low-skilled and low-paid jobs, with no contract and no social benefits. This vulnerable situation continues over the years, since the chances of getting a residence permit that would allow them to work are very low. As Van der Leun affirms, "All the evidence points to the fact that illegal immigrants are severely limited by a legal ceiling" (Van der Leun, 2003: 58).

Not having a residence permit prevents them from renting an apartment through the formal housing market, so they have to rely on the informal market and social networks in order to get a place to live.

Due to the fact that they do not speak the language and do not have contact with many Dutch colleagues at work, the social relations that they establish are mainly with other Brazilian or Latin Americans migrants. They do not have Dutch friends and their social interaction with Dutch citizens is very limited or non-existent.

Because of all these factors, the integration of undocumented Brazilian migrants into the Dutch society in terms of speaking the language, having access to housing and jobs in the formal market and having Dutch friends or colleagues is very weak. They are functionally integrated into Dutch society, since they participate in the (illegal) labour market. But they are not subjectively integrated, since they do not feel part of the society. Therefore, as long as they do not manage to get a residence permit that would allow them to work and live in The Netherlands legally, their situation will remain the same indefinitely.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **Conclusions**

This research was focused on Brazilian migrants in The Netherlands, comparing the situation of documented and undocumented Brazilians, the problems that they have to deal with, their coping strategies and their social integration towards Dutch society.

After conducting semi-structured interviews and analyzing the data obtained in them, I was able to obtain valuable information about these two groups and their situation in The Netherlands.

The first important factor that was taken into account in this research was the in-depth observation of the topics that Brazilian migrants face when they arrive in The Netherlands, and an analysis of how they deal with them.

In this respect, I found that documented migrants encountered difficulties with Dutch language, culture and making contacts and friends. They've also found more obstacles than they were initially expecting when looking for a job in their own field of expertise.

Despite the initial cultural shock that they experienced, many of them seemed to have got used to the Dutch way of life and made Dutch contacts and friends.

The coping strategies that they developed to deal with these issues helped them immensely to feel more at home. Among the strategies they used, we can mention the creation of social networks on the Internet as the main one. These networks were useful in different ways: they served as a tool for making friends, clearing their doubts and getting answers to questions about different aspects of the Dutch society, which helped them to feel less

homesick and/or lonely. Other strategies detected are meaning making, reframing and hope.

While interviewing undocumented migrants, I came across different realities, problems and situations. The main issue here, present in all the testimonies, is the difficulty of living in a country without having the legal permission from the government to do so. The initial obstacles are many and everything is a challenge: the language, the weather, the fact that they have to find a place to live and a job without having papers and the fear of the police. All of them arrive in the country knowing at least one person (friend or relative) that is already living there. Otherwise, it would have been almost impossible to deal with all these obstacles by themselves.

Undocumented migrants develop coping strategies that are similar to the ones of the documented ones, but they also have their particularities. If in the case of documented migrants, social networks helped them to deal with feeling homesick and lonely, in this case, they are vital for finding a place to live, a job and getting different information that is crucial for surviving, such as data about Dutch laws and how to send or receive money without a bank account, among others.

One tactic that is particularly developed by undocumented migrants is related with forms of resistance and strategies employed to avoid police controls and deportations.

In sum, it can be noticed that while the coping strategies of documented migrants tend to be focused on understanding the Dutch society, the labour market and integrating into it, as well as making new friends, the coping strategies of undocumented migrants are mainly related to how they can

get a place to live, a job and basically survive in the society without being caught by the police.

Even though documented and undocumented migrants appeared to be two defined groups (and I studied them separately), I was also able to notice relationships and points of contact between both groups. Many documented migrants help the undocumented ones in different ways, for example offering them a job. Both groups share the same Internet forums and spaces for discussions, where many undocumented migrants post questions about their situation or ask for help, and receive answers from documented and undocumented migrants.

Another question that I wanted to examine was how Brazilian migrants integrate into Dutch society.

After overcoming numerous initial concerns and developing coping strategies to feel more comfortable in the new country, documented migrants seem to be well integrated into Dutch society after some years of living in the country. Their coping strategies prove to be effective and they speak the language, have a job in their own area of expertise, establish a family (in many cases with Dutch children) and have Dutch friends.

On the contrary, even after years of staying in The Netherlands, undocumented Brazilian migrants still struggle with the same things and do not seem to overcome them. Their legal status, the fact that they are undocumented, limits them in many aspects, condemning them to a life of risks, insecurities and vulnerabilities, where everything can change from one day to the other.

Learning Dutch is still a pending issue. The jobs that they can obtain are still the ones that circulate in the informal job market, which are usually low-paid and low-skilled jobs, very unstable and hazardous. Their contact with Dutch citizens is very limited. Consequently, their integration into Dutch society is not an easy process and may not occur if they do not have the resident permit to stay in the country and legally work and live there.

All the interviewees, documented and undocumented, migrated voluntarily taking a difficult and courageous decision to start a process which could imply many different consequences, sometimes not very promising ones.

They all migrate with the aim of accomplishing a dream: establishing a family, completing a PhD abroad, advancing in their professional careers with a new job, or saving money to go back home with a better position.

However, this dream is not as easy as it may seem in the beginning and in many cases it cannot be achieved. But if the advantages of migrating to another country prevail over the costs of undertaking that action, it can be expected that illegal migration will continue.

Immigrant's cultural and racial diversity can change the idea of social identity in the Dutch society. The question of "What does it mean to be Dutch?" nowadays may get different answers from the ones it would have got 10, 15 or 20 years ago. In this sense, I believe it is important that NGOs and the government can focus their attention to programs to raise awareness about these issues in the society, in order to sensitize the population and avoid discriminatory practices that are still taking place and affect both documented and undocumented migrants, and even sons and daughters of migrants, who were born in The Netherlands.

Besides, although the majority of European governments –including that of The Netherlands– have taken strict measures and laws against illegal migration in the past years, these measures did not stop migrants from arriving to the continent in search of new opportunities. On the contrary, trends suggest that illegal migration will continue and increase in the next years and it is expected that 4,000 migrants from Latin America will enter Europe each year.

Different authors who observed the issue suggest new categories for migrants instead of dividing the population into citizens, legal migrants and illegal migrants. They propose terms such as transnational citizenship, before called Universal citizenship, always in relationship to the main issue: Is it possible to think that international migrations transform the conception of citizenship for the ones who go away and for the ones who stay, for the ones that arrive to the country and for the ones who were there before with the identity and a threatened or vulnerable citizenship situation? To what extent do the transnational actions of the migrants, their associations or their governmental or state instances allow them to develop new and innovative dimensions of processes of access and building of citizenship, independent from the address where the person is?

Transnationalism then can be seen as a possible model of integration from a new conception of people's mobility, no more and not only unidirectional and linear, but with the exercising of the right to circulation: complex, open, creative and destabilizing.

This research intended to be a first approach to the topic of Brazilian migrants in The Netherlands and a comparison of the situation of

documented and undocumented migrants. In a further investigation, it would be interesting to analyze these subjects in depth, as well as others that may come about in the coming years.

It is too early to tell how the sons and daughters of Brazilians will integrate into Dutch society. It would be interesting to conduct a research in the future about how they perceive their identity and their integration into The Netherlands. It would also be relevant to examine the feminization of migration in this specific Brazilian case and its consequences on several aspects of the whole migratory process in more depth.

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## 7. Annex 1

### Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from in Brazil?
3. When did you arrive in The Netherlands?
4. Why did you come here?
5. What did you know about The Netherlands before coming?
6. Did you come alone?
7. Do you have children?
8. If so, did they come with you? Were they born in The Netherlands?
9. What is your legal situation?
10. What is your educational background?
11. Do you work?
12. Do you study?
13. Do you speak Dutch? Do you speak any other language?
14. Do you do any voluntary work?
15. Do you have Brazilian or Latin American friends?
16. Do you have Dutch friends?
17. Do you belong to any social organization or group?
18. What do you do at weekends?
19. Do you have family in Brazil?
20. If so, how often do you communicate with them? How do you communicate with them? (email, telephone, chat room, Skype, Facebook, post mail).
21. Do you send money to people in Brazil?
22. If so, how often? To whom?

23. Do you travel to Brazil?
24. If so, how often?
25. Do you feel adapted to Dutch culture? Why or why not?
26. What are the main differences that you encounter between Dutch and Brazilian culture?
27. What do you like the most about The Netherlands?
28. What do you miss the most from Brazil?
  29. Did you experience any form of discrimination?
  30. Are you planning to go back to Brazil?