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The Economic Crisis and the Return of Brazilians from the USA

Marina Tomassini *

1. Introduction

While Americans try to recover from the downturn of 2008 - 2009, Brazil grew at its fastest rhythm in more than two decades in 2010, and unemployment is at historical lows, despite the recent slowdown. In Brazil, from the time of the outbreak of the crisis in 2008 until early 2012, the country experienced a period of economic growth, ranking it as the sixth-largest economy in the world. However, recently, the impact of the crisis in the country has begun to gain more visibility, interrupting this period of confidence. Thus, should Brazilian immigrants stay in the United States or should they return? Did this crisis affect their jobs? How? Will they have better jobs and opportunities in Brazil? Are Americans willing to take these jobs under the same conditions?

The aim of this article is to contextualize data about the Brazilian immigrants who have decided to stay in the United States, those with intentions to leave, and those that had already left. These immigrants attest to the influence of the crisis on the decision and the impact on their occupations and income. The hypothesis is that the natives of Brazil increased with the crisis, but the migration may continue with less intensity. Nevertheless, the profile of immigrants and types of migration may change. I will bring this subject through the analyzation of recent reports and academic productions. I will also show the information collected at the International Airport of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to Brazilians, during the arrivals of flights from United States - Miami, Detroit, Dallas, New

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York, Newark, Atlanta and Washington. Finally, I will explore the methodological obstacles that I have found during this research.

2. The Influence of the Crisis on Migration Flows and the Labour Market

Since the beginning of the crisis there have been publications, articles and reports about the causes and consequences of it. According to Ghosh¹, economic crises usually generate unemployment, growth of border restrictions, reduction of migration flows, low values of remittances, increased number of deportations and natives. Based on the experiences of the past recessions, he also states that the labor market takes longer to recover than the economy. Which is directly reflected in the patterns of migration policies. In times of crisis, we see the impacts on both the country of origins and destination. The countries of destination should contain new migrations due to the reduction of labor demands, which leads to a drop in irregular immigration. Another trend is the decreased tolerance to foreigners as a result of increased competition for jobs and resources. However, general characteristics affect countries differently, making each flow between two points a single event.

According to, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), international migration has shown its resilience in the face of economic downturns and can be expected to grow further in size and complexity over the next few decades. The 2010-2011 period was characterized by a slow and sometimes hesitant march towards economic recovery from the worst global recession in decades. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates diverted positive for higher-income countries in early 2011, while many emerging and developing economies posted healthy indicators of growth. For the IOM:

i) While a number of global trends were observable, there was considerable variation at the regional and local levels; ii) migrant stocks built up over several decades remained largely unchanged; iii) there were many indications of reduced migratory flows to destination countries; iv) many major countries of destination adjusted their migration programme targets downwards, either in anticipation of a reduced demand for migrant workers or simply to protect their domestic labour markets; and v) fears of greatly reduced remittances proved to be unfounded; following relatively small decreases, they

¹ B. Ghosh, *The Global Economical Crisis and Migration: Where do we go from here?*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva, 2010.

rebounded healthily in 2010 and are expected to continue to increase in the coming years².

The latest annual report on International Migration conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)³, based on data from 2010 and 2011, states that the fall in the flow of legal immigration that has occurred in recent years was due to the global economic crisis that is coming to an end. Immigration for the 23 OECD countries decreased in 2010 for the third consecutive year. However, the decline was modest (3% compared with the previous year, and 7% if 2009 is taken, the study says).

Nonetheless, to the International Labor Organization (ILO)⁴, a record of 202 million people could be unemployed across the world in 2013. It stated, in the beginning of this year, that with the emergence in five years of the financial crisis, unemployment is on the rise again as economies around the world lose jobs and the fragile recovery is threatened by "incoherent monetary policy" in the U.S and Europe. The estimated rise in global unemployment was 4.2 million in 2012. This was one of the largest increases since the early 2000s, excluding the recent crisis years. Reaching 197.3 million jobseekers in 2012, the number of unemployed is expected to rise greater by about 5.1 million in 2013 and by 2.9 million in 2014, in the ILO's baseline projection. For the organization, the global economy was expected to show a modest gain in 2013, with outputs up to 3.6% compared to 3.3% in 2012, according to the International Monetary Fund. Yet this fragile recovery is threatened by political uncertainty on both sides of the Atlantic. So, will it directly influence the international migration flow around the globe? Is it really resilient? Could this crisis be a milestone that is putting a definite end on the classical south-north migration and generating new flows and destinations?

² International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2011: Communicating Effectively about Migration*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva, 2011.

³ OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2012*, 2012, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2012_migr_outlook-2012-en (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁴ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends 2013: Recovering from a Second Jobs Dip*, 2013, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_202326.pdf (accessed 25 June 2014).

3. Brazil

The OECD report insists on the slow increase of international migration and also notes this trend towards Brazilian immigrants, in Japan, after a drastic decrease of 22,900 Brazilian immigrants in 2007 to 3,000. In 2009 at the height of the crisis, the Brazilian population increased again in 2010 to 4,700. In Portugal, the number of Brazilian immigrants increased again to 3,400, in this year after having decreased from 5,000 in 2007 to 2,900 in 2009. In Spain and Italy the decreases persisted in 2010, but was more moderate than the previous. Cathy McIlwane, a researcher at Queen Mary, University of London, also agrees that the economic crisis in Britain and the growth in Brazil have not created an exodus of migrants⁵.

According to the Brazilian Census 2010⁶, the number of Brazilians who decided to return corresponds to 174,597 and the majority of them came from the United States (52,000). In the Brazilian Census 2000, the total number of natives was 143,600 and 29,591 of them were Brazilians returning from the United States. The last Census also states that the United States is still the main destination for Brazilians, corresponding to 117,104 (23.8%). Yet despite being the most complete data about migration available in Brazil, the Census' number is underestimated. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that the number of Brazilians living in the United States is around 1,388,000. It also states that the issue of developed countries leads many Brazilians to make the journey back home. While only 20% of those living in the U.S and a quarter of those who live in Japan have returned since the beginning of the recession in 2008⁷. For the American Community Survey, the Brazilian population in the United States has declined by a little over 8 percent between 2009 and 2011. The most significant decline was in Massachusetts, where the Brazilian population decreased by 22 percent from 2005 to 2011⁸. According to the Center for Brazilian Immigrants in Boston, 15.000 to 20.000 of the state's 200.000 Brazilians left home in 2008 – 2009, and they anticipate additional

⁵ See R. Pinto, *Is Brazil's economic growth enough to draw emigrants home?*, BBC News, March 6, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17272698 (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁶ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Censo Demográfico 2010: Características da População e dos Domicílios – Resultados do Universo*, IBGE, Rio de Janeiro, 2011.

⁷ Ministério das Relações Exteriores, *Brasileiros no Mundo: Estimativas*, MRE, Brasília, 2012, www.brasileirosnomundo.itamaraty.gov.br/a-comunidade/estimativas-populacionais-das-comunidades/APENDICE%20Diplomacia%20Consular%20-%20Brasileiros%20no%20Mundo.pdf (accessed 25 June 2014).

⁸ See American Community Survey at www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/2009_release/

departures in the future, unless the economy improves and immigration reform allows the undocumented to work legally⁹.

According to Maxine Margolis' research¹⁰, there are other indicators of this return, although indirect, from travel agents with a Brazilian clientele. One agent in Danbury said that the number of Brazilians purchasing tickets for the return increased after 2006. In the beginning, the profile corresponded to single men, but later to the entire families. Some other two agencies confirmed the same. The moving companies have also noticed this increase. One company said that the contracts had increased 30 percent in 2009 compared to two years earlier. Owners of remittance agencies also said that over the last four years businesses have decreased drastically.

Brazilian officials are claiming that the country needs to increase the foreign skilled and unskilled workforces to maintain its current economic position. They stated that if the government does not control the current conditions, the country could lose its international competitiveness in relation to other economies in the world. Currently the Brazilian government is still doing its own advertisement to invite highly qualified workers (foreigners and natives living abroad) to come to the country in order to fill the demand for different specialties. Unemployment in Brazil is at a record low. The jobs that are easily available are for those mentioned above and also are for the ones on the opposite side, who have a basic education. Workers in the middle, who have spent around ten years in school but do not have any college education or professional qualifications, struggle to find work. And for non-qualified workers, the quality of life that they have, doing the same activity in Brazil and abroad is much different. For some authors, the mass return is not a rule, because the living conditions in the countries of origin did not change much and many migrants have already rooted abroad with family and social relations.

Yet Brazil is definitely after "brains and human capital". A special Strategic Actions Secretariat (SAE) is working on a strategy to attract selective quality immigration, says Ricardo Paes de Barros, head of SAE. In 2012, Brazil extended 73.022 work visas for foreigners, but only 8.340 were permanent. Of that total, 9.209 were for U.S. residents, followed by workers from the Philippines, Haiti, United Kingdom, India, Germany, China and Italy. Brazil previously attempted to attract qualified immigrants following the collapse

⁹ *Brazilian Immigrant Center*, Annual Report, 2010, www.braziliancenter.org/images/resources/resources-BIC_Report_5-1-10_to_12-31-10.pdf_color.pdf (accessed 25 June 2014).

¹⁰ M. Margolis, *Goodbye, Brazil: Emigrés from the Land of Soccer and Samba*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2013.

of the Soviet Union in the nineties and the exodus of scientists from the former super power, but this plan never managed to take off¹¹.

The recent data published by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) states that the unemployment rate was estimated at 5.7%. This is the lowest rate for March since the beginning of the series and it did not change in comparison to the results of February (5.6%). The unemployed population (1.4 million people) was stable in comparison to the previous month and decreased to 8.5% (127 thousand people) in comparison to March last year. The employed population (23.0 million) remained stable in comparison to February. Contrasting with February 2012, there was an increase of 1.2%, which meant an increase of 276 thousand employed individuals within 12 months. The number of workers with a formal contract in the private sector (11.4 million) did not record any change in relation to February. In the annual comparison, there was an increase of 2.8%, which accounted for an additional 309 thousand jobs with a formal contract in a year. Compared to March last year, the employed persons' purchasing power increased to 0.6%¹².

In an article published in the Brazilian newspaper *Estado de São Paulo*, Mac Margolis points out that the rise of emerging countries is revolutionizing the global immigration:

Before exporters of people, poor countries have attracted workers worldwide today. The flow of immigrants between developing countries already competes with the classic migration from South to North, the United Nations estimates. The economic crisis in Europe, USA and Japan only intensifies this trend. Brazil is in the midst of this whirlwind demographic. Two decades ago, the Brazilians used to run away as Haitians. Now, they return. Stable, democratic, with a booming economy and in the sights of investors, the "new" Brazil, once again, became a country that attracts people. Reissuing the history of the 19th and 20th centuries, the country opens the doors to European immigrants, but also to Latinos¹³.

Despite the flurry of Haitian migration to Acre, there is a very modest presence of immigrants in Brazil. Foreigners were over 1 million in 1970,

¹¹ Mercopress, *Brazil reviewing immigration policy and is looking for "brains and human capital"*, April 2, 2013, <http://en.mercopress.com/2013/04/02/brazil-reviewing-immigration-policy-and-is-looking-for-brains-and-human-capital> (accessed-25 June 2014).

¹² Instituto Brasileiros de Geografia e Estatística, *Pesquisa Mensal de Emprego*, 2013, www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/indicadores/trabalhoerendimento/pme/pmemet2.shtm (accessed 25 June 2014).

¹³ M. Margolis, *Brasil, Novo Pólo de Imigração*, Estado de São Paulo, January 08, 2012, <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/impresso,brasil-novo-polo-de-imigracao-,819891,0.htm> (accessed 25 June 2014).

606,000 in 1991 and only 433,000 in 2010, according to IBGE. This includes undocumented immigrants, which are not even 2% of the national population.

According to Patarra¹⁴, growth and economic stability in Brazil has attracted not only natives, but also immigrants from around the world. Once more, the data diverge: the Ministry of Justice registered 1.466 million foreigners living in the country regularly in 2011. In 2010, they were 961.000 and it continues to still increase.

Despite some initiatives to evaluate the impact of the economic crisis on the return of Brazilian immigrants, most of the data published in the country corresponds to the period prior to 2011, and are insufficient to illustrate the reality. Brazilian studies about the return have focused on the cause and circularity of migration; based on the Theory of Social Networks they are concentrated in certain regions of Brazil, such as Governador Valadares and Ipatinga.

A study of nearly four hundred Brazilians who left the United States for Governador Valadares after the crisis demonstrates that more than 40 percent of natives returned to Brazil because they were working less and earning fewer dollars. Some individuals held up three jobs and earned as much as \$20 an hour before the beginning of the crisis. After which they were earning only \$9 an hour, and they thought that staying in the United States was simply not worth the sacrifice¹⁵.

Another Brazilian research tried to measure the impact of the crisis on the return from the United States and Portugal, and they concluded that the golden era of the Brazilian migration had come to an end. Several factors have contributed to this, as the “building” of a fortress, Europe grounded in xenophobia and restrictive laws on immigrants in the United States that criminalize irregular migration. The economic crisis extinguished jobs and reduced the productive capacity of countries that had an immigrant workforce for their continued growth. On the Brazilian side, as a factor of attraction, the response of the economy to the economic crisis and the efforts that led the country to an enviable position in the international arena

¹⁴ N.L. Patarra, *O Brasil: país de imigração?*, in *Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Regionais e Urbanos e-metropolis*, July 2012, No. 9, ano 3, 6-18.

¹⁵ S. Siqueira, G.O. Assis, E.C. Campos, *Of the Place for the Global: Configuration of Transnational Flows Between Brazil and the United States*, paper presented at the meeting of the Latin America Studies Association, Toronto, October 6-9, in M. Margolis, *Goodbye, Brazil: Emigrés from the Land of Soccer and Samba*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2013.

have offered for those who live abroad the dilemma of leaving everything and facing a new immigration: the return¹⁶.

The data also shows that most immigrants do not mention the crisis as their most important reason to return. The majority stated the reason for their return was related to their families (either because they missed them, or because there was a relative who was sick). Only 10% cited that the 2008 crisis hampered the conditions of employment, reducing working hours and increasing the costs of living in the United States. The other 10.5% of respondents returned to Brazil because they have achieved what they sought abroad. 7.1% of respondents stated that health issues, such as depression or diseases and accidents among family members abroad were reasons to return to Brazil. It is noteworthy that 18.5% returned to Brazil for various reasons such as fear of deportation, the end of college or having the intention of going into higher education in Brazil, difficulties adapting abroad, new prospects and other factors.

According to the same research study, several academic works have pointed to an increase of the feminization of international migration. The possibility of greater permanence of women at the destination via the maintenance of their work in time of crisis (mostly domestic), compared to the difficulties encountered by men, can be one of the biggest factors pointing to an increased number of male immigrants among the natives. The Brazilians who were interviewed used to work predominantly in the market and the services sector in Brazil, before leaving, and in the services and civil construction sector in the United States. Most of them decided to go to the United States to save money, to have a better quality of life and for better job opportunities.

The research study mentioned above, that was conducted in the cities of Poços de Caldas and Teófilo Otoni (State of Minas Gerais) states that since 2008, the municipalities in the study were receiving massive returns of Brazilians who lived abroad. In the qualitative part executed in 2011 and Poté and Botelhos (neighboring these two main cities), respondents reported that the flow of return was intense. In Poté and Botelho most current natives are considered as "borrowers" (people who make loans). Since the beginning of the global crisis, there were not a significant number of international migrants who have returned to the cities of Minas with money in their bank accounts. The Bank of Brazil continues to receive remittances, but their values are much smaller.

¹⁶ C.S. Nunan, D. Fernandes, M. Carvalho, *O fenômeno internacional de retorno como consequência da crise mundial*, in *Revista de Estudos Demográficos*, July 2011, No. 49, 69-98.

Despite more stringent rules on irregular immigration, the main negative aspects of the international crisis in the opinion of the natives were the reduction in working hours, cutting of overtime, rising of inflation and the devaluation of the dollar, all resulting in a lower financial gain. The majority of migrants regretted returning to Poté, because there were many difficulties associated with reintegration into the labor market in the city in Brazil. Respondents reported that after the 2008 crisis, the youth of Poté changed their goals, since they are more interested in attending colleges in Brazil, rather than pursuing opportunities for a better life in the United States. Although there was no direct interview with the natives who were at the same time, without money and unemployed, all respondents emphasized that most natives were out of money and out of the market. The commercial movement in the city decreased, hampering the opening of businesses through loans and then having financial return. That is why the city has become dependent on international remittances. According to Soares¹⁷, in Governador Valadares and Ipatinga, the remittance used to contribute to local economic activities, especially the real estate sector. In this case, the impact of remittances can even change the condition of the household (owned, rented, transferred, etc.). According to IOM, Brazil is the second largest receptor of remittances of Latin America, after Mexico¹⁸. Although such remittances cannot be seen as a national development effect, they may have a localized effect on the municipalities for which they are sent.

Between 2007 and 2008, 700,000 jobs were lost in construction in the United States, in Newark, New Jersey, Mount Vernon, New York, Pompano Beach, Florida and elsewhere, Brazilians have been leaving home by the hundreds. According to Margolis, in a single month in 2009, around fifty Brazilian families in Newark, including those who had real estate there and had not planned to leave, pulled up stakes and headed home. As a consequence, the number of patrons in local restaurants, grocery stores, hair salons, and other business that catered to Brazilians decreased. The editor of Newark's Brazilian newspaper stated that while many Brazilians are indeed leaving the area because of the lack of jobs, not all are returning to Brazil. Several are moving to other states, such as California and Florida,

¹⁷ W. Soares, *Da metáfora a substância: redes sociais, redes migratórias, e migração nacional e internacional e Valadares e Ipatinga*, PhD Thesis (Demography), Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2002.

¹⁸ International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2010: Building Capacities for Change*, IOM, Geneva, 2010.

in search of employment. Some of the men in Newark are leaving their spouses and children behind to seek work elsewhere in the United States¹⁹. For Martes²⁰, the economic crisis reached both documented and undocumented immigrants. Nearly 40 percent of the natives interviewed in Governador Valadares were legally in the United States but had decided to return because of the economic difficulties. Nonetheless, many Brazilians who had green cards or became American citizens (25% of the sample), hoped the crisis would pass and that they would be able to return to the United States and find work. So, they stated that they are living in Brazil temporarily. If the U.S economy improves they would consider returning to their native land.

If many are returning, fewer are leaving Brazil to go to the United States recently. For Siqueira, this is because of the transnational connections between friends and relatives living abroad influencing decisions to stay home. It shows that the American Dream has begun to fray²¹.

But returning is usually more difficult than leaving. In the study of Vedana²² about the return of Brazilians and the processes of acculturation and adaptation related to forms of consumption, the majority of the natives think that the return was a bad decision. Her study found that among the main products and services that the natives usually miss are: food, clothing (quality), electronics (affordable), transportation and security. The data collected through 21 interviews in Porto Alegre demonstrates how this lack is directly related to a negative process of adaptation. Many were outraged by the prices in Brazil, by having to spend a lot of time working to purchase goods. The loss of purchasing power by doing the same activities in the country is a common negative factor that complicates the process of return, which is usually accompanied by slight depression.

For Siqueira and Santos, the crisis in the American economy has also made Brazilians return on an intensity greater than normal in a migratory flow. They applied 235 structured interviews to immigrants that had returned from 2006 to 2011, in 25 cities, which belong to the Northeast Region of

¹⁹ M. Margolis, *Goodbye, Brazil: Emigrés from the Land of Soccer and Samba*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2013.

²⁰ A.C.B. Martes, *New Immigrants, New Land: A Study of Brazilians in Massachusetts*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2010.

²¹ S. Siqueira, *Migrantes e Empreendedorismo na Microrregião de Governador Valadares – sonhos, sucesso e frustrações*, PhD Thesis (Philosophy and Human Sciences), Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2006.

²² S.N. Vedana, *Viver no exterior e voltar para o Brasil: uma análise do processo de aculturação e readaptação de consumidores brasileiros*, Master Thesis (Management) Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2010.

Brazil. The data shows that the immigrants were young people, whose age ranged between 21 and 30 years old, unmarried. They stated the main reason for migration was to earn money, invest in their homeland and go back in a better economic situation. The main reason for their returning was the unfavorable conditions to get money and strict supervision regarding documentation. The majority did not have any investment in Brazil and they came back without reaching the initial project. They sought to find a space in the labor market; however, they found difficulties due to years of absence, the knowledge gap and the low qualifications²³.

One particular shock for newcomers is the strength of Brazil's currency, the real. That may help Brazilians snapping up apartments in places like South Beach in Miami, where properties cost about a third of their equivalents in Rio's exclusive districts. This also hurts the country's manufacturers and exporters. As Simon Romero asked: "Brazil is doing great, but honestly, every other week I ask myself, when is this going to end?"²⁴.

4. United States

The unemployment rate in the United States is higher today than Brazil at 7.6 percent, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported last March. Employment grew in professional and business services and in health care but declined in the retail trade. Both the number of unemployed individuals at 11.7 million, and the unemployment rate, at 7.6 percent, were little changed. Among the major worker groups, the unemployment rates for adult men (6.9 percent), adult women (7.0 percent), teenagers (24.2 percent), whites (6.7 percent), blacks (13.3 percent), and Hispanics (9.2 percent) showed little or no change in March. The unemployment rate for Asians was 5.0 percent (not seasonally adjusted), little changed from a year earlier. In March, the number of long-term unemployed (those jobless for 27 weeks or more) was little changed at 4.6 million. These individuals accounted for 39.6 percent of the unemployed. The number of individuals employed part time for economic reasons (sometimes referred to as involuntary part-time workers) fell by 350,000 over the month to 7.6

²³ S. Siqueira, M.A. Santos, *Emigração, Crise Econômica e Retorno: O Caso da Microrregião de Governador Valadares*, Anais do XVIII Encontro Nacional de Estudos Populacionais, 2012.

²⁴ S. Romero, *Foreigners Follow Money to Booming Brazil, Land of \$35 Martini*, New York Times, 8 August 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/08/13/world/americas/13brazil.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1 (accessed 25 June 2014).

million. These individuals were working part time because their hours had been cut back or because they were unable to find a full-time job. In March, 2.3 million individuals were marginally attached to the labor force, essentially unchanged from a year earlier. These individuals were not in the labor force that they wanted but, were available for work, and had looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months. They were not counted as unemployed because they had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. Among the marginally attached, there were 803,000 discouraged workers²⁵ in March, little changed from a year earlier. The remaining 1.5 million individuals marginally attached to the labor force in March had not searched for work for reasons such as school attendance or family responsibilities. So, it reveals that the recovering is still slowly happening²⁶.

Unauthorized movements of migrants looking for work went down as well during recession. Such movements are not cost-free and with no guarantee of finding a job, they no longer look so attractive to potential migrants and their families. Part of the large drop in unauthorized movements to the U.S from Mexico and Central America (border patrol apprehensions decreased from 875.000 in 2007 to 350.000 in 2011) is due to the impact of recession²⁷.

Following the statistics of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the highest number of Brazilians removed from the country was in 2005, when there were 32.112 of them deported. One year later this number decreased to 2.957. In 2008, that is at the beginning of the crisis, it started to increase, corresponding to 3.814, but it is now slowly reducing again²⁸.

It is largely publicized that there are about eleven million irregular immigrants in the U. S. According to the OECD, labor migration accounts for almost 40% of immigration flows into the European Union, compared with only 6% in the United States. In the U.S. there is little permanent (green card) labor migration, because its system, which is based on numerical limits, favors family migration. The U.S. has the largest share of family migrants in the OECD. About three out of four new permanent

²⁵ Discouraged workers are persons not currently looking for work because they believe no jobs are available for them

²⁶ See updated data at Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov/.

²⁷ OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2012*, 2012, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/8112071e5.pdf?expires=1380564908&id=id&accname=guest&becksum=BA2DF3C769E2C7124378B8035AC0003C (accessed 25 June 2014).

²⁸ Data available at www.ice.gov/removal-statistics/.

immigrants are in this category. Overall in OECD countries, in spite of some decline, family migration continues to be the main category for permanent migration in 2010, accounting for 36% of the flows.

According to a recent research realized by the firm Latino Decisions, 85% of undocumented Latino immigrants have U.S. citizen family members and 87% would plan to apply for citizenship if immigration reform passes. According to the results, they have deep roots in America, with strong family and social connections to U.S. citizens, painting a portrait of a community that is very integrated into the American fabric, and hopeful of a chance to gain legal status and ultimately citizenship²⁹.

The situation now is that facing economic difficulties in the region. Most Californians for example, are advocates of more flexible laws for foreigners for the first time in history. With the shortage of Latinos, entrepreneurs already speak about a collapse in California's agriculture within a few months, if the government does not allow the entry of new workers by the Mexican border. Since 2011, illegal immigration between countries is 0%, according to a survey of the Pew Hispanic Center³⁰.

The crisis of the real estate market in the United States had also a strong impact on immigrants. Brazilians, along with other nationalities, were targets of subprime-mortgage lenders since most lacked good credit histories or proof of employment and income. Moreover, their immigration status apparently was of no consequence to these lenders. According to Margolis, some mortgage companies offered financing to Brazilians and other immigrants without requiring documentation of any kind. Consequently, since the beginning of 2007, many Brazilians, documented and undocumented, in various communities in the United States were able to buy houses with subprime loans. Many believed that this was a good deal because their mortgage, at least initially, cost only a little more than what they were paying for rent. In addition, they could divide their houses into two or three separate living units, one for their own family and the others to rent out. The rent money, in turn, would help pay off the mortgage. But this scenario changed once higher interest rates kicked in. According to her example, the mortgage of one Brazilian family in the Boston area for example, increased from \$1,500 to \$2,600 a month. This was because of the weak economy, "the husband, who had a job in construction, was working

²⁹ M. Barreto, G. Segura, *Poll of undocumented immigrants reveals strong family and social connections in America*, Latino Decisions, www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/04/15/poll-of-undocumented-immigrants-reveals-strong-family-and-social-connections-in-america/ (accessed in 25 June 2014).

³⁰ Data available at Pew Research Center: www.pewresearch.org/.

fewer hours and his wife, who cleaned thirty houses, lost more than one-third of her clients³¹. As a subprime, high-risk borrower, the family had to pay an interest rate on the mortgage that suddenly rose to 12 percent annually. The family did not pay too much attention to the contract and became aware of the problem only once monthly payments skyrocketed.

5. The Research Project

It is not easy to deal with migration statistics. Numbers can differ greatly from one another and they are not very precise, mostly because of the great number of irregular immigrants. This is also the case of returnees. The numbers available are a combination between consulate registrations, the department of Homeland Security in the US, non-governmental organizations and others academic studies. Most academics work with the “snow ball”³² methodology, which is quite common in recent migration studies, because of the large methodological obstacles³³.

Therefore, to get closer to the natives themselves, I decided to collect the first data of my research at the International Airport of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The initial proposal was to apply questionnaires to Brazilians that are returning from the United States. For those who have lived there, I would make questions in order to trace a profile, including: reasons for living in the United States; their occupation and income in Brazil (before traveling) and in the United States; living conditions in both countries; remittances; and reasons to return. The flights from the United States are concentrated in the morning period at both airports. From 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM the flights usually come from Miami, Detroit, Dallas, New York, Newark, Atlanta and Washington.

³¹ M. Margolis, *Little Brazil: imigrantes brasileiros em Nova York*, Papirus, Campinas, 1994, 210.

³² The first group consists of a random sample of respondents who are asked to identify other elements that belong to the target population of the survey. This process can be performed in successive waves, obtaining referrals or information from the interviewee, using his/her own network of friends and relatives. The following groups are part of a non-random sampling technique, which presents a disadvantage because the data cannot be generalized. The statistical data can be used only as useful guidelines.

³³ M. Margolis, *Little Brazil: imigrantes brasileiros em Nova York*, Papirus, Campinas, 1994 and L.M. Anicio, *O imigrante internacional de retorno e sua inserção no mercado de trabalho: um estudo entre as microrregiões Teófilo Otoni e Poços de Caldas*, Master Thesis (Geography), Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2011.

I have spent ten days at each airport and I have contacted at least 50 people a day³⁴. Yet the number of people that I found who were really retuning was surprisingly irrelevant (less than 1%). Thus, right at the beginning I decided to apply not only the questionnaires to the natives but interview all the people who were coming from the United States, including the families waiting at the arrivals. Therefore, I found out that most of them were coming back from a tourist travel (73%), business trip or conference (7%), or they were young people returning from their exchange program or academic studies abroad (4%).

About 15% of them were returning only to visit Brazil. Those people have a stable economic situation in the United States and, according to them they were not really affected by the crisis. Their professions were: housewives, hairdressers, flight attendants, manicurists, cleaners, teachers, bank clerks, models, military soldiers, advertisers, administrators, and consultants. Talking to them I found out that they were living at least for three years in the United States (some are abroad for more than thirty years) and do not think about returning to Brazil. They also have a regular status and they can come and go whenever they want. For the few natives the crisis did not influence their decision and they already had a job or studies arranged in Brazil.

There are some important facts however, that should be considered here. First of all, while I was interviewing individuals, there were many others going out, therefore this kind of research would need more people to have a better accurate data. Another relevant consideration is that strong irregular networks are established in other states like Minas Gerais, Ceará, Goiás, and we believe that those irregular immigrants are the most affected by the crisis³⁵.

I have also visited the only Brazilian center of information and support to international returnees, which is located in the Japanese neighborhood in São Paulo. They mostly receive people returning from Japan. According to their data from January 10, 2011 to December 26, 2012 they received 2.044 people and only 29 of them were returning from the United States. The Brazilian government intends to create more centers like this, to give

³⁴ I have decided to stop my research to reformulate its method and validity after this preliminary experience.

³⁵ At the airport of São Paulo there is a Center of Humanized Service for Brazilians who were deported and ask voluntarily for any kind of help. I went there but the staff wasn't allowed to give me any information without the permission of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. We have been in touch and they will send me their data soon.

support, lectures on entrepreneurship, information about the Brazilian market and qualification courses³⁶.

6. Final Considerations

All the information and data collected demonstrates that the current situation is still uncertain. The job market is really taking longer to recover and there are doubts about the resilience of immigration. Even if there is a recovery, things have definitely changed. After the crisis it is clear that an important number of Brazilians living in the United States, especially those with an irregular status, have had their jobs affected. At least a fifth of them decided to return, but it is not clear if the Brazilian great economy is enough to keep these individuals here and to assure their adequate entry to the labour market. The cost and quality of living in Brazil are problems that all natives face unfortunately.

There are also subjective aspects that are relevant when we think about the impact of the crisis. When natives do not mention the crisis as the main reason, one should consider the difficulty to assume failure in the migration process and other aspects such as the feelings of being homesick. This is what Sayad³⁷ calls the constant desire of return, and when it materializes it seems to be associated by the individual to a single reason. There are important studies about it that should interchange with more macro ones. It also seems that the United States has a demand for some kind of activities that Americans are not willing to fulfill. This is something that is getting more evident each day, as we can see now in the rural area of California.

It is clear that there is a strong necessity of deeper studies and data to evaluate the facts in order to understand the impact on different regions in Brazil, the United States and also between the rural and urban area.

³⁶ Data available at: www.bunkyo.bunkyonet.org.br.

³⁷ A. Sayad, *A imigração ou os paradoxos da alteridade*, São Paulo, Edusp, 1998.



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