

**MIGRATION, RELIGION, AND TRANSNATIONALISM
IN SOUTH FLORIDA**

by

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INTRODUCTION

In this article we report the preliminary finds of a research project entitled “Transnational Florida,” which is supported by the Ford Foundation. The aim of this project is to develop a study of religious pluralism, transnational migration and identity among three groups of immigrants in Florida (USA): Brazilians, Mexicans and Gautemalans¹. More specifically, the project seeks to understand the role that religious beliefs, practices and institutions play in the articulation of the transnational connections and in the construction of the identity of these three groups. The concept of transnationalism refers to the existence of regular relationships that cross the national borders, producing a constant flow of people, goods, money, pieces of information, culture and religious practices. However, the main point of the research is the investigation of this transnationalism inside the religious world, understanding its relationship with the production of multiple and hybrid, individual and collective identities among the immigrants².

Research among Brazilian migrants was carried out by two sociologists and one anthropologist³. During 25 days – from March 10 to April 04, 2003 – we conducted exploratory research in Deerfield Beach and Pompano Beach, South Florida, with the

goal of mapping out the research sites and establishing the first contacts with the communities that were going to be deeply studied in a near future.

At this moment, three major points stood out in the research: the life conditions of the immigrants; the context of the US reality in which they were inserted and of the Brazilian reality from which they came; and finally, the role carried out by several religious traditions in the construction of the every day life of these Brazilians who are living outside Brazil.

The research got underway with preliminary contacts made by the University of Florida⁴ and with our own immersion in the universe of the research. This universe involved the religious groups devoted to taking care of the Brazilians in the area. We used several methods and techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, open interviews and the collection of print and audiovisual material.

This article, which sums up its main discoveries, is divided into two parts. The first one refers to the life conditions in which these Brazilians find themselves. The second focuses on their religious universe. Since the project is in exploratory phase, this article only offers a broad view of several key dimensions and dynamics.

FIRST PART: WHO ARE THE BRAZILIANS?

The area and the presence of the Brazilians

Both Deerfield Beach and Pompano Beach are located in Southeast Florida, inside Broward county, about half an hour from Miami. The first city has 64,583 inhabitants and the second one, 78,191 inhabitants. Among these inhabitants, there is a significant number of elderly people: in Deerfield Beach 29,3% of the population are over the age of 65 and in Pompano Beach we find 23%⁵. To these percentages we must add the great number of people who are elderly people, who come from the North of the country during the winter, the so-called “snow-birds”⁶.

As to the ethnic composition of the population, the majority are white people, both in Deerfield Beach (81,5%) and in Pompano Beach (70%). The Hispanics form a reduced proportion, 3,9% and 10% respectively. According to Helen B. Marrow (2002)⁷, the category “Hispanic” was created to denote the minorities of Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, but it ended up taking in the Brazilians too. However, the Brazilians are ambivalent about this label. Sandra Schamas⁸, a journalist, confirms that 69% of the Brazilians declared in the Census: “*I am not Hispanic,*” and 30 % wrote beside the list of categories, “I am Brazilian”.

The above information reveals one of the first dilemmas when we try to identify officially the number of Brazilians in the USA: in which category are they classified in the Census? Should they be melted under the Hispanic label and/or other ones?

According to the Broward Supervisor of Elections, among those who are registered as voters to the year of 2000, there are no Brazilians. Here, besides the problem of the classification of the Brazilians in the Census, we have the problem of the political representativeness. In both cases, there is something that has a good deal of

importance: the great majority of migrants do not have their “green cards”, that is, they do not have the US government’s permission to reside legally in the country. This situation seriously affects Brazilians’ exercise of political rights and even the mere possibility of information about the real dimensions of the group.

Nowadays, there is a great number of Brazilians in South Florida. Estimates range from 200.000 to 300.000. However, it is extremely hard to obtain more accurate data. Deerfield Beach and Pompano Beach areas are known for their high concentration of Brazilians. They can be easily observed through the large number of trade business that display Brazilian names such as, “Central do Brasil”, “Brasil Original”, “Uai!”, or, in an evocative mixture, “Brasliced”⁹. We can also take into consideration the number of Brazilian flags, newspapers and magazines, adds, and the Brazilian language, Portuguese, that is heard every where.

Heterogeneity

The Brazilian community we have researched is quite heterogeneous, particularly concerning its religious world, though we have detected some predominant tendencies when dealing with class, race/ethnicity, and gender. When talking about place of origin, the majority are “*mineiros*” (from Minas Gerais – Brazil), but there are many migrants from the northeast, southeast and south of Brazil.

From the point of view of a Brazilian researcher, the majority of migrants seem to be middle-lower class. They have a basic educational level and have some or little knowledge of English. The jobs they perform do not demand a high qualification. Most migrants do not have the papers requested by the Immigration Service. Yet there is a minority that enjoys a high social and economic position, with steady jobs, legal papers, living in comfortable houses and having new cars. Besides those people who have already come from Brazil with a social and economic status, there are also those who have succeed in the USA and have experience upward mobility.

In the universe studied, there is a balance between the number of men and women. In the church environment, the significant number of men is surprising, unlike what usually happens in Brazil. Perhaps this happens because in the USA the Brazilian churches also play a social role in terms of group solidarity, leisure time and possibilities of information about a job and papers – all of which would attract more men than women.

Though the majority of Brazilians are white, there are also non-white ones. The number of these non-white people and the place they have inside the hierarchy of the

church varies according to the different churches. In terms of age, we have a mixture of young people and adults. There are also many children and a few old people. This calls our attention once more in the church environment for it is different from what happens in Brazil.

The departure to the USA: Migration or change?

We cannot deny that the principal motivation to leave for the US is an economic one: *“I have come to America to earn money”*. The opportunities that the USA offers today in this area are clear. This in contrast to the Brazilian situation, which is marked by the persistent restriction on the job field, shrinking salaries, and growing unemployment.

However, this is not the only reason and it does not account for the complexity of the migratory process. The histories of moving observed during our work – not only starting with Brazil, but specially from the northeast of the US to South Florida – cannot be explained only by market and salary asymmetries, as assumed in the traditional the push-pull models of migration¹⁰. It is necessary to take into consideration the role performed by the social systems as attraction and sustenance poles for these displacements. In effect, as Martes (2000) reminds us, *“the displacements (...) are not uphold by individuals that decide to migrate singly, but by groups of people connected by friendship ties, knowledge or kinship”* (p. 43).

When dealing with the reasons why Brazilians go to the USA, we frequently come across the difficulty of talking about “migrants”. This word seems to be derogatory.

Talking about this subject, one of the interviewed people referred to the stigma of the migrants. When we asked what she meant, she answered, *“it is a hard situation, especially in the beginning... there are thousands of difficulties. It is a true stigma”*.

In effect, many people do not identify themselves as migrants. They prefer to say that they *“have come or moved to the USA”*. As a matter of fact, when they refer to migrants they do it in the third person, “them”, the others. This happens especially when we have a differentiated social situation. A catholic priest, for instance, when addressing the faithful ones talked about the “migrants”, but he did not define himself as one of them, although he was also Brazilian, living in the USA for about 20 years.

Nevertheless, the rejection of the condition of migrant can also hide another issue that refers to the political aspect of this concept. Beyond the discrimination issue lie political struggles around the recognition of Brazilian migrants as a legitimate group by the State and civil society in both the US and Brazil. Facing a lack of policy for the migrants from the Brazilian government, which is poignantly illustrated by Brazilian president’s and his ministers’s silence on this issue when they visit the USA – the fact that they do not use the term migrant is also a way to avoid assuming responsibility for the difficulties, segregation and stigmas that the Brazilian migrants suffer. In view of this lack of social policies for the migrants, churches, above all the Evangelical ones, have come to fill in the vacuum. They compensate for the lack of the political representativeness of the migrants.

Conditions of work and urban life

Jobs done by Brazilians in Deerfield and Pompano Beach are also differentiated, adding to the heterogeneity among the migrants. There is a minority of migrants that work in the business sector, either in small enterprises which have Brazilian funds, or in American enterprises, in the communication, commerce or other working areas. However, this kind of occupation is less visible. The majority of Brazilians are distributed in many types of work like house cleaning, civil construction sector, gardening, paving, swimming pool treatment, transportation by truck and trade business (such as sales clerk, mainly in Brazilian enterprises).

Wages in these activities vary. In the heavier jobs and in those that demand less qualification, as the paving and swimming pools cleaning ones, the wage is at about \$ 6 per hour. In the civil construction sector and house cleaning area, the average is between \$ 8 and \$ 12 per hour. Yet, depending on the qualification of the worker and on the kind of job, s/he can get to higher wages. Thus, those who work in house cleaning, depending on the type of house and on the parts that will be cleaned, can receive \$ 20 per hour¹¹. A plumber, an electrician or even someone well-qualified in drywalling¹² can get a wage of \$ 18 or \$ 20 per hour. However, in the case of drywalling, there are many difficulties associated with this line of work. When a Brazilian young man told one of the researchers that he worked with drywall, he asked if the researcher knew what it was. As the answer was negative, he commented, *“it is better not to know what it is about”*, which revealed both the depreciation of the kind of work and the shame of the one who performs it.

The intensity of the work also interferes in the profit achieved. In the civil construction sector, depending on the hours spent on the work and on the job to be done, the work day may typically bring \$ 75 to \$ 150. In house cleaning, people can control their activity/wage starting with the type of job they perform and the number of houses they plan to work in (they can only clean at least four houses a day). To work on Saturdays and Sundays is common as well as to have more than one job. There are people who work handing over newspapers at night and daybreak and also work as drivers during part of the day. However, the results of this double journey of work are harmful. They increase the risk of diseases and accidents.

The deterioration of the job market is also quite visible. The reduction of the wage is most visible. For example, a “square foot” of installed ornamental tile or floor, was twice worth ten years ago compared to what it is today. A year those set up television cable received \$ 17 installation. Today the price is \$ 9. Besides, vacation is directly connected to the number of years one has worked on the same corporation. Thus, due to high turn-over ration of jobs or even of the lack of a formal job contract, many workers hardly take their vacation.

Job risks are another problem for workers. First, the worker needs to have an accident insurance and another insurance against any damage he/she may inflict on the material or equipment which he/she works (which is rather common in the civil construction sector). All in all, insurance can cost \$ 300, payable every three months. At the same time, Brazilian participation in the growing informal economy is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, workers do not pay taxes to the government, increasing the profit gained. On the other, job instability and insecurity can be severely felt when health problems make it impossible for the person to work or to pay high medical bills.

One of the most significant issues to Brazilians, is professional over qualification. People who are graduated in universities and who worked as lawyers, doctors, system analysts or other professionals, leave their activities in Brazil to dedicate themselves to manual and low-skilled work in the US. The degree of dissatisfaction and frustration – proportional to the high expectation they had before concerning the possibilities of professional success – in many cases, leads to serious problems in the emotional area and in adapting to the new way of life. The presence of men in jobs that are typically

occupied by women in Brazil, such as house cleaning, becomes an interesting variable to be investigated. To what extent this change affects men emotionally?

Space was also a major variable in our findings. The landscape of the urban area in the studied cities differs markedly from that in Brazil. Some of its characteristics are wide avenues, the absence of sidewalks, and the omni-presence of big shopping malls and buildings constructed to be distant from one another, with houses isolated by gardens. To this we add a very limited public transportation system. There is no subway and there are few bus lines. This means that the person must have a car.

In this context, the absence of public areas for a meeting contributes to a life of few contacts. Many times these contacts are restricted to the house, the job and the trade business. Even the beaches tend to be segregated, setting apart areas predominantly visited by Americans and zones where the minorities, including the Brazilians, usually are in. Given the lack of shared public spaces, the churches and religious groups, as open spaces for meetings, have a special importance.

The dwelling conditions are well diversified in response to the economic situation of individuals. For a minority, these conditions are good, since they have access to modern well-equipped houses, with all the American comfort and technology. However, the majority pays rent for houses of three or four bedrooms that can shelter from two to four Brazilians per bedroom. The rent is around \$ 300 per room, which can vary depending on the facilities and locality. There is also what we call “to warm the bed”, when those who work during the day take turn with those who work at night.

Family, schooling and the English language

The family and kinship alliances and ties perform a significant role in the histories of motivations to migration (Margolis, 1994). In general, these ties constitute one of the most important support beam to the Brazilians living in the USA,. However, arrangements vary according to household configuration: whether migrants are married or single; whether the marriage happened in the USA or in Brazil; whether the children were born in Brazil or in the USA; whether the husband or the wife moved first and only after his/her settlement they gathered together again in the USA, etc.

For some of our informants, the fact that they are “*away from home*” strengthens the family ties. It is not rare to find families who brought relatives, mainly grandparents, to help take care of the children. On the other hand, for many of them the migration situation results in family separation and disruption, deepening the rootlessness and lonely life.

Intensive and extensive immersion at work generates time limitations for a quality family life. Many people regret the fact that they cannot assist the children and teenagers, both emotionally and morally, teaching them the rules of sociability and upbringing. Consequently, the existential and family crisis is part of daily life and talk. As we will see, this theme is frequently addressed in the environment where the community of faith gathers.

When talking about schooling, we can say – as far as we could observe and obtain data – that a great deal of Brazilians have finished secondary school. Few of the

interviewed ones admitted to have the schooling level inferior to eight years of study.

The number of illiterate people would seem small. We found only one woman who declared she *“did not have her first letters”*. On the opposite side, there is clearly a more prepared segment. They come from Brazil with a higher schooling level. In one of the biggest Evangelical churches, according to its leader, *“80% have schooling. [...] Our church is not much politically aware [...] and it is called the church of the rich ones”*.

Besides this segment, there are also Brazilians who have moved from the North of the US (after having left Brazil in the decade of 80) to South Florida (in the decade of 90) so that they could continue with their schooling. A few of the interviewees evaluate this schooling according to how long ago they arrived. Those who arrived 10 years ago, had greater opportunities to have their status of foreigners legalized, that is, they are *“supported by papers”* and, consequently, have a more stable life condition. Among these people, there is a tendency to see the recent migratory wave as composed by *“Brazilians of low economic and schooling level”*. According to another informant, *“not many people have a university degree. Many of those who come have gone at most to high school”*.

But there are other possibilities to think the relationship between time of arrival and schooling. Olavo's example¹³, is significant. He arrived in the end of the 80's. He was 18. He did not know anything about the English language and only in the end of the 90's he secured a better job, in a communication corporation. His sister and brother have recently arrived. As they are younger, they have gone to high school¹⁴. They have learned the language faster and entered easily in the job market. Today, they have intermediate jobs in American corporations.

The children of Brazilians who have moved from Brazil during their sons' and daughters' schooling age or who were born in the US have greater chances. These children have access to public schooling, even if their parents and/or responsible ones are not "supported by papers". However, in this case, they may have some problems when getting the diplomas. On the downside, the children who are socialized in US schools end up assimilating "American" values, without thereby surrendering their Brazilianness – especially when they keep in touch with their country of origin and/or are immersed in transnational social networks. This may lead to identity and generational conflicts. In these cases, the churches – as we will see ahead – keep a relevant connecting and re-socializing role.

There is no automatic relation between schooling and fluency in English. In Brazil, only those who can pay for private schools can achieve this fluency, since public education is underfunded and deficient. This means that the great majority of migrants face the barrier of the language, which makes the immediate and qualified insertion in the US society and culture very difficult. In general, children and young people – for whom it is easier to learn a second language – are the cultural mediators between the members of the family who cannot speak English and the cultural universe of the host society. And the lack of language fluency contributes further to the loneliness we have referred to because it limits the possibilities for communication.

In this case, the help of those who know English is crucial. Nevertheless, even with this help, the newly arrived Brazilians get cheated, especially by Brazilians who know the language and take advantage of the ignorance of the others to get money and

benefits. In sum, it is evident that the combination between schooling and language fluency guarantees greater possibilities of competing for better jobs and of getting better life opportunities.

Successes and failures in the migratory experience after September 11

The “American adventure” is a history full of contradictions in which success and failure are interlaced. The adventure plays itself out in different patterns.

The quality of life that the privileged minorities have in the USA is, in many aspects, superior to that they would have in Brazil in equal circumstances. However, though these people consider themselves – to a great extent – pleased with the situation, they do not escape from the consequences of living far from their country of origin: separation from family and friends, cultural shock, family differences in the process of the adjustment to life in the US.

To the great majority, the challenges presented by the conditions of life and job are heavier. To face them daily brings emotional and psychic problems: solitude, permanent tension, depression, sometimes leading to suicide. The example of one of the first Brazilian Baptist Churches – that has nearly 800 members – is startling: among them, there were 12 suicide cases in the last six months¹⁵. At the same time, these days it is not as easy as it was in the 1960s and ‘70’s for migrants catch a glimpse of the “American Dream.” In the context, the decision to stay in the USA or to go back to Brazil is a permanent dilemma. However, to go back to Brazil is itself a dream – “*next*

year I will be back “– that is always postponed by the impossibility of making it come true. “*Every time I check my watch to see what time it is in Brazil*”, says Ivete. She constantly thinks about going back, but she cannot afford doing it.

Better job opportunities in the USA, safety, quality of life, the possibility to send money to Brazil – making possible the fulfillment of many projects that would be impossible otherwise –, the need to pay debts made in the USA and, on the other side, the economic difficulties and the violence in their country of origin are reasons raised to justify permanence in the USA. On the other side, the reasons to go back to Brazil are also strong: the hardness of life in the USA, solitude, the excess of professional qualification or the sub-qualification of the performed job, the difficulty to relate to Euro-americans – who are considered cold and individualist – and, in addition, migrants miss Brazil, and feel the separation from their family and friends and the lack of a more informal and warmer life style.

Of course these arguments are mixed and play themselves out in different ways, in every personal path, forming several options. Decisions are also reformulated along time. The initial period after migration is generally the most difficult since it demands a greater effort of adaptation, above all when questions that have to do with housing, jobs, and papers are not solved. Afterwards, as people get accustomed to the US lifestyle, they do not “find” themselves in Brazil anymore. This tendency grows strong when the children, raised in the USA, do not want to go back. However, it is neither a linear process nor free from ambiguity. Aparecida’s account is significant. She is a high middle class woman, ex-wife of a high representative of the Brazilian government.

Aparecida does not classify herself among those who are considered the richest ones – “as the *Collor de Mellos*” – but she obviously does not see herself as poor. She has economic security and is free to come and go. She made a choice for the US and likes Florida a great deal, although she complains about the limitations on the cultural level. But it is also not easy to go back to Brazil after such a long time. Although she lives in a privileged social situation, she does not find herself free from inner separation and suffering. She is still a migrant (does she consider herself as such?) and, as such, she cannot escape from the dilemmas and difficulties that are typical of this situation. In this context, there are not many Brazilians who clearly assume the decision to live definitively in the USA. Only those who have achieved a better life conditions and have adapted to the US style are sure of their decision to settle abroad. In a special category are the religious leaders who came to the US to carry out religious activities and stay in the country while it is necessary.

For those who decide to stay, obtaining their papers from the National Immigration Service (INS) takes a position of absolute pre-eminence. It was not difficult – at least till some time ago, before the events of September 11¹⁶ – to succeed in getting, for example, the visa for six months. At the end of this date, the immigrant would become “illegal”, unless s/he could legalize his/her situation, through job contact or marriage with an American citizen. When these two alternatives are impossible, many Brazilians prefer to run the risk and continue working “without the papers”. This option – that seems to be adopted by the great majority – means to be exposed to the permanent tension of being “discovered” by the INS, suffer the “*humiliation of being*

seen as a criminal”, or, what is even worse, to go through the painful process of extradition.

The events of September 11, 2001, intensified the difficulties experienced by the migrants. There is a consensus among those interviewed that the situation has worsened. The fact was seen as frightening and shocking – “*September 11 created a death*” – and aroused consequences in the country. “*It is a serious situation, we are in war*”, declared a priest. Besides, it also generated specific consequences in the life conditions of the Brazilians. It affected the job market – “*there are not many jobs anymore, many people do not have a job*”. But above all, it implied tightening restrictions to migration: the processes of legalization of the papers are much slower, there are greater demands to obtain a driver’s licenses, and control on people who do not have their papers intensified: some people were arrested and exiled.

Naturally, all this context generates an atmosphere of fear and tension. And this atmosphere grows worse through the proliferation of the rumors, that are transmitted faster among Brazilians. It is in this general context that several Brazilian churches act on.

PART II – THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

The religious scene

The religious groups that deal directly with Brazilians – usually called “Brazilian churches” – are numerous and distinct. We could identify 39 churches, situated in Deerfield Beach and Pompano Beach. Among them, there is only one Catholic Church –

the Church of Our Lady Aparecida – that serves all Brazilian Catholics in the area.

Among the many Protestant churches, those of Pentecostal and Neo-pentecostal character dominate¹⁷. There are also three Spiritist Centers; and a *Candomblé terreiro* in the process of being formed.

This picture reflects to some extent the Brazilian religious scene. In fact, according to the last Census in Brazil, 73.8% of the population is Catholic, 15.4% Protestant; 1.4% Spiritist; 0.3% of *Umbandistas* and *Candomblecistas*, 0.1% classify themselves as Jewish; 0.1% as followers of “Oriental religions”, 1.3% of other religions; 0.2% of religions that are not determined, and 7.3% indicate that they do not have a religion¹⁸. These data show the growth of the Evangelical churches and those who declare not to have a religion. Although the number of Catholics is still shrinking, they still represent the great majority of Brazil’s population.

The religious scene found among Brazilian people in the two researched cities departs in important ways from that in Brazil. First of all, there is a high number of evangelical churches. This certainly has to do with the fact that they have “arrived first” and they have found resonance in the Protestant tradition of the country. In fact, these churches, together with some Spiritist groups, settled in South Florida since the decade of the 80’s, to support the Brazilians who were beginning to grow in the area. According to one of our informants, in the beginning of the 90’s, “*there were 29 or 30 groups, with services in Portuguese in this area, and they are still multiplying.*”

In this period, because there was no “Brazilian” church, Catholics attended the US churches regularly. However, this generated many problems, due to the linguistic and

cultural barriers. In this context, many of Brazilianas started to attend evangelical churches. *“All this time in which the Catholic church – in Portuguese language – was not present, almost all Brazilians, felt this experience. In the thirsty, in the desert of their lives, they searched for water. They went to those places where they could find something in Portuguese. 90% sought a new experience in different religions,”* declares a Catholic priest. According to him, this search did not necessarily lead to an authentic conversion to other religions: *“at the moment that the Catholic church settled itself, the Catholics who attended Evangelical churches started to come back”*.

This tendency, from a Catholic point of view, would need to be confirmed through further research. From the Protestant perspective, pastors generally confirm that there is growing number of evangelical churches, but due to the splintering that characterizes this universe, it is hard to reach consensus on this. Certainly the number and size of some of these churches, as well as the creation of an Evangelical Minister Association, show the vitality of Protestantism among Brazilian immigrants and the attempt to unify the religious field under its banner. In sum, we hypothesize that at this stage, evangelical churches scattered in the area attract the majority of Brazilians.

A word of caution is needed here, since this reality contradicts not only today's scene in Brazil but also the situation found among the Brazilian migrants in Massachusetts and New York (Martes, 2000; Margolis, 1994). Though the numerical predominance of the Evangelical churches is an unquestionable fact, maybe it is not enough to conclude that the majority of Brazilians are Evangelical. Additionally, the

phenomenon of the “non-practicing Catholics” or of those who declare themselves “without religion” was not studied in this research because of methodological options.

At the same time, we are not talking about a static picture. We have observed a certain religious flow among the different churches. These aspects would certainly need to be deepened in future research.

The religious practices

In these different churches, the organization of the religious services holds a central position. For example, in Spiritist centers, the teaching of the doctrine to its members receive great attention in the public meetings. There is also the spiritual sessions, where people, previously oriented, receive prayers as part of what we may call a spiritual “treatment”. A more restricted core in the centers, participates of in mediumship work, desobsessão (spiritual cleansing), psycho-writing, incorporation of and communication with the spirits. Yet, these works do not receive the same priority as the doctrine teaching.

For *Candomblé*, the initiated leader, or *pai de santo*, had not started his activities in the area. Yet, we could infer, from his account on previous practices, that his main activities are the consultations – which include throwing and reading the shells (*buzios*) and interpretation of the horoscope – carried out daily. These sessions on the *Candomblé* center happen once a month.

In the Christian world – which we analyse more accurately here –, services in Protestant churches and Masses in the Catholic church constitute the moment in which the

community collectively expresses its faith and joins together to pray and hear the Word of God. The pastor/priest performs an essential role which bestows on him the power not only in the religious arena but also in all the organizational and administrative matters. In both in Catholic and Protestant churches, there are many other activities besides services. Most are connected with religious formation and the doctrinal preaching. In these activities, young people receive special attention, dovetailing with the other central theme for Brazilian immigrants: the family.

In all churches, music plays a vital role, stimulating the intense participation of the community. In Evangelical churches, this aspect is particularly well developed. These churches boast excellent sound systems and musical groups – including percussion instruments, keyboard, tuba, bass, and guitar – all in an atmosphere of perfect acoustics. The participation of the community is made easy by the projection of the lyrics of the songs in a big screen, through slide projectors.

All this contributes to create an atmosphere of intense emotion, also encouraged by the pastor's preaching style, which can be considered a true show. Pastors use an array of vocal and gesture resources which trigger and are reinforced by group prayers and the intense participation of all church members. Our sense is that evangelical becomes professionalized in the US, strongly influenced by local styles and driven by technology.

In some cases, the presence of professional singers and/or choirs makes the musical level a true concert¹⁹. Even in Catholic churches – in contrast to what happens in Brazil,

where the music does not always have the same technical quality – we find excellent musical groups.

The religious dimension is not limited to the collective dimension, but it also finds expression at the individual level. Religion tries to give an answer to the search for meaning and thus it is present in all of life's aspects. Especially for migrants, who live a situation marked by the material and/or emotional instability, the religion helps to understand and accept this situation by seeing it as part of God's will. The latter is seen as the ultimate source of guiding criteria for daily choices.

Reliance of God's will is illustrate in the way some of our informants account for their choice for "*coming to America*". This choice is seen as obeying basically the religious motivation: this is what legitimates their arrival. Henriqueta, a Catholic social worker, is an example of this. She already had her professional life set up with all comforts in Brazil. She also worked in the church doing pastoral work among families. Then her husband was invited to work for an American enterprise. For her, coming to America meant leaving everything that was important at that moment. It was a difficult process. Henriqueta finally came to understand her trip to the USA as part of God's plan to her life. "*I will only stay in the USA if I feel it is His plan, if I have something very important to do there. Then I will stay!*". Just to be sure, Henriqueta asked for a sign: that the Lord help her choose her house. She bought the house she liked most and when she moved there with her family, she found the sign: the house was empty, but "*there were two images of Our Lady and a cross, and it was written, 'I and my house will*

always serve the Lord'. Didn't I ask Him for a sign? It was there, 'You came to serve Me!'. (...) That is why I say, I came with God''.

This narrative is a good example of how the religious dimension is lived in the existential level.

It is also important to highlight the gender dimension. In the Christian churches we have observed, it gains some peculiarities. First, we have verified that there are not many women placed high in ecclesial hierarchies. Regarding the Catholic Church, this was to be expected for, according to the present Canon Law, women do not have access to priesthood. However, even in the Evangelical world which, according to some studies is more open on this subject, we did not find female . This leads us to hypothesize that the patriarchal influence that still permeates, in higher or lesser degree, the power structure of most Christian churches.

From a quantitative perspective, women do not represent the majority among the faithful. As we stated before, this tendency is opposite of what generally happens in Brazil, where men are numerically on a par with women. However, here we cannot infer that women have lower rates of participation in the churches. Nor does it necessarily mean that women have lesser interest in religious matters when they are abroad. We can only tentatively concluded that there is greater male participation. One of the interviewed women, Antonia, said, *“it was in America that my husband started to engage in the religious life. Like him, many men started to engage in the community life here because the church is the only place where they find support and human warmth.*

American people do not have friends. They only go from their houses to work, from work to their houses. The church environment offers this meeting space and social exchange”.

In their turn, women, even if they are not a numerical majority, always take part in churches in a vigorous way. We do not have enough information to measure the degree and/or assert that, in the migration context, the level of participation in Florida would be higher than in Brazil. But it is certainly an active participation in the religious worships.

For example, in evangelical churches, women preach with great eagerness and emotion. In particular, oral testimonies offer a favorable occasion to express the problems that of daily life. In this extent, women feel free to express their concrete problems, opening their privacy to find comfort and hope in a religious environment. Women also have an important participation during the Laudation moment: they frequently conduct the prayer and the hymns.

In terms of the Catholic church, women participate as much as men. Both groups engage in all the tasks performed by lay people, such as the reading of the holy texts, the offertory procession – in which they bring offerings to the altar – the gathering of donations and the fulfillment of other supporting tasks during the Mass ritual. Some women also perform, just like men, the so-called “non-ordained ministries”. We have found several Eucharist ministers that distribute the Holy Communion.

Some religious movements – such as Christ Movement Couples – also open spaces for reflexion on gender issues. In this aspect, the experience of migration to a country where the process of women’s liberation is more developed than in Brazil in

general, seems to be of great importance. In the opinion of some Brazilians, the situation that we have in Brazil nowadays is still much more traditional, generally speaking, since women dedicate themselves, predominantly, to taking care of the children and to household tasks. For them, the US experience is different: the fact that the majority of Brazilian women in the USA take part in the job market and earn their own money guarantees a greater autonomy which is reflected in the domestic field and in the ecclesial environment.

In sum, Brazilian churches regularly assemble a good deal of people. We could assume that the participation in the religious activities has a greater weight in the life of Brazilian people in the USA than in Brazil. In this particular context, its meaning enlarges. Far from limiting itself to a specifically religious dimension, religion also enters many other dimensions of life, including both sociability, leisure time, and the base to several needs, as we will see afterwards.

Administrative structure of the churches

In general, churches are well organized. There is always a list of the members in which their basic data is registered. For the Catholic church, this type of demand is much more strict in Florida than in Brazil. In the US, the list is justified as a consequence and expression of the voluntary nature church life in a pluralistic setting. To survive in this pluralistic setting, the church needs active participation in the religious life of the community. The list also makes it possible to control the financial organization of the churches. Tithing seems to have a central place here. In general, the emphasis given to

this theme in the Evangelical churches is justified by the principle that generosity is always rewarded. The churches we visited are not an exception. However, even in the Catholic church, we have observed a greater emphasis in monetary contributions by parish members, which is different from Brazil. There is even an organized group of tithe contributors responsible for this work. Offerings during the religious services are also a common activity among the several Christian churches. Finally, there are also several campaigns to raise funds to specific purposes. Among them there is frequently, both in the Catholic and in the Evangelical churches, the purchasing, construction and/or restoration of church property.

The high degree of organization in the different churches “in the diaspora”, besides responding to the internal needs of the churches, may also be explained by more than one factor: the US government demands. In the US, the churches are considered “volunteer organizations”, that is, they do not have any State support and so they must be self-sufficient, economically speaking. On the other hand, they generally operate with the status of the non-profit organizations and thus are free from taxes: for this they need to have their papers faultlessly in order. This is not always understood by Brazilians – and by the Latin/Latino culture in general. Latin American immigrants do not have the habit of cooperating effectively in this aspect. This leads the churches to make an effort to make their members economically responsible for them. Spiritists also have a non-profit organizations status. Because they are smaller groups, each member must contribute financially. However, Spiritist centers do not exhibit the degree of organizational control shown by Christian churches.

The *pai de santo* we contacted sets up his administration by charging money for his consultations and the jobs performed on the *Candomblé terreiro*. The fact that he interact with *Candomblé's terreiros* in New York, Salvador, Interlagos and Lagos reveals an intense and organized level of transnational activity.

Sociability, leisure time and support to the needs

In Deerfield and Pompano Beach, Brazilians face specific conditions of life. They live in landscapes quite distinct from those they create in Brazil. Their lives are characterized by the insertion in a different urban life – in which the public space is not very conducive to the spontaneous meeting and contact with others – and in the job market demands. For us, the Brazilian churches are precisely the institutions that, in addition to their traditional religious role, fulfill a socio-cultural role, opening spaces to conduct various types of meetings, celebrations, and fraternal encounters. Churches tighten collective ties among Brazilians in South Florida.. One of the first aspects that confirms this refers to the quantity of recreational activities – from the snacks in church cafeterias, to religious services, soccer games (organized for example by groups such as “Athletes for Christ”), to parties performed inside or outside the holy spaces. All these activities seem to contribute to establishing ties that can build and rebuild identities. The essence of Brazilianness is reanacted in these moments and is reinforced by the different activities sponsored by churches in these areas.

In the face of a rather long list of problems of daily life – access to information, jobs, housing, papers, legal problems, and health issues – religious institutions provide

intense support. Of course, the level of support depends on the size of the church, the degree of institutionalization, and the material and symbolic resources available. In terms of job placement, churches have several ways to try to solve the problem. Announcements before and after the religious services are usual, besides the information given in pamphlets and other institutional publications. Even when the religious leader does not consider this the role of the church, some kind of help is always offered. A minister explained to us, *“There is a misunderstanding here because the church is not a job agency. This is not the church’s job. But, as we have a heart, we guide them”*. As we have seen, getting a job and adequate housing depends on the social situation and the type of networks which the immigrants belong to. In our research sites, religious networks seem to perform a significant role, not only in obtaining bits of information, but mainly, because the faith communities organize themselves (either formally, through their spiritual leaders, or informally, through specific groups or even through individual members of the congregation) to support Brazilians. A minister explained to us that, *“Usually, people who do not have a place to live in come here... The person comes from Brazil invited by another person. When he/she arrives here and cannot find a job in one or two weeks, that friend says, ‘here it is each for himself, because we have to pay for everything’. Then, we [the churches] cooperate with money or find a brother’s room for the newly arrived person till he/she can settle himself/herself”*.

To respond effectively to Brazilians’ quest to obtain their legal papers with the INS, all the religious leaders and lay members interviewed stressed that their churches the multiple

initiatives to provide help, including support groups in defense of the workers who do not have their papers.

The churches' support to the families that immigrate depends on the structure of each congregation. The biggest Evangelical churches in the area, for example, offer more formal help. They usually sponsor and economically support people who are members of the church in Brazil, especially when they come from the same region, state, or town of those who are already in the USA. According to their leaders, churches are sponsoring people from places such as Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina, Paraíba and Pernambuco. One pastor reminds us that immigration *"has to do with the number of people of that region that moves first. Because the others will need some help then"*. It is at this moment that his church supports the requests from the members who come from the same area and, according to the minister, *"they have a community here"*. Another ministers gave a concrete example, *"On Monday I will meet a family from Brazil at 5 a.m.. They are four. They are broke. Father and mother and two daughters (...) They are Evangelicals from Brazil. But they do not have anything. They are starving!"*.

In the area of health – both of the body and mind – the different religious traditions seek to help Brazilian immigrants. Churches and mediumship-based centers try to the void left a very expensive health system to which immigrants have little access in different ways. In the Catholic Church, the support in the mental health area comes from a group of psychologists who volunteer to continually help the members of their community of faith. In the Evangelical field, the churches which are bigger and more structured have members of the community who give medical assistance in the church.

But maybe it is in the religious dimension that the churches concentrate their greater efforts openly. The account of a minister is indicative, *“People who come here feel lonely. That is what we call solitude. Even if they have many things to do, they are not in their environment... they feel alone. So there is the need to keep a spiritual activity to take them off this loneliness... Jesus is the only person who brings life: he is the solution. Many people say, ‘I came here to win money, but I found something much better than money, I found Christ!’”*.

Political and civic representativeness of the churches

During this research, we did not find (secular) civic entities organized by Brazilian people to defend their rights. It is true that the Brazilians gather informally to perform activities that contribute to the identity and visibility of the group. We have as an example a lively *“Forró”*²⁰ we took part in, carried out in a public park. It was organized by different individuals, without explicit religious affiliation – although many of the participants belonged to local churches and part of the profit were allocated various project in the Catholic Church. This event gathered hundreds of Brazilians from around the area to dance and eat the traditional barbecue.

Here we go back to role religious organizations play in bringing together and representing Brazilians publicly. Due to the distant location of Brazilian Consulate, based in Miami, one of the Evangelical churches provided a room for an employee of the

Consular Service to offer assistance to the migrants. Another example of the work of religious organizations in the political field is the newspaper “Christian Immigrant” in March 2002. One its main headlines has been the meeting between the Evangelical Ministers Association from Florida and the Ambassador Lucio Amorim to deal with the changes in legislation about immigration in the US.

We also noticed the churches are worried about the adoption of public policies from the government Brazilian . One of the ministers interviewed invited a federal commissioner from the Labor Party to visit his community, stay in his house and investigate violations of human rights suffered by Brazilian immigrants. This report was the basis a request for a Parliamentary Inquiry on the situation Brazilian immigrants in the US which, unfortunately, was turned down.

Thus, there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the visibility of the Brazilian presence in the area, through several restaurants’ signs, business trade, services and corporations, and, on the other, the lack of political voice has to be negotiated in some way by religious institutions. Brazilians in Florida are threatened by a kind of “hyper-anomia”, due to the absence of the voting participation and civic associational life. In the future, it would be important to discuss the way the churches perform civic-political functions, the limits of these functions, and the type of alternative movements or social actors that could emerge in response to these limitations.

Religious transnationalism

The institutional and personal interchanges, as well as the formation of networks in the different areas in the religious field among the Brazilians interviewed, point to an advanced degree of local and transnational relationships. In the transnational dimension, we detect multiple “comings and goings” between the USA and Brazil. In the Evangelical field, several ministers visit their missions and churches in Brazil and in other countries in Latin America. Conversely, ministers, preachers, and evangelists from Brazil are invited to seminars and lectures in churches in Deerfield and Pompano Beach, especially when for the anniversary party of the founding of churches.

In the Catholic field, transnational exchanges are frequent, including visits from priests, nuns, and bishops who come from Brazil to keep in touch with the faithful. An example was the visit of 19 couples, a priest and a bishop from Brazil to begin a couple’s movement in the area. There was also the visit of a priest connected to the Young People Movement to preach to them in a retreat.

The main face of transnational for Spiritists is the annual visit of the members of a center to Brazil. These trips allow contact with different spiritual projects there and make it possible to bring to the US suitcases full of books dealing with the teachings of Spiritism. Center members also gather funds to bring speakers from Brazil to celebrate the center’s anniversary.

For Afro-Brazilian religions, the *pai de santo* maintains up *terreiros* in New York, Salvador, Bahia, and another one in Interlagos. His visits Brazil every three months and

travels constantly to Lagos, in Africa. All these routes indicate that he is inserted in wide transnational circuits.

Transnationalism also happens through newspapers and religious institutions that keep sites in Internet, favoring the permanent contact and exchange of information. Another visible aspect is the phonographic industry, mainly that formed by a semi-informal economy of “gospel” music. Brazilian singers often tour in the US, while there is a growing number of Brazilian singers in the US who are attaining some prominence in Brazil. Thus, we have here an expanding transnational market.

We cannot ignore transnational expressions that happen through institutional connection and networks inside the USA. Frequently, religious groups use the resources of American religious institutions to carry out their own religious activities. It is also common to belong to American conventions, federations or associations. However, this does not limit Brazilian groups from affiliating themselves to specific Brazilian ministries, federations or conventions with presence in both countries.

The creation of an Association of Evangelical Pastors of Florida is particularly noteworthy, as is the support that the Spiritist center is giving to the creation of other centers in Orlando and in Boston, besides lending books to other neighboring centers. The Catholic Mission of Our Lady Aparecida is another highly visible example of a Brazil-US initiative. The Archdiocese of Miami, with the involvement of Scalabrini Order, whose vocation is work among immigrants all over the world, answered pleas from the Brazilian immigrants themselves to create a multi-sited mission. This mission has close

relations with the *pastoral do imigrante*, which is part of the CNBB (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops).

The bottom line is that for Brazilians in South Florida transnational and local networks provide extended contacts. Religious groups not only coordinate wideranging religious work, but also help individuals, families or groups with job referrals, legalization of their immigrant status, and the creation of public spaces in which collective Brazilian identity can be reconstructed. Thus, the religious transnationalism is closely related to the wider displacement and settlement Brazilian immigrants experience in the US.

Conclusion

The migratory reality that Brazilians encounter in Deerfield Beach and Pompano Beach is marked by a tremendous heterogeneity. Among these immigrants, one can distinguish people who achieved an excellent quality of life, a good place in the job market and legal papers. However, another big contingent remains in quite adverse conditions. For this group the lack of security on the job, the precarious life conditions, the tenuous hold on the English language, and the permanent threat of deportation are common. For this majority, a climate of suffering, abuse, injustice and discrimination dominates. This climate is sustained by both Americans and Brazilians. The depressing psychic conditions to which these people are subjected induce emotional disorders and, in some cases, even suicide.

In this complex and varied context, several issues called our attention. The first one refers to family relationships. Whether all family members are living together in the USA or whether they are separated by national borders, the family is an important reference point that goes through changes in the migratory context. Relationships can break up or grow stronger. Young children suffer the impact of the US culture. The immersion of the father – and especially of the mother – in the job market makes them rethink the domestic structure.

Yet, family is not the only network. It is linked to others based on friendship, work, and religious identity. All of them are essential to the migratory process. In fact, far from being a solitary process, migration normally involves multiple social networks. These networks make it possible for the Brazilians come, survive, adapt, and perhaps even thrive in the US. Several religious institutions serve as anchors for the array of networks. The help given by churches to Brazilians cannot be ignored. It is expressed through the services they render and their concrete results in individual's and family's journeys. Recognition of the material (job, money, house, car), emotional (community life, sympathy, peace, attention, welcome), and spiritual (personal experience with what gives the true meaning to life and throws it beyond the limits that the different problems impose) benefits is present in the oral testimonies. The latter reveal the importance of the religious ideas, practices, and institutions in the everyday life of the immigrant. The transnational nature of the religious institutions gives them a wider and more original dimension in the act of harnessing resources and in formulating of political, cultural and material actions seeking to defend the interests of Brazilians' abroad.

At the same time, this process is not free from contradiction. The help given to Brazilians – especially related to work issues – can also include dynamics of exploitation and political clientelism. These contradictions must be studied in a careful and balanced way. The failure of the Brazilian government to have viable policies directed to the migrants also leads the churches to fulfill a role in the area of political representation, with the unintended consequence that no national discussion on this issue ever emerges. In other words, the larger question here has to do with the responsibilities and duties of the state and other social sectors.

The stigma that the word immigrant has among Brazilians reveals a self-understanding of their marginal and precarious condition vis-a-vis the state and civil society in both Brazil and the United States. At the macro-level, it would seem as if both states benefit from this marginality. The Brazilian state can export those who cannot be absorbed by the national job market or those without economic perspectives, in effect passing to the migrants themselves the cost and risk of maintaining the national economic project. The US, for its part, benefits from the cheap labor these immigrants provide. Of course, this failure to be recognized, and thus to have a legitimate political voice, can bring benefits to the Brazilians immigrants themselves. Political visibility certainly entails costs that are not always possible to handle, especially for a relatively new immigrant group. Perhaps the current Brazilian migratory pattern is predicated on and made possible by its political invisibility and its economic informality. To conclude, we cannot forget the context generated by the events of September 11 and their consequences in the US's present state of affairs. After this day, a series of changes have

been affecting Brazilian migrants. These modifications have made the suffering and the risks of personal projects worse, even of those who can count on the help of different social networks. Where will the political and cultural changes lead in the end? What is the impact of these changes for the group of Brazilians of this area? What changes will suffer the migratory process suffer and what actions will Brazilians organize through their churches in response to these changes? These questions will have to remain unanswered for now, but they are essential to our understanding of the new state of affairs faced by Brazilians in Florida today.

Endnotes

¹ The Florida Transnational project is based at the Center for Latin-American Studies of the University of Florida. For this first phase, it counted on the financing of Ford Foundation. Its co-directors are Manuel A. Vasquez and Philip J. Williams. For each immigrant group studied, there is a team of researchers formed by a professor from the University of Florida and of two or three researchers from the country under. Thus, the project and the research themselves are transnational.

²Explanation given by Manuel Vasquez to the Seminar: Brazilians out of Brazil, on April 08, 2002, in the University of Miami.

³ Respectively, the two authors of this article and Caetana Maria Damasceno, anthropologist and professor of the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro.

⁴ Contacts made by Neda Bezerra, Coordinator of the project at the University of Florida.

⁵ Data taken from the US Census of 2000 and Deerfield Beach's city government in 2002.

⁶ In Portuguese, “pássaros da neve”. A reference to the migratory birds that search for warmer regions in the winter.

⁷ “To be or not to be (Hispanic or Latino): Brazilian racial and ethnic identity in the United States”. Paper presented in the Seminar: Brazilians outside Brazil, on April 08, 2002, in the University of Miami.

⁸ Data come from the Florida Review newspaper, from the first period of fifteen days from May, 2002.

⁹ An amalgamation from the words Brazil and sliced – “fatiado”. It can mean a “slice of Brazil,” or “Brazil” sliced

¹⁰ On this neo-classic approach see: Larissa Ruiz Baía (1999) and Ana Cristina B. Martes (2000).

¹¹ In Boston, Brazilians are paid twice what they receive in Florida for the same jobs performed. However, the cost of life is more expensive in Boston.

¹² Drywall is the name of wooden plates, clothed with a layer of plaster or similar material, used in houses and building structures. It is used inside the constructions to make internal divisions among the different rooms.

¹³ The names of informants were changed to preserve anonymity.

¹⁴ High school is on a par with our old “Segundo Grau”, which we call “Ensino Médio” nowadays.

¹⁵ It was not possible to find out the motivations that led to these suicides. We know that at least in one case, the motivation was emotional due to the impossibility of a Brazilian woman to get married to an American who brought

her to the USA with this intention. He was already married.

¹⁶ September 11, 2001, refer to the events that happened in the USA. Hijacked planes were crashed against the two towers of the WTC, in New York, against the Pentagon and one ended up falling down, altogether killing thousands of people.

¹⁷ The fact that we do not find, among this variety, any temple of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus – IURD), that is expanding rapidly in Brazil and also in other countries, is an interesting issue to explore further. Such absence could be explained by two hypothesis: on the one hand, we observe a kind of competition among the Evangelical churches. It may then be difficult for IURD to enter a space that is dominated by the churches already settled – mainly the Pentecostals ones. On the other hand, the fact that the IURD was settled in Miami and acts, above all, among the poor Latinos, could also indicate that the Brazilian group in Deerfield and Pompano comes from another social and economical status, different from the poorer one to which IURD directs its speech and religious practices.

¹⁸ Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – FIBGE – Census 2000.

¹⁹ We have had the opportunity to attend the “show for Jesus”, presented by Aline de Barros – a well-known singer in Brazil – which was a high level show.

²⁰ It is a typical dance from the northeast part of Brazil and that nowadays is in style as a type of feast.