

“How to get into London?”: The role played by travel agencies to move Brazilian migrants to the UK.

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Introduction

The empirical findings that I am going to present today are part of my thesis, which I am developing in the Dept of Sociology at Goldsmiths College. Basically, the thesis reflects on migration beyond the concepts of flows and networks, and surveillance mobility, not in terms of static categories but as a continuum which extends beyond and inside geopolitical locations through a set of legal, administrative and technological procedures. The empirical focus of the research is how Brazilians from Alto Paranaíba have journeyed through both airports located in the Schengen area and in British territory to London, and how after becoming undocumented they have dealt with the British immigration law applied to non-European migrants which recognizes them as foreign citizens without rights to remain and work on British territory.

In this paper, I am going to explore the transformation in the geography of Alto Paranaíba migration and the role played by the local travel agencies. Xiang Biao (2005) argues that ordinary migrant workers have to deal with institutional barriers, checkpoints, be submitted to interviews and in extreme cases to interrogators along their travel to the host society. Aiming to avoid a journey under constant surveillance, migrants seek to move through less known routes which are supposedly less controlled by border controls. In other words, the reinvention of routes through strategic places made by people specializing in this kind of mobility provides the chance to escape from the patrols carried out by agencies specialized in

monitoring the mobility of suspect people through the state's boundaries. As Papadopoulos et al. (2008) note, these *escape routes* enable migrants to move through the porosities of the borders and reach the destination place.

In the case of migrants from Alto Paranaíba who are moving to London their movement is an intricate procedure of negotiation which starts in their towns and involves other places across Brazil and EU territory with the clear intention of overcoming the border controls at the British airports. To succeed in this journey, the role played by Border people is crucial as they map the migratory routes. As Khosravi (2010) defines, they are the links. In the case of this paper they are travel agencies and people specialized in border crossing movements. Not criminals, but locals who have contacts with smugglers. Migration as well as borders is a profitable business not just for those who migrate but for people who can sell his/her knowledge and contracts that facilitate the mobility.

Taking this into account, travel agencies play a crucial role. They are responsible for organizing the trip which is going to lead migrants to outside of Brazil. Unlike Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2011) have affirmed, it is not just a matter of buying flight tickets and booking hotels. The travel agent draws the route in which the traveller is going to journey. Following Ingold reflection upon mobility, the travel agency is endowed with a skill in shaping a safe route, while the traveller must have "knowledge of this cultural context to be able to read and understand" the route (2000: 225).

The beginning: routes to the United States

For years, air travel has been the main feature of migratory routes from Alto Paranaíba to the United States. The fieldwork conducted in Brazil has clearly demonstrated that cities located

in the United States are the main target of migrants from Alto Paranaíba. During the 90s, migrants from Alto Paranaíba have journeyed to the United States as tourists.

People from Alto Paranaíba who wanted to move abroad had to access travel agencies in cities where a migration industry was better established. Hence, cities like Uberlândia, Governador Valadares and Belo Horizonte, which have historically established migratory networks to European countries and North America, had their services accessed by locals in Alto Paranaíba. Julia, for instance, mentions that her brother had to travel from their town to Uberlândia to organize his trip. “He [Marcelo] bought his fly tickets in Uberlândia. There were not travel agencies here during the first time he travelled. Moreover the travel agencies over there were specialized in producing fake passports and stuff like that.” According to Fusco (2005), Governador Valadares, for instance, has become an important node in a vast connection of Brazilian cities from distinct states which have people willing to move abroad. Contacts through people specialized in such mobility are made with other Brazilians migratory networks which operate in states like Rio de Janeiro, Goiás and São Paulo.

In fact, these cities located in Minas Gerais state are well known for a wide migratory industry which provides mobility not just for their own population, but also for people from other Brazilian states (Margolis 1994, Fusco 2005, Yamaue 2007, Siqueira 2009). Soon bogus documents, elaboration of clandestine routes, loaning money and fake tour packages became some of the border crossing services consumed by the inhabitants of Alto Paranaíba. Through this experience acquired in other cities, Alto Paranaíba was able to produce in the last decade its own migration industry which has employed people, and established links with other Brazilian cities and countries.

As a result, in the 2000s the picture has changed. New travel agencies were created in towns over Alto Paranaíba. According to Clarice, in her town - Carmo do Paranaíba – there were 7 travel agencies operating at the same time due to the high demand. “These travel agencies belonged to people who lived in the United States. After returning they started in this sort of business. My husband was one of them. He knew how to travel abroad and how to pass through the Passport control”, she comments. Clarice says that obtaining a tourist visa was not a big issue as long as the migrant was well oriented to sensible behavior at a passport desk of any airport in the US territory. “My husband had this kind of knowledge. So, he started selling tickets and tour packages for those who also wanted to go abroad.” Therefore, travelling as tourist has been the main tactic adopted by migrants from Alto Paranaíba in order to get into the United States.

Travel agencies were in charge of transforming these economic migrants into tourists. Preparing a tour package which includes hotel reservation, touristic attraction tickets and a set of reasonable answers to be given at the passport control were the main tactics adopted by these migrants and the travel agencies to get a visitor visa approval to the U.S. territory. In addition, Clarice explained me that she as a travel agent tries to prepare the migrant in the best way possible for him/her succeeds at the passport control in any airport localized in the US. “Tell me, who would on himself leave Brazil, without speak a single word in English, book a hotel or get a taxi? It is crazy!”, she says. Therefore, her travel agency books hotels or hostels for the time spent in the United States. If the customer wants they can also provide tickets for local attractions. In addition, Clarice mentions that “we explain everything in the minimal details. Even what the person has to talk at the passport control desk. You know. The questions are normally the same. Then we give some advices”. The luggage is also

carefully prepared. “If you are going as a tourist, you have to carry clothes enough for those days described in your tour package. Nothing else”, Clarice reinforces.

Nonetheless, after the September 11 attacks, Brazil was included by the U.S. government amongst the countries which citizens should apply for a visa before leaving their countries. In other words, the border reinforcement imposed by the U.S. government on Brazilians has ended up damaging such tactical mobility adopted by migrants from Alto Paranaíba, in the last decade.

Clarice affirms that getting a visa from the United States Embassy has become a very tough process. “It started taking a long time and without any guarantee. Any simple misunderstanding in the visa application could nag at them and be a reason for a refusal visa. Your time gone, your money as well”. After the 9/11 the United States has included Brazil into its networked borders. In other words, the US boundaries were extended from its own territory to the Brazilian one. And that means Brazil was encompassed by the U.S. Border Zone.

Since then new migratory routes have been created. New Connections and places have become likely to be explored, either to circumvent the American border control or to be used as a migratory destination. It seems that travelling through the Mexican territory has become the immediate alternative route utilized by a large number of migrants from that Brazilian region. The travel agencies kept selling their tour packages, but now to Mexico City. And from there the travellers were put in touch with smugglers who would lead them to the North.

The tactic consists in fragmenting the initial route in shorter pathways. The initial idea was still the same, “travel as a tourist, with a tour package to visit the Mexican capital”, Clarice explained me. However, after crossing the Passport Control at the Mexico City International Airport, travelers are taken by a smuggler with skills to crossing the Mexican- U.S. border, who would lead him/her to the “pathways to El Norte” (Riosmena and Massey 2012). Through their guidance, they would move from Mexican city to Mexican city towards the North. In the U.S. side other border people would be waiting for them.

Laerte, owner of other travel agency in Alto Paranaiba, also mentioned that he has organized this sort of trip. However, he emphasized that he just send migrants to Mexico city with a tour package of 3 days. Once there, it is up to the person if he/she wants to move ahead to North America. In fact, they reinforced that they do not have any contact with people who can smuggle through the borders. He meant coyotes. “I do not know what happen to them. We do not deal with coyotes”, Laerte reinforces. Like Ingold states, “one can no more know in places than travel in them (200: 229).” Despite the fact of providing good contacts and having important skills to map a route, the travel agent still has a regional knowledge. They can send to Mexico and even put in touch with other border people, but their role reduces from that point.

The initial route linking a Brazilian airport to an U.S. airport was changed by a much longer and fragmented route involving tactical places and smugglers. However, such pathway strongly divides opinions among locals. The risks of robbery, deportation, physical violence and even death are all taken into consideration in their arguments.

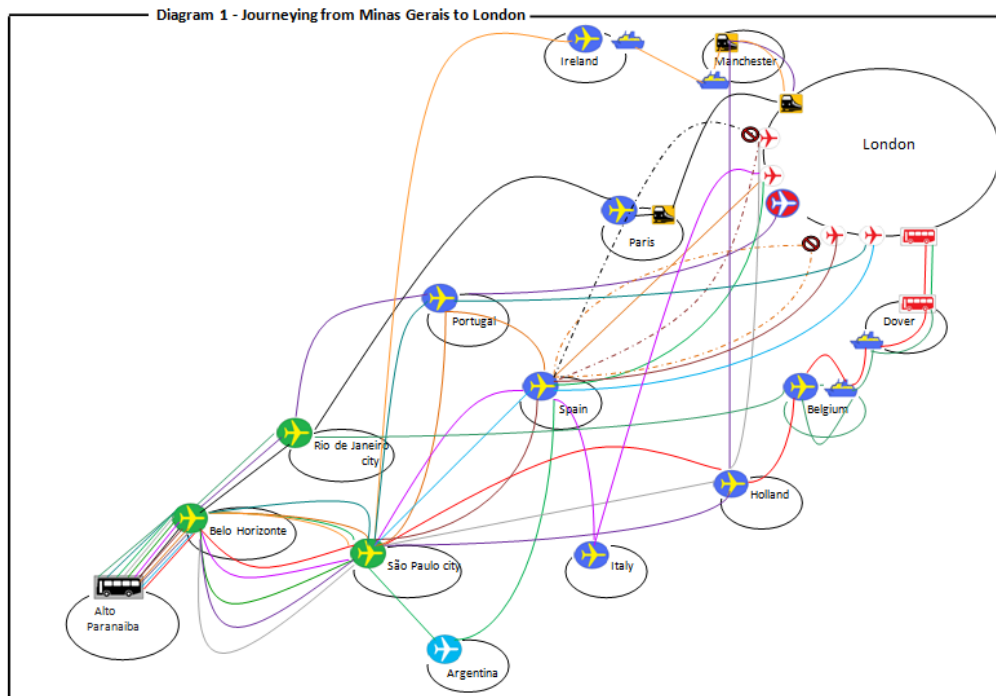
The routes to London

As a result, migratory routes to Europe, London in particular, have been faced as an option. Taking the migratory experience acquired in the two previous routes and adapting to a new context, travel agencies have developed links to Europe. Despite of not providing the same job opportunities and standard of living as the United States does, journeying to Europe were much safer in that moment. In such context, London has played a key role since the September 11 attacks. Therefore, journeying to London is faced by migrants from Alto Paranaíba as an alternative route to escape from visa refusal at the U.S. embassy in Brazil, or death in the Mexican territory. These migrants can still travel to a developed country to improve their lives back in Brazil.

The facility to get a tourist visa in a British airport has ranked London as a third option for migrants from Alto Paranaíba. (Following the point of view of my informants, I could observe that there is a difference between migrating to London and to the United States.) On the one side, as I have already demonstrated migration to the United States is risky that either demands a visa still in the Brazilian territory or a dangerous journey through the Mexican territory; but once there, they say that the picture changes. Interviewees affirm that the migration rules in the US are less restricts for undocumented migrants and it provides confidence and calm to work and save money. In other words, they can have a drive license, buy a car, rent a house and even start their own business. On the other side, migrating to London means to them the opposite. Getting into London is easier as there is no need for a previous visa collected still in the Brazilian territory, but the inner borders imposed by the British government are much harder to be crossed, and that make them struggle to work and save money.

Nevertheless, the border controls in the European airports have also become aware of this group and are closing up in the last decade. As a result, the number of deportations has also grown sharply. Recently incidents involving Brazilians in both Barajas (Spain) and Heathrow (the UK) airports have revealed a large movement of Brazilian migrants into Europe via airports. According to the digital newspaper *The Prisma* (2012), in 2007, the total number of Brazilian migrants who were refused entry into the European Union through Barajas airport stood at 2,764; while in 2008, the Spanish authorities refused to allow nearly 800 Brazilians entrance into the same airport, claiming that they did not have the full documentation required by the European Union. The restriction on Brazilians also has gained force in the European Union countries, which have proliferated and transformed their borders as a mechanism to control the influx of people after September 11th (Mezzadra 2008).

Aware of the large number of Brazilian migrants who have been deported every year at Heathrow airport, the interviewees agreed that arriving as a tourist was the best way to get into the United Kingdom without drawing too much attention. According to them, crossing the borders as a tourist is a process which involves movement through other European countries before landing in the UK. Therefore, analysing the journeys taken by my correspondents demonstrates how airports based in the Schengen area can be interpreted as airport hubs which provide safe mobility towards the British border (see Diagram 1). So, in the next section, I will argue that migration is not just a movement from A to B (Cresswell 2006), but a practice of border crossing tangled in a mesh of routes, places and people (Ingold 2011a).



The tactics of border crossing movement

The travel agents provide a range of optional trajectories connecting other European Union countries before landing in British territory. According to Claudio and Anderson, two of my informants interviewed in London, the customer can decide if he/she wants a package tour which includes two or three countries and then the rest (buying coach and flight tickets, booking hostels, and preparing the speech which will be used at passport control) is organized by the agents. Interviewing people from different towns of Alto Paranaíba it has been suggested that the service and the prices may vary according to the travel agencies and this information is passed by word of mouth among those who are interested in buying this kind of service.

Rather than travelling alone, the mobility is arranged for two people and it can be two males/females or a couple. The purpose is to reinvent their migratory mobility into a tourist mobility in which two males/females would represent classmates travelling on holiday from a

hypothetical university, or a couple would represent partners also on vacation. Therefore, travelling with a *dummy classmate* or a *dummy girl/boyfriend* can be seen as another tactic used by the travel agents in order to reinvent this mobility to Europe. According to my subjects, this tactic is a good idea, to reinforce the idea of two friends or a couple travelling as tourists. Moreover, they say that moving in twos also enables them to get support from each other in case of being interviewed at the border control. As this excerpt from Adriano's interview shows:

Gustavo: Did you come alone?

Adriano: With a friend...

G: Who was she?

A: In my town its like this...when you go to a travel agency, there is always somebody who wants to come to Europe too. Then, they try to put both people together because it makes it easier to get through the immigration border...

G: Did she play a girlfriend role?

A: Yes. She did.... we were friends, but we came as a couple on holiday across Europe...we combined a speech and then we came.

So far, the subjects have explained to me that airports in Spain, Portugal, Holland and Italy are the places where the flight connections can happen. Claudio and Denise, another informant interviewed in London, told me that travel agents normally recommend that the dummy pair do not go straight from Brazil to London, and never have this city as the last stop in their journey. Instead, they are given the choice of making flight connections to European airport hubs where the travellers will receive passport stamps on the passport reinforcing their image as Brazilian tourists. London, then, is represented as just a tourist city where the travellers will spend a few days in their tour around Europe. The aim of this mobility is to show to the passport control at any British airport that the dummy pair are actually in transit, and they will continue their travel to other countries in the EU. Hotels or hostels, therefore, are booked for two or three nights and the travellers are advised not to give any information about who is waiting for them in the UK. As mentioned in this excerpt from Anderson's interview:

Gustavo: How was your route to get here?

Anderson: I left my city with a girl. We were not friends, but we accepted to travel together...we came as a couple who were on a trip to Europe.

G: Through a travel agency?

A: Yes... A guy who has a travel agency in my town... he knows how to move and to get into the UK. And because of that, he gave us some tips and also organized the journey... He advised me do not tell about my cousin who was waiting for me in London. He also gave some information about Rome, like...he said that in Italy we should not get the white taxi, because it is very expensive and we would waste our money. So, he prepared a schedule for us and so we did... (Laughs).

This tactical mobility adopted by migrants from Alto Paranaíba takes advantage of the borderless zone created by the Schengen Agreement between Member States of the European Union. This treaty allows the 26 countries in the Schengen Area to operate like a single state with external border controls for mobile people travelling in and out of the area, but with no strict internal border controls. Thus, border checks are done only occasionally and custom controls are not required. Such agreement allows the airside zone for flights within Schengen countries to be classified as a Clean Zone (Codourey 2004).

Presenting reservation letters from hostels or hotels and their tourist itinerary proving they are guests on a short-term basis and explaining why they are passing through that specific country are the reinventions made by migrants from Alto Paranaíba to secure their border crossing movement. Anderson, for instance, who travelled with a dummy girlfriend, said to me that their journey included two other countries (Spain and Italy) before arriving in the UK. According to him, the reservation letters and the idea of making a tour through a few European countries aimed to reinforce their image as tourists. So they stayed for three nights in Rome, all the time spent between the hotel's room and walking in the city. But, as he said, they were always concerned with saving their monetary provisions as much as possible. Eventually, Anderson said that the tension took control of him on the last day. He woke up at

7a.m. and desperately started packing his luggage while calling out to his dummy girlfriend to get ready and head for the airport. In interview he mentions that:

Anderson: On Saturday, I woke up desperately around 7a.m. I could not bear Rome anymore...I had walked the whole city ... I started organizing my luggage and told her (his dummy girlfriend) that it was time to go... we left the hotel at 9a.m. for the airport in Rome, it was the Fiumicino airport...we got there around 10:30a.m. to head for London at 11p.m... so we spent the whole day sleeping on the benches... the boredom was horrible. The flight was delayed and we left at midnight and arrived in London at 1:30 a.m.

The idea is to present London as the first place to be visited in their tour across Europe and then continue their journey to other European Union Member States. Arriving in London quickly not only provides the opportunity to conclude their journeys, but also saves their monetary provisions. Claudio, for example, told me that he travelled with a friend, who was his dummy classmate.

Reflecting on the migratory mobility of migrants from Alto Paranaíba to London, the first leg of their route finishes after crossing the first passport control in the Schengen area. Therefore, I argue that reaching a European Member State of this treaty shows the chance that these Brazilians will succeed in their journey, as they have reached the continent. From this stage of their journey, the last European country they passed through is the return point in case of being refused permission to enter the UK.

It is clear that the border controls in the UK can also refuse permission to enter the British territory, and then send the arrivals back to the last airport which they came from. In this case, the tactic of travelling as a tourist, presented above, in some cases does not work as planned. In order to deal with this possibility, some of these Brazilian migrants keep fellow countrymen living in the UK and/or in the previous country aware of their journey. This is the case with Adriano who had friends in Mostoles, Spain, and kept them informed about his

movements. According to him, this plan was crucial to help him avoid going back to Brazil. He said that Barajas airport was the first European place in his journey, and from there he and his dummy girlfriend caught a plane to Gatwick airport where they were refused permission by the passport control. Adriano told me that the passport control officers accused them of not having enough money to spend two weeks in London, as tourists. They tried to show their return tickets to confirm their temporary stay, but they were sent back to Barajas airport.

Connecting places, removing failed options, contacting people throughout the journey, defining and redefining routes according to personal circumstances are some of the tactics that the interviewees have explained to me in order clarify how they arrived in London. In a sense, there is more than one single route and the elaboration of it can take a different shape. Each one arrived in London through a different airport, but adopted the same tactic: avoiding Heathrow airport and coming as tourists. However, unlike the others, Paula avoided this airport by arriving in London through St. Pancras station. The last leg of her journey was made by railway and not by air travel. She explained to me that her travel agent prevented her from arriving in London through any airport. Thus, she moved from Brazil to the Netherlands and from there she caught a domestic flight connection to Manchester airport, where luckily she met a border agent who spoke Portuguese. From Manchester, Paula took a train to London and arrived at a main rail station of the city.

The idea of arriving in the UK through small airports does not eliminate the risk of passing through a border control. The negotiation, therefore, happens again in this last leg of their journey: the distinction of mobile people through the queues as “UK/ EU passport” and “All other passports”, filling in the landing card for the UK border control and an interview at passport control. The following interview excerpt illustrates this moment and the process of

negotiation/resistance made at the airports in order to overcome a possible disconnectedness in their journey to London.

Once more they have to bear in mind the possible questions and correct answers which they were taught by the travel agents in their towns due to the fact that the British authorities also use the interview as a strategy to identify and ascribe legitimate and illegitimate identities to those moving across borders (Wilson and Weber 2004). As happens with the mythological merciless and treacherous meeting with the Sphinx, the interviewees explained in detail how they answered the riddles and thus escaped from suffering the tragic fate of those migrants who cannot answer: deportation. Côté-Boucher (2004) notes that the interviews, actually, present a confessional aspect of the inspection upon arrival at a port of entry, “border apparatuses deploy spaces of examining and interrogating travellers, emphasizing gaze and inciting speech as means of surveillance” (2004:145).

Final observations

Travel agencies have played a crucial role in the mobility of these migrants from Alto Paranaíba. As the interviews have demonstrated, these establishments belong to migrant pioneers who have returned to the region and seen in this business a profitable opportunity to sell their migratory experience. Hence, these private retailers provide package tours — which combine flights, transfers and accommodation — to one or two European countries, where the locals have emigrated, plus the United Kingdom. The purpose is to build a stereotyped image of tourists travelling on holiday to Europe and who are going to visit London. Therefore, migratory mobility is camouflaged as tourist mobility which enables them to move as desirable mobile people, as Cresswell (2006) has defined.

Moving in pairs – as a dummy couple or dummy classmates – from their towns in Alto Paranaíba to Belo Horizonte would be, then, the first leg of their journey. From the Minas Gerais capital, the migrants have two options for leaving Brazil: either from Guarulhos airport in São Paulo or Galeão airport in Rio de Janeiro city. From these airports the journeys presented in this chapter took distinct directions, but with the same purpose: to reach the Schengen area before landing in the UK. According to the interviewees, the migrants and the travel agents project a journey which is going to reach London through the fringes. In other words, the route is mapped by substituting airports into the package tour which are less monitored (“small” airports) than Heathrow airport, which is considered the airport with the most surveillance in the UK. Based on that, I believe that these non-standard routes are tactics of border-crossing movements in order to overcome the border controls of the Schengen area and particularly of the United Kingdom, which have been reinforced since 9/11 (Codourey 2008, Ceyhan 2008).

In addition, reflecting on the concept of mobility presented by the current literature on mobility (Cresswell 2006, Mezzadra 2011, Adey 2004, Urry 2007, and Augé 1995), the routes journeyed by these migrants has demonstrated that airports are surveillance spaces which have different meaning and function for distinct mobile people. While desirable mobile people such as international students, tourists and business people have accessed airports as spaces of circulation which enable them to connect distant geographical locations within a short space of time, migrants are included in the transgressive mobile group who have to negotiate their mobility at passport borders. Thus, in their cases, this paper argues that airports work as spaces under strict regulations rather than places of flowing. As a result the reinvention of border crossing movement is the main strategy adopted by them in order to

overcome the smart borders. Thus, travel agencies and their package tours gain a significant meaning in this process of escape routes (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).