Highlighting the Contrasts, Downplaying the Divergences: Insertion and Visibility Tactics of Brazilians in Portugal

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Abstract

The article analysis the insertion and visibility strategies adapted by Brazilians in Portugal, giving a ‘privileged’ voice to Brazilian association leaders and key informants tied to these organisations. The findings presented are the result of twenty-three in-depth interviews with representatives of sixteen associations, as well as information gathered through informal conversations with association members and volunteers and through participant observation. The paper sets out to scrutinise two key questions: how do Brazilians perceive group differentiation and stereotyping and how do these variables impede insertion and acceptance on the part of Portuguese society; what integration and visibility tactics are adapted by Brazilian collective organisations in order to facilitate community insertion.

Keywords

Brazilians, Portugal, Insertion, Visibility, Associations, Stereotyping

1. Introduction

In Brazil, succession economic crises during the 1980s and 90s, limited labour market growth and opportunities, reducing the possibilities of attaining social mobility for many of its people. Naturally, within recent years, the solution for many has been to emigrate and to find a better life elsewhere. Given the social, linguistic and ancestral (coloniser/colonised) ties between Portugal and Brazil, as well as the economic upswing witnessed in Portugal until the mid 2000s, many Brazilians have come to chose Portugal as their emigration destination. In consequence, Brazilians are today the most represented immigrant group in Portugal.

Now one might assume that 500 years of cultural, linguistic and migratory interchange between the two nations would facilitate the integration of Brazilians into Portuguese society. Such a straight forward reading, however, is an over simplified one, for rarely is any coloniser/colonised relationship free of a complex historical past (Arenas 2005). Contact through time has particularly made Brazilian culture very familiar to the Portuguese, with an existing ‘attraction’ towards Brazilian pop culture being very present in Portuguese society. Given these points, the question that looms is to what extent do the historical pasts shared by these two nations and the perceptions of the Portuguese towards Brazil, and above all its culture, effect the integration of newly arrived Brazilian immigrants in Portugal in the post-colonial era? Is the physical presence of Brazilians in Portugal as welcome as the variables that make up Brazilian culture? It is this line of enquiry that frames this article.

The aim of my analysis sets out to examine the insertion and visibility strategies adopted by Brazilians in Portugal. In doing this, I give a ‘privileged’ voice to key representatives and intermediaries of this community in Portugal – that of Brazilian association leaders and key informants. The study is based on fieldwork carried out...
during a one-year fieldwork period in mainland Portugal (excluding the Azores and Madeira regions) from September 2004 to September 2005. The findings are the result of twenty-three in-depth interviews with representatives of sixteen associations, the realisation of informal conversations with association members and volunteers, as well as information gathered through participant observation.

I set this article within conceptual and theoretical frameworks focusing on the topics of ethnic group boundaries, the institutionalisation of ethnic groups and the collective objectives and mobilization phenomenon that often draw individuals together under the ethnic banner. After a brief discussion of these concepts and a review of Brazilian associative world in Portugal, I analyse two central questions posed to the interviewees:

- how do Brazilians perceive group differentiation and stereotyping and how do these variables impede insertion and acceptance on the part of Portuguese society;
- what integration and visibility tactics are adopted by Brazilian collective organisations in order to facilitate community insertion?

Concerning the first line of inquiry, I show how stereotypical representations of Brazilians are not a new phenomenon in Portugal, having been formulated even before this community started to arrive in Portugal. Second, taking stereotypes and discriminatory barriers along with other integration impediments into consideration, I outline how the Brazilian associations approach these concerns and what sorts of strategies they define. I demonstrate that visibility tactics are two-fold: on one hand, aimed at obtaining the right to integration socially (economic, civic, political, cultural and spiritual) into Portuguese society, on the other, retaining and transmitting ethno-cultural forms with the aim of contributing to an intercultural society.

2. Boundaries, organisation and representation: brief theoretical notes

In the majority of cases, nation-states possess a dominant culture, language, values and social patterns, defined by them as being the norm. By definition, the groups that define these norms also possess the power and resources to establish institutional arrangements and ideological systems consistent with their interests. For minority groups, often set apart due to racial composition, ethno-cultural differentiation as well as class differences, their placing within the large societal frameworks in terms of power and resources is commonly the margins of society (Elliot and Fleras 1992). A situation is created where opposing groups enter into competition to define, protect and promote collective interests. It is the tension between these competing forces that generate and accounts for the dynamics of societal life (Olzak 1992).

2.1. Group boundaries

Within migration contexts, newly arrived immigrants bring with them the ethno-cultural baggage that identifies them with their country of origin. The social constructions, characteristics and mutual acknowledgement of group differences in cultural beliefs and practices further developed out of the interaction between the inside group (receiving society) and outside group (migrants) leads to the accentuation of boundaries between the groups in question (Barth 1969). However, groups, and above all those in a minority position, may establish boundaries in response to limited political involvement, discriminatory legislation, restricted economic opportunity, restrained cultural expression and/or straight-out rejection on the part of the inside group. The ways in which insiders and outsiders go about characterizing one another, and thereby
positioning themselves in society-at-large, is in response to the social, sometimes even historical, contexts within which intergroup interactions take place (Nagel 1994; Waters 1990). The heightening of ethnic consciousness and identities are often dependent on opposition and/or conflict across boundaries. The presence of stereotypes and prejudices lead to the construction of such divisions.

2.2. Organising collectively

Perceived outside threats and inequities are useful in drawing a group of people together. They reinforce a sense of distinctiveness, solidarity and commitment to the in-group. Within migrant settings, the primary variable that unites such a group is that of a common ethnicity or national origin (Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Roosens 1989; Eriksen 1997).

Once settled in the emigration country, individuals of the same ethnicity or national origin will often come together for three reasons: culture, ecology and politics (Marger and Obermiller 1987). The cultural model is explained by the way in which newly arrived immigrants, as well as long-time settlers, depend on their culture as a form of adapting to the unfamiliar environment. The ecological model focuses on the ecology of urban environments, as a base for ethnic or national group formation. This form of togetherness is most evident when observing work-related ethnic concentrations or residential clustering, as well as dependencies on certain services and institutions. In the third model, based on political reasons, group formation comes about when individuals start making demands of power, prestige and prosperity. These types of groups are made up of individuals who search out political and economic means. They come together as a response to external competition and to develop tactics in order to better their collective status when competing for resources.

The institutionalisation of the immigrant group can thus function as a support unit and as a point of identification for its members. For the immigrant, the ethnic community becomes a ‘security blanket’ in a society that can be highly impersonal. The level of interaction, support and dependency is conditioned by a variety of factors such as the acceptance of the host society as well as the level of institutionalisation. The degree of group formation will depend on these variables as well as the propensity of the group and its individuals to organise.

Consequentially, when boundaries between groups are sharpened and those in a minority position feel mistreated or at a disadvantage they will organise and consolidate their available resources and set forth their actions, primarily on a political front, in order to promote their collective interests. The effective ties between members are answers to certain situations that can take on a special significance, and, consequently, lead to the group’s mobilisation. It is under these circumstances that a group will ‘transform itself from ‘a group in itself’ to ‘a group for itself’” (Drury 1994, p. 15).

The sections to come will build on these theoretical concepts, analysing how social representations and images have been construed in relation to Brazilians in Portugal, and how Brazilian collective organisations go about managing these variables. Beforehand, however, a few methodological considerations concerning ‘the voices’ behind this study – those of the Brazilian associations – will be presented.

4. Brazilian associativism in Portugal

The Brazilian community in Portugal finds itself divided by two migration phases with very distinct characteristics which, according to the Casa do Brasil de Lisboa (2004)
report, sees the year 1997 as the dividing line between the two. The two waves are identified as: the pre-1997 wave – primarily composed of qualified individuals who arrived in a legal fashion; and the post-1997 wave – young, unqualified and undocumented individuals. Brazilian associations founded since the late 1980s, have equally been a reflection of these two waves. While the late 1980’s, early 90’s witnessed the founding of professional, cultural, political associations aimed at integrating Brazilians professionally, maintaining economic ties with Brazil and celebrating Brazilian culture in Portugal, with the recent coming of unqualified and undocumented immigrants, since the late 1990’s, organisations have taken on interventionist and solidarity actions as their main field of activity. This change in the associations’ typology is, above all, owed to the greater differentiation between social classes, with the early organisations catering to an elite sector of the population already well integrated into Portuguese society, while recently created organisations aim at assisting with the social integration of the recently arrived lower-classes. The only exception to this shift lies with the founding of three Brazilian student associations created with the aim of helping the growing number of Brazilian university students integrate into Portuguese universities.

Generally speaking, however, the term ‘niche associativism’ is a well suited term when it comes to defining Brazilian associativism in Portugal as the associations identified for this study exemplify. Of the sixteen, six are social assistance organization (AACILUS - Lusophone Citizenship Support Association, Brazilian Association of Portugal, Association More Brazil, House of Brazil of Lisbon, Peniel - Social Assistance Association, Immigrant Solidarity – Association for the Defence of Immigrant Rights - Ericeira Nucleus); three are student clubs (ABRUNA – Brazilian Association of the University of Aveiro, APEB – Brazilian Researchers and Students Association of Coimbra, BRUSUP – Brazilian Citizens Association of the University of Porto; two sports and leisure (Abadá - Brazilian Association for the Support and Development of the Art of Capoeira and ‘Torcida’ Brazil); two business (Luso- Brazilian Association of Oral Health and Brazilian Businessmen’s Club); one cultural (Group Brazil); one political (Brazilian Worker’s Party – PT Nucleus of Lisbon) and one prisoner solidarity group (Brazilian Care Association).

Although the variety of areas of activity show that the associations are target specific, it’s the social assistance organization that are mostly in the spotlight when it comes to voicing the concerns of Brazilian immigrants and bringing greater visibility to the problems facing this immigrant population. Especially worth highlighting is the organisational monopolisation of one organisation, the House of Brazil of Lisbon, which has become the associative backbone of the Brazilian community in Portugal, and the primary spokes-organisation in the Portuguese political rings and social service provider to Brazilians in Portugal. To exemplify this association’s positioning and numerical power, although at the time of the fieldwork (2004/2005), it had just over 2,000 registered members, since its inception in 1992, over 5,000 members are accounted for. In comparison the other fifteen associations possessed, on average, 140 members. The monopolisation of social services and community representation by the House of Brazil of Lisbon has, therefore, left little need for other associations and, in consequence, has not created a numerically robust associative movement in Portugal.³

Lastly, regarding leadership, one particular variable worth highlighting is that of gender. The fieldwork revealed a male-dominated Brazilian associative world. Evidence is given through the interviews carried out, as sixteen of the twenty-three leaders spoken to, were men.
5. ‘This is why we stick out’: Dissecting Brazilian visibilities

So in utilising the associations as my informants, I delve into the first area of inquiry which possesses the question: how do Brazilians perceive group differentiation and stereotyping, and how do these variables impede insertion and acceptance on the part of Portuguese society?

The very idea of migrating from Brazil to Portugal and the preconceived romantic notions and images possessed by Brazilians, before arrival, of what will be their migration experience (perceiving Portugal as a country with common cultural roots, with a shared language and historical migration ties, and therefore, assuming that Brazilians will be welcomed due to years of contact and similarities) is often proven wrong upon arrival. In the words of Padilla (2005, p. 9), once settled, the process of re-socialisation can often be ‘traumatic and drastic’. From the ethnographic information gathered, the general sentiment expressed is that Brazilians come with a preconceived notion of Portuguese society being liberal and open, similar to the way they perceive themselves. Instead, what they find is a country they see as being conservative. Once the differences are felt, cultural shock becomes a reality for many. They quickly realise that Portugal is nothing like Brazil and that the Portuguese are very unlike Brazilians.

According to the association leaders interviewed, the most mentioned socio-cultural difference between Brazilians and the receiving society concerns the Portuguese being characterised as cold, unhappy, unreceptive, pessimistic and stand-offish, as opposed to Brazilians who are described as warm, friendly, happy and positive individuals. These differences are also expressed in the way Brazilians have had to reconstruct certain cultural behaviours if they wish to fit into Portuguese society. In the words of one interviewee:

Life is a celebration for us and this is not so much the situation for other cultures. We want everybody to come join our party, but the Portuguese are not like this so here we have to moderate this constant partying (Group Brazil).

As a reaction to the way the Portuguese socialise, Padilla (2005, p. 11) points out that Brazilians will often change their ways of social interaction ‘by becoming more introverted, shy or contained’. This, the author highlights, is a way to adapt to the host society, by introducing more controlled and contained behaviours.

Additional responses to what distinguishes Brazilians from the host society deal with personality traits: through the experiences of the ‘warmth of the welcome’ by Portuguese society. The Portuguese are viewed as narrow-minded and judgemental, often willing to accept elements of Brazilian culture, but not too accepting of Brazilians. The ‘exotic’ or ‘tropical’ side of Brazil, for example, has for centuries been present in Portugal (Machado 1999; 2007). Since colonising Brazil, the Portuguese have held a generalised, stereotypical image of that territory and its society, characterising it as sensual, tropical, liberal and extroverted. In the present day, the representations of Brazilians in Portugal, most frequently derived from images attached to Brazil – football, samba, soap operas, exotic women, etc., – are accentuated by the exoticism often attached to that imagery; an exoticism that many feel moulds the narrow-mindedness and stereotypical perceptions of the Portuguese towards Brazilians.

The occupation of job market niches on the part of Brazilians is further explained as bring with it a double-edges form of acceptance. Here, Brazilians have taken up positions in jobs considered to be highly visible; requiring contact with the general public. Many find themselves in service industries, namely restaurants, catering,
retail sales, etc.; still others are employed in leisure-related sectors such as the entertainment industry (e.g. dancers, musicians, etc.) or night-life (clubs, bars, etc.), a sub-sector Machado (2003) refers to as the ‘market of joy’ (‘mercado da alegria’). Thus, as ‘sellers of exotic culture’ (Machado 1999, p. 6), Brazilians are in a privileged position, possessing the qualities that define ‘exotic Brazil’ – as friendly, warm and sensual individuals who speak with an accent. This positive stereotyping puts Brazilians on the top of the list in the aforementioned labour sectors. However, the placing of Brazilians in these highly visible labour niches also creates resentment, with the tag of ‘invasion’ often applied. Expanding on this argument, I turn to the words of one informant:

(... there is this view of Brazilians being everywhere now; Brazilians are at the tills of the fast food restaurant, they’re waiters, they work in the stores where you shop. So now you hear people say, ‘Brazilians are everywhere, all you hear is Brazilian being spoken’. If it’s not that it’s our behaviour or the way we dress. It’s as if people feel threatened by us. On the other hand, I think Brazilian culture has also changed the lives of the Portuguese. We’ve contributed to making Portuguese society more at ease, we’ve brought more colour into it; more joy. The people here have watched Brazilian soap operas on television their whole lives; they love our food, our music and so on. This is what I mean by a love/hate relationship that people have towards us. Let’s not forget the vision people have of Brazil – of football, beaches, parties, samba, that whole image of Copacabana (House of Brazil of Lisbon).

Before the massive in-migration of Brazilians commenced in the latter part of the 1990’s, Portugal was supplied, on a daily bases, with images of Brazil via Brazilian soap operas and through the sounds of Brazilian music, a phenomenon that still persists to this day. The exposition of Brazilian cultural production has, thus, diffuses Brazilian symbolism, often associating it with exoticism, eroticism, tropicalism and joyfulness. The popularity of Brazilian popular culture demonstrates that a ‘Brazilian invasion’ has, in fact, always been a welcomed one, but only from a safe controllable distance. A physical invasion, on the other hand, sees ‘other sides of Brazil’ – ones that may be accepted via mass media propagation (e.g. symbolism and imagery displayed via television or music), but not in the everyday life of Portuguese society.

From the interviews collected, it was expressed that the contributions of Portuguese media is to be blamed for perpetrating stereotypes of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal, first and foremost. These accusations range from the way Portuguese media depicts Brazilians as crooks, as bad neighbors (owed to their constant partying and noisiness, and also due to the fact that many live together in large numbers), as criminal offenders (e.g. often associated to many being undocumented), as well as the association of Brazilian women to prostitution. The Brazilian prostitution issue, in fact, was given particular attention in the narratives provided. A recent study carried out by the Observatório da Imigração (2003) revealed that 57 per cent of the Portuguese population possess the view that Brazilian women are often tied to prostitution (2003). In addition, the study coordinated by Lages (2006) asked the question: have Brazilians contributed to prostitution in Portugal, of which 70 per cent of respondents answered yes. As Padilla (2007) points out, although the incorporation of Brazilian women in the Portuguese labour market sees the majority working either in the commercial, domestic or hospitality sectors, there is a tendency to affiliate Brazilian women to the leisure and
sex industry. The propagation of this stereotype is primarily owed to two over-arching reasons (Machado 1999, Padilla 2005):

1) the construction and proliferation of ‘the cult of the body’ in Brazil which, in turn, has created the myth of Brazilian female sensuality and created an image of Brazilian women as being highly sexual and ‘easy’;

2) news stories on illegal Brazilian sex workers plying their trade in nightclubs throughout Portugal, as well as Brazilian prostitutes blamed for the destruction of families.

Concerning the first point, Padilla (2005) emphasises that the Portuguese stereotypical association of Brazilian women being sensual and extroverted has perpetuated since the fifteenth century, since the first images of native populations walking around naked; images that still remain, although, today, re-adjusted to new contexts – one of which includes prostitution. As well, Machado (1999) explains that the image of Brazilian women, as highly sexual and ‘easy’, has been re-enforced and re-interpreted through the showing of Brazilian soap operas in Portugal, where the interpretation of the Brazilian women are frequently played out in this manner. The transmission of such images has reinforced such stereotypes among the Portuguese, and, above all, Portuguese men, who often expect that this preconceived image will be reproduced by Brazilian women in the immigration setting. As one leader explained:

I have heard all kinds of stories: from Brazilian women who get into taxis and are asked by the drivers if they would prefer to pay with sex, to women who get sexually harassed by their bosses who think that this is normal behaviour in Brazil and, therefore, think they’re used to it. Because of certain image and stereotypes associated with ‘some’ Brazilian women, we’re all thrown into the same basket (House of Brazil of Lisbon).

Again, this quote highlights how preconceived labelling, attached to Brazilian femininity is associated to an ideology of exoticism and ‘easiness’. For the migrant women, just the fact that they’re Brazilian automatically confers the affiliation.

The characterisation of Brazilian female prostitutes as more attractive, sensual and sexual (when compared to their counterparts of other nationalities), has also come to imply that they are in greater demand by those who frequent prostitutes. As a result, this has lead Brazilian women getting blamed for the destruction of Portuguese families. The most notorious example is that of the case of Bragança, the northern Portuguese city where a group of Portuguese women organised a group calling themselves Mothers of Bragança (Mães de Bragança), claiming that Brazilian women were stealing their husbands and destroying their families. The case of Mothers of Bragança gained international recognition, when in 2003, the magazine Time Europe published an article on their cause. The internationalisation of the occurrence led to an increased focus on the Brazilian prostitution issue in the Portuguese media with emphasise being put on the Brazilian prostitutes as family wreckers. The media treatment the Bragança situation received came to typify Brazilian women as the evil-doers, characterising them as prostitutes and as opportunistic, husband stealing criminals.

Now since the mid 2000s, the economic downturn that has instituted itself in Portugal has, in turn, increased the competition for jobs, leading to higher unemployment rates among both nationals and foreigners. As a result, it is felt that Brazilians are no longer welcome to work in Portugal, for, in the words of one spokesperson:
If there’s a lot of jobs and not enough people to fill them, then you are welcome. If there are few jobs and the people here are unemployed and you think you’re coming here to work, then you’re here to take jobs and you’re not welcome. Brazilians should be conscious of the fact that they’re only really welcome when they’re not here to take anything away from anybody (Brazilian Worker’s Party – PT Nucleus of Lisbon).

Past histories concerning Brazilians in Portugal tell us that, under the scenarios of threat and privilege, immigrants will be demonised as job stealing individuals very much like the narrative implies. Here two episodes, stand out. First, dating back to the late 1980s, the battle between Brazilian dentists and the Portuguese Medical Dentistry Association, propagated by media coverage, became a symbol of resistance between Portugal and what were viewed as dishonest Brazilian profiteers. Although a reciprocity accord between Portugal and Brazil permitted any Brazilian individual to work at their trained profession in Portugal, when Brazilian dentists started coming to Portugal in large numbers, the Portuguese Medical Dentistry Association/Order of Dental Practitioners would not accept these professionals due to what were considered training curriculum differences between the two countries. The Brazilian dentists were accused of not being properly trained and, thus, could not practice in Portugal. The Brazilian dentists, on the other hand, defended that the ‘lack of training argument’ was invalid, arguing instead that this was a mere cover-up for the competition Brazilian dentists were creating in the Portuguese dentistry market.\textsuperscript{9}

The second example is more recent, dating to 2006, and coming in the form of an organised immigration of a reduced number of Brazilian families to the Portuguese interior village of Vila de Rei where they were given homes and jobs. In the Portuguese media, and by society-at-large, this migration scheme was viewed as a process that privileged Brazilians in detriment of the Portuguese.

Both of these cases produced controversy in Portuguese society either during times of socio-economic crises and in situations where being an immigrant was seen as a threat to the host population.

It’s, therefore, felt that group differentiation and stereotyping, along with increased visibility of certain community characteristics and events, has come to impede the integration of Brazilians into Portuguese society, leaving, instead, a negative light shining over this population. Taking this into consideration, in the following section I will examine how Brazilian associations in Portugal perceive and adopt integration tactics and how they go about drawing attention to the issues considered drawbacks to Brazilians in Portugal.

6. The Integration Tactics of Brazilian Associations

For immigrants, collective associations become important instruments when it comes to their social integration in the host society. For the associations, community integration and visibility tactics are often approached from what Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) call offensive/defensive stances. According to this dichotomy, the associations act ‘offensively’ through their actions, involving the bettering of integration measures and the attainment of equal citizenship rights. The organisations, in this case, call for and work towards achieving rights to legalisation, labour, housing, education, health, among others. The ‘defensive’ point-of-view, on the other hand, is expressed through actions relating to identity preservation and diffusion of ethno-cultural interests.
I here point out the duality of objectives in the actions carried out – how the associations go about providing a link between the ‘old life’ and the ‘new life’; between primary-group ties and the formal bureaucratic structures of Portuguese society (Jenkins 1988; Sardinha 2009). While the three Brazilian student associations, for example, describe the reasons behind their existence as, on one hand, to help insert Brazilian students into Portuguese academic life, bureaucratically, socially and culturally; on the other, they also work to break isolation and help curb home sickness by providing links to the homeland. Equally, while associations such as the Brazilian Association of Portugal, House of Brazil of Lisbon, Association More Brazil and AACILUS claim to be politically active and dedicated to social integration actions, they also point out organising cultural events and participating in those organised by other civil society organisations.

Consequently, the associations were asked to discuss the most significant integration problems faced by Brazilians in Portugal. Here, the most highlighted responses included: obtaining legal papers; work-related issues such as the lack of labour contracts and labour market exploitation; and rights to accessing social services, namely health, education and training programmes. As one leader pointed out:

(…) it is more a question of integrating them [the immigrants], in getting everyone legalised, in acquiring their rights – this is what’s important. All the other issues can start being taken care of after that. Family rights, labour rights, human rights – this must be taken care of first if a person is to integrate into this society (House of Brazil of Lisbon).

With the aim of drawing attention to these insertion problems, the associations highlighted a number of actions and initiatives they carry out, including: lobbying and negotiating with government institutions (local, regional and national) and political parties; articulating with other receiving country organisations (e.g. labour unions, religious institutions and other civil society organisms); participating in consultative bodies (e.g. the national Consultative Council on Immigrant Issues and municipal councils); using media forms (e.g. television, radio, newspapers, internet, etc.); utilising confrontational means (e.g. public demonstrations, strikes, etc.). It is through these actions that their ‘offensive’ prowess takes place.

Of the organisations studied, four in particular – the Brazilian Association of Portugal, House of Brazil of Lisbon, Association More Brazil and AACILUS – possess greater proximity to the political structures and greater lobbying dynamics. This is owed to the official recognition of these associations by the High Commissariat on Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI). Bounded by legislation, immigrant associations are to be legally recognised by ACIDI if they are to be partners of the State on issues dealing with immigration and integration. Once a series of requirements are met (elected social bodies, published statutes, registration in the National Registry of Collective Bodies and having as their primary goal the promotion of immigrant rights), an association is recognised as a legitimate representative of the immigrant group and is entitled to participate in the definition of immigration policy, regulatory processes concerning migration, in the Consultative Council on Immigrant Issues, among others. The positioning of the four aforementioned associations places them in a privileged position as their proximity to the government institution responsible for immigration and integration matters allows them to transmit demands to the powers-that-be and bring greater visibility to the issues that most affect the community.
In large part, however, it’s at the local level, alongside municipal support offices or councils, where most of the associations claim to carry out the majority of their visibility campaigns. Local-level relations between immigrant associations and the local power authorities are, in large part, more common given that the majority of the associations have a fixed geographical base (municipal or regional) and given that many issues and problems, more often than not, come under the mandate of local authorities (Sardinha 2007).

Beyond citizenship and equality issues, a second set of insertion issues were highlighted by the associations, including: homesickness and loneliness, lack of acceptance on the part of Portuguese society, climate and geographical aspects, and discrimination, racism and stereotyping. As one interviewee pointed out:

There’s this problem of feeling alone; of being in a strange place. Brazilians don’t have the experience of leaving their country – of living in another countries – so for many, this is a frightening experience, namely because we leave behind those elements that provided us with the safety we need, emotionally, psychologically and culturally. Here we are among people who are different from us so we can never be fully integrated because we can’t completely be ourselves; we can never feel at home here. As well, the climate here is hard for us and we have a hard time adjusting to it. You can’t imagine how hard it is for us when it’s the middle of winter here and its ten degrees, while back in Brazil its thirty-five degrees and everybody’s at the beach. The culture shocks make it hard to adjust and integrate into this society (BRASUP).

Different from previous issues is the fact that these problems are based on feelings of integration. Measuring ‘felt’ integration is a more complex process than measuring integration influenced by State instruments, policies and programmes. In order to combat ‘felt’ integration difficulties, the ‘defensive’ side of Schrover and Vermeulen’s dichotomy comes into play. The associations highlighted the festivities, the cultural events, the platforms created with the intent of further creating networks of camaraderie, socialisation, communication and social assistance; that help break isolation and curb homesickness by providing links to the homeland through the reinterpretation of cultural traditions and symbols.

Furthermore, although associations are grounds for such exchanges, it was also made clear that the majority of Brazilians in Portugal don’t search out formal associations when it comes to creating personal networks, nor are associations viewed by community members as pivotal structures when it comes to cultural maintenance and preservation. As one interviewee expressed:

I think Brazilians are more visible on a daily basis than any other group. The way we dress, speak … you see Brazilian wearing national football jerseys all the time, for example. We feel comfortable in shorts and flip-flop sandals because that’s what we are used to wearing in Brazil. You see Brazilians dressed like this here even when it’s cold. You see Brazilian flags hanging from apartment windows. I don’t see this with other immigrant groups. This is how Brazilians show who they are and associations aren’t needed for this (Brazilian Association of Portugal).

In pointing out that Brazilians practice and exhibit their ethno-cultural identity more-so within personal spaces and informal networks than through formal associations, the respondents also expressed that the work of the associations extends
beyond the preservation of their ethno-cultural identity, giving equal importance to the
transmission of Brazilian culture with the intent of bringing awareness and greater
openness in Portuguese society towards Brazilians. The quote that follows reflects this:

(...) with Carnival coming up, we hold festivities for both Brazilians and
Portuguese. This is one of our greatest symbols. The whole world knows our
carnivals (in Brazil). So we try to bring a little of what our carnival is all about to
the people so, on one hand, Brazilians here can keep in contact with one of the
cultural elements that defines us – carnival – and, on the other, Portuguese people
can also see and participate. We participate in the Portuguese organised Carnivals.
We do not want to be isolated; it is not the Brazilian way. We want to celebrate
with the whole world. Our visibility can’t be limited to working in restaurants and
so on … (Association More Brazil).

Specifically drawn attention to is the importance of intertwining cultural
elements and intercultural exchanges, seen to some as an integration strategy – a way in
which greater visibility can be given to the Brazilian cultural components and identity
elements, not as an independent variable, but as an intercultural instrument to be pooled
alongside Portuguese cultural and identity references and exchanged. Although such a
goal is to be praised, given its contribution to the creation of an intercultural society, it
is also important to point out that such an endeavour may bring with it a negative
depiction if the activities the associations produce ended up contributing to the
construction of stereotypes, as may be the case with the depiction of women as sex
objects in carnival parades, for example.

Furthermore, no different from the individuals and philosophies they represent,
the associations end up acquiring ‘multiple subject positions’ (Cohen 1997) through
dealings outside of the associations’ structure and ethnic circle. Also important to keep
in mind, however, is the fact that impediments may exist when it comes to acquiring
such ‘multiple subject positions’. Integration is a ‘two-way street’ – this is to say that no
matter how much immigrants may want to be a part of the host society, or assimilate
into it, if the host society puts up obstacles, hindering any attempt at integration or
assimilation, the immigrants will not succeed in doing so. Such obstacles may come in
the form of discriminatory practices or through stereotyping. I here go back to the
stereotypical image of Brazilian women as prostitutes as an example. Although highly
referred to as a primary concern when it comes to the insertion of Brazilian women into
Portuguese society, only a reduced number of the associations pointed out having this
issue as a key subject matter in its outlined objectives. Still some associations claim to
‘work within’ as is the case of AACILUS:

We carry out a ‘form of soul therapy’ with Brazilian women who feel alone and out
of place, who might not feel safe, and feel affected by the stereotypes and the way
they are treated by society. We work with women who want to meet and discuss
their issues and create a network of solidarity among them (AACILUS).

Such ‘soul therapy’ may serve to lighten the affects of stereotyping and ease integration
into Portuguese society; however, it has no impact on society-at-large. As Padilla
(2005) points out, Brazilian women are frequently left to their own devises to battle
stereotypes, adapting such strategies as changing their behaviour and appearance, and/or
going into alternative labour markets where visibility is not so high. While many of the
interviewees concur that the importance of collective action and lobbying the powers-
that-be is effective in combating labelling and stereotypes, it is equally important to question why the associations are not working with the aim of changing women-hindering stereotypes, and why, instead, some associations partake in initiatives that continue to portray the stereotypes (e.g. the sexualisation of women through carnivals). This approach (or lack thereof) can perhaps be explained by the male-dominated Brazilian associative world. Parallels can perhaps be drawn to the work of Jones-Correa (1998) who, through his work with Latino activists in New York City, reveals that while men are more likely to favour patterns of socialisation and organisation, women are more likely to favour change.

For the associations, therefore, the importance of their roles as community representing institutions and their capacity to pressure ‘from below’ is key to creating change, something that can be more readily accomplished if the right actions are taken to see change happen.

7. Conclusion

Focusing on the testimonies of those at the helm of Brazilian associations, this article took on the task of, first, analysing differentiations, perceptions and stereotypes as they are applied to Brazilians in Portugal; second, to observe the insertion and visibility tactics adopted by the associations. Discussed were a series of stereotypes that have been formulated through centuries of Portuguese-Brazilian contact and re-enforced in recent years due to mass media and increased visibility and contact with Brazilian immigrants. Such stereotypes, as was demonstrated, have played a major role in creating boundaries between the Brazilian community and the host society. The imagined contrasts – ‘exotic Brazil’ and ‘melancholic Portugal’ – is marked by the contrasting ‘happy/sad’ dichotomy that characterise Brazilians (happy) and Portuguese (sad). Such stereotypes and preconceptions, no different from Said’s (1979) ‘orientalism’, in the sense that such definitions create a divide, consequently, serving as a cornerstone in the creation of ethnic boundaries, have put Brazilian immigrants in a submissive position. Such is the case with the labour market niches occupied, where Brazilians are often identified with jobs where good public relations skills and friendliness are involved.

Due to the increased visibility of the Brazilian community, a sentiment of invasion is also expressed. Combining this sentiment with the negative depictions of Brazilians, and above all Brazilian women, who are often affiliated to prostitution, makes this community’s insertion into Portuguese society a difficult one. Thus, when it comes from Brazil, it seems that what is desired must come in a controlled mode (Brazilian cultural elements), free of perceived threats or incursion (Brazilian immigrants).

Taking integration difficulties into consideration, the question of what tactics are adopted by Brazilian collective organizations to facilitate community integration was asked. First, it was singled out that the often opposing objectives of retaining ethno-cultural forms, while, at the same time, possessing the right to integration into the social structures (economic, civic, political, cultural and spiritual) of Portuguese society outline the goals of the organisations. It was demonstrated that the vitality and commitment of the Brazilian associations in coordinating their involvement in both receiving and sending contexts demonstrates their willingness to work within both ethnic and host-country systems. Ethnic mobilisation was expressed primarily through two streams of action: cultural events, festivities and transcultural ties, on the one hand; political engagements, in the form of media contacts and parliamentary lobbying tactics,
demonstrations, etc. on the other. Through these means, the associations invest in integrating Brazilians into Portuguese society, while at the same contributing to what is most desired – an intercultural way of living, including all rights and freedoms.

So in reiterating, the positions of the associations on the topic of insertion resonated within Schrover and Vermeulen’s (2005) offensive-defensive dichotomy, with the offensive strategies framed around resolving community problems (legalisation, employment, housing, education, health, etc.) as well as discrimination and xenophobia; the defensive position through maintenance, practice and transmission of the ethnic identity. Such premeditated tactics are further confirmed through the notion of ‘strategic identity’ (Camilleri et al. 1990) for immigrant communities will adjust and operate in accordance with the situations established by the receiving society and carry out their actions and coordinate their visibility tactics in accordance with the host societies’ openness. Consequently, the degree of differentiation, stereotypical perceptions, as well as lack of equal rights to citizenship plays a primary role in defining collective actions. The degree of visibility of Brazilians in Portugal, therefore, is, one hand, determined by the ethno-cultural contrasts and the acceptance of those contrasts by the host society; on the other, equally determined by the downplaying of divergences, being that greater attention will continue to be drawn to social-political issues if social-political rights are not granted.

Notes

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2 The first four years of the 2000s saw the Brazilian population triple in size from 22,222 to 66,907. Most recent 2008 statistics account for 106,961 in Portugal (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras 2008).

3 It is important to note that although Brazilians are the largest national immigrant community in Portugal, they do not possess the associative dynamics that other communities do. For example, according to a study carried out by Albuquerque (2002), the Guinea Bissau community possessed the most associations in Portugal with a total of forty-two, one association per 599 nationals of Guinea Bissau. The Brazilian community, by comparison, possesses one association per 3,717 Brazilian nationals.

4 The study coordinated by Lages (2006) asked 1,539 Portuguese respondents how they perceive (stereotype) Brazilians with the results being, on one hand, happy and friendly, on the other, unprofessional, incompetent, and dishonest.

5 For a more in-depth analysis of Brazilian immigrants in the Portuguese labour market, see Peixoto and Figueiredo (2007).

6 To exemplify this popularity, Machado (1999) points out that, by the end of the 1990s, up to eleven Brazilian soap operas could be viewed daily, while radio stations dedicated large percentages of their programming time to Brazilian music.

7 The image of Brazilian women as prostitutes is not exclusive to Portugal. Studies carried out Margolis (1993) in New York City and by Bógus and Bassanesi (1999) in Italy, also point out that Brazilian women in these locations are pigeon-holed with the mark of prostitution.

8 This sentiment was also expressed in relation to immigrants in general.

9 The on-going dispute reached a conclusion 1997 when the reciprocity labour accord between the two countries was eliminated. Under a new signed agreement, those who
had arrived before the elimination of the previous accord would now be able to freely practice dentistry in Portugal, while those who arrived after would have to go through a course equivalency processes (Machado 2003).

10 Created in 1995 (Decree-Law 3-A/96 of January 26th, 1996), and restructured in 2003 and again in 2007 (that year changing its name from High Commission for Immigrant and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME) to what it is today), ACIDI is a mediating government institution that holds as its aims: 1) promoting the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities in Portugal, 2) co-ordinating the participation and collaboration of the different representatives of immigrants’ interests – namely, NGO’s, immigrant associations, municipalities, various government bodies and other civil society organisations – in determining the policies promoting social integration and eradicating social exclusion, 3) overseeing the application of legal tools aimed at preventing discrimination and eliminating xenophobia, and 4) collaborating with various public offices, namely the Foreigners and Borders Service, in the control of immigration flows to Portugal, and to suggest and promote policies that aim at supporting immigrants and ethnic minorities (Albuquerque et al. 2000; Teixeira and Albuquerque 2005).


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