

Subjective assessment of work opportunities  
By Brazilian women living in Rome

Isabela Cabral Félix de Sousa

E-mail: [isabelacabral@fiocruz.br](mailto:isabelacabral@fiocruz.br)

Fundação Oswaldo Cruz  
Escola Politécnica de Saúde Joaquim Venâncio

- Subjective assessments of work opportunities by Brazilians living in Rome, which constitutes a very little known phenomenon related to the Brazilian immigration in Italy.
- Working opportunities foster migration behavior, but the way immigrants experience these opportunities vary.
- Brazil is presently witnessing a phenomenon that is unprecedented in its history, which is the increasing the emigration of nationals, particularly to the Northern hemisphere, in a pace that is transforming the country into a new emigration country.
- This situation in a country which population was formed through the contribution of immigration poses new questions. One of them is the noticeable population of women among the Brazilians abroad. This places Brazil in an international population trend, where it is seen increasingly more women than men migrating.
- By December 2002, it was estimated that Brazilians in Italy were 20.804, which placed them at the 22nd position of the 30 communities with major presence of immigrants in Italy (CARITAS ROMA, 2003). D'Angelo (2004) affirmed that in this same period in Italy, the communities with more Brazilians were Rome (4.381) followed by Milano (3.032) and by Torino (1.153).
- The proportion of Brazilian men to women in the year 2001 indicates a prevalence of women since their presence related to 65, 4% of the total (CARITAS ROMA, 2002).

## **Qualitative Methodology**

- The data has been collected from oral interviews and through fieldwork notes regarding observations at selected social sites where Brazilians meet in Rome. The places selected were the Brazilian consulate and embassy, an art gallery, a pizzeria, two churches, two restaurants, one bar and a Brazilian association for women.
- From December 2003 to August 2004, in-depth interviews were conducted with 46 women and non-standardized interviews were settled with 3 key persons that were referred by many Brazilians as developing active roles in their social integration in Rome.
- The open-ended questions were generated in this research to address women's subjective issues and the profile of men present at the gathering places.

## Research Results

Table 1 – States and country where interviewed Brazilian immigrants were born

	State or country	Number of women
<b>North</b>	Pará	01
<b>Northeast</b>	Maranhão	01
<b>Northeast</b>	Paraíba	01
<b>Northeast</b>	Pernambuco	05
<b>Northeast</b>	Bahia	08
<b>Midwest</b>	Mato Grosso	02
<b>Midwest</b>	Goiás	04
<b>Southeast</b>	São Paulo	04
<b>Southeast</b>	Rio de Janeiro	04
<b>Southeast</b>	Minas Gerais	05
<b>South</b>	Paraná	05
<b>South</b>	Santa Catarina	01
<b>South</b>	Rio Grande do Sul	04
<b>USA</b>		01
<b>TOTAL</b>		46

Table 2 – Civil status of interviewed women

Single	25
Officially married with Italians	11
Officially married with a German	01
Italian male partner	03
Brazilian male partner	02
Separated	03
Widowed	01
Total	46

Table 3 – Educational background of interviewed Brazilian immigrants

	Women	Men	TOTAL
Elementary School	02	02	04
Junior High School	05	01	06
High School	20	25	45
University degrees	19	06	25

Table 4- Work activities performed by interviewed women

	Every weekday activity	Sporadic activity	Total
Domestic service	20	02	22
Care of children	11	-	11
Restaurant	06	05	11
Care of old persons	-	05	05
Volunteer	01	06	07
Commerce	02	01	03
Beauty care	01	02	03
Marketing	01	01	02
Journalism	01	-	01
Translation	-	02	02
Tourism	02	1	03
	01	-	01
Teaching	-	02	02

Note: In this table, categories are not excluding since some women develop more than one activity.

Table 5- Different forms of spending earnings by interviewed women

Send money or goods to nuclear family in Brazil	04
Send money or goods to extensive family in Brazil	11
Send money to others (friends and church)	03
Send money and goods for own benefit	08
Send money and goods for own benefit and also benefit of extensive family in Brazil	07
Do not send money or goods	13
TOTAL	46



- Considering Brazilian women work activities in Rome, all of them reported to be working.
- Greater insertion in the labour market as performing household assistance.
- Level of satisfaction seems to largely depend on their previous perspective back home as well as the time they had been in Italy.
  1. Previous unemployment in Brazil leading to satisfaction with present condition
  2. Level of educational attainment. (Misfit of job aspiration when women hold a university diploma)
  3. Previous job (if reduced gains or status)
  4. Time in Rome, Italy
  5. Class status

Other factors:

- Housing conditions and work as a domestic servant (Live-out position was clearly seen as more autonomous than having a live-in position).

A 38 years old woman holding a university degree reported: «Unfortunately I will have to move into a live-in position. I prefer to work as a live-out, have my apartment, but I was dismissed and there are more offers for live-in positions». It is important to note that as live-out position, this woman's living conditions were not easy. Her living arrangements included other 11 people from other nationalities and one of her companions was recently stolen by one of her roommates.

- Easiness to find in 1 to 2 weeks a domestic service job for a woman but not for a man.
- Only legal work stay granted easily by authorities in Italy was for domestic service

Working problems:

#### 1. Humiliation

- A 25-year-old woman had problems working as a domestic servant for an Italian family because she was humiliated without reason and complained to the authorities to receive her last payment.

#### 2. Exploitation

- A 28 years old, born at the Brazilian Northeast and working for a Brazilian diplomatic family, complained to be receiving less than the average paid in Rome. She actually received less than all other interviewed women doing the same job.

### Volunteer work as unexplored dimension:

- A 55 years old woman working as a domestic servant said: «Before, I came I already did volunteer work and worked as both a domestic servant and a nurse. Here, I lived one of the best days of my life when I went to represent the country at the international volunteer day, due to my work for Betinho's food campaign, but I think my life would be good anywhere». This woman explained that she came to Italy because she had lost her main paid job in Brazil and a friend referred her to come to work with Brazilian diplomats.

### Gains from living in Rome:

- A 49 years old woman explained: «I grew as a person because I learned so many cultures and then, I compared good and bad things of Brazil with other countries. It is an opportunity to know people, to know how they think differently. I grew immensely and so did my children».

Spending money:

- The decision to migrate did not seem to have been taken due to family pressure but a few might be compelled to send money and to provide material goods for their children or ill family members abroad.

A 46 years old woman working as a domestic servant and living in Rome for 18 years contended: «I am happy to have to spend money on my self and on my family in Brazil. I bought a house in Rome and always helped my sister who is ill and my nephews».

A 37 years old woman explained: «I did not pursue university degree in my country because I became unemployed and I could not pay the tuition fees and at the same time help my family. Yet, I should have been more selfish since my dream was to study. I cannot help being differently. Now, my father is ill and I end up sending much of my money to help him because he does not have help from the Brazilian government».

## **Conclusion**

- It is undeniable that holding better paying jobs in the host country has an important role in women's empowerment.
- Their empowerment was revealed in holding jobs, having more earning power and to some more autonomy to spend these earnings, what they told were their psychological, cultural and material gains, and in how they wanted to and did transform themselves or the social world they lived in.
- The studied women were all protagonist in choosing migration
- While all had a protagonist role in departing from Brazil, how they used the benefits of their improved earning power was varied.
- While work opportunities were the main motivation for the majority to migrate and remain in the host society, the expected better life conditions were not always a reality in their migration process.