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Sacramento, Octávio 2019. For love, labour, and lifestyle: European men moving to Northeast Brazil. *Anthropological Forum*, 29(2): 134-152.

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## **For love, labour, and lifestyle: European men moving to Northeast Brazil**

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**Abstract:** This article debates the specific case of the migration of European men to the Northeast of Brazil and its relation to the creation of intimacy bonds with local women that have been made possible by previous tourist visits. The analysis has the principal objective of understanding the dense framework of social conditions and circumstances that cause the transatlantic mobility of men, and gives particular emphasis to the emotional and marital factors that fuel this type of movement, trying to show that they also migrate for intimacy reasons, and not only for economic reasons as studies based on a neoclassical approach have often seemed to indicate. While central, in these examples of international mobility, the intention to marry is not as determining a factor as the concept of “marriage migrations” would seem to suggest. Poetic motivations related to passion and intimacy coexist dynamically with a much wider set of (micro)political economy and existential drives, related not only to employment and investment, but also to recreation and the minutiae of everyday life. For this reason, it is important to avoid any unicausal schema based on exclusive or dichotomous conceptual frameworks that foreground migration for marital, lifestyle and/or employment motives. The migrations in question tend to be motivated, simultaneously and cumulatively, by the desire for matrimony and to secure assets, and even by what we might call “civilizational” issues. The material that sustains both this and other perspectives presented in the article are the result of a multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in various spaces within Euro-Brazilian configurations of intimacy.

**Keywords:** Masculine migrations; transnationalisation of intimacy; economic reproduction strategies; lifestyle; Europe-Northeast Brazil.

## 1. Introduction

In global images and imaginations, Brazil represents, above all, a preeminent destination for tourist mobility, and thus constitutes part of Northern countries' "periphery of pleasure" (Turner and Ash 1991). However, it is important to recall that historically Brazil has also experienced significant international migration, from the earliest days after European contact, until the middle of the 20th century (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE 2007; Lesser 2013; Patarra 2005; Patarra and Fernandes 2011). The total number of immigrants in the country today approaches two million (Martes 2016) – a figure that, while less appreciable than in the past, nevertheless still displays an upward trend, in spite of the economic slowdown and political instability of recent years. There is a substantial diversity in the origin, social profiles, motivations, expectations and lifestyle of the people centrally involved in these mobilities. Alongside migration from the global North, there are a growing number of citizens from other countries in the American continent who tend to choose to establish a new life in the centre and south of the country (Baeninger 2012; Oliveira 2015; Patarra and Fernandes 2011).

In this article, I circumscribe my attention to a specific context and to a particular profile of immigrants: men from Europe who develop emotional, sexual and marital relations with local women and who permanently establish themselves in the city of Natal (state of Rio Grande do Norte), in Northeast Brazil. These intimate relations are often the outcome of the significant number of European tourists that visit Natal, in general, and Ponta Negra, in particular. Ponta Negra is small coastal resort with around 24,500 inhabitants (Maciel and Lima 2014) that has become one of the most emblematic and internationalised seaside locations in the region. It is in this specific empirical context that I examine the transatlantic displacements of male immigrants with origins in the European continent, with a view to securing a passionate and/or marital relationship that have mainly resulted from the encounters and intimacy bonds with local women mass tourism has made possible.

My starting point is the ethnographic fieldwork on Euro-Brazilian configurations of intimacy that I conducted in 2009-2010 in Ponta Negra and in various European locations (e.g. the North of Italy) from where my main informants originated or to where they had returned (Sacramento 2014)<sup>1</sup>. The participant observation and semi-structured interviews, that constituted the main research procedures of this "multi-sited ethnography" (Marcus 1995), permitted the collection of a substantial amount of detailed information (Sacramento 2016a). The analysis undertaken in the present article has the aim of trying to understand how intimacy acts as a propeller of international migratory projects at a conjuncture when the romantic narrative is particularly valued and widely consumed (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2004; Illouz 1997; Roca 2008). Nevertheless, I have explicitly avoided unicausal explanations in trying to understand how motivations based on the desire for passion and intimacy coexist and interact with many other aspirations, particularly economic (Zelizer 2005), harboured by male Europeans as they decide to move to the Northeast of Brazil. Specifically, I try to understand two major things: (i) how the impassioned experiences with Brazilian women during the tourist experience are the axis

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<sup>1</sup> The field research was supported by an FCT doctoral scholarship (SFRH/BD/60862/2009).

around which European men, reflexively, evaluate intimacy in their countries of origin, seek new intimacy configurations and choose the construction of a life project in Brazil, passing from tourists to immigrants; (ii) how the poetics of Euro-Brazilian passions intersect with economic pretensions and with existential aspirations to another way of life, constituting the dense puzzle in which the masculine migrations in question are inscribed.

Transnational relationships of intimacy and the migrations associated with them have been studied in various geographical contexts, typically from the perspective of so-called “marriage migration”, “marriage-related migration”, “marriage flows” or “migration for love” (Brettell 2017; Charsley 2013; Charsley, Storer-Church, Benson, and Hear 2012; Constable 2005; Flemmen 2008; Jones 2012; Kim 2010; Lauser 2008; Mai and King 2009; Piscitelli 2009; Raposo and Togni 2009; Roca 2007, 2016; Treto 2012; Yang and Lu 2010; Yeoh, Leng, and Dung 2013). In these types of mobilities, the bonds of intimacy are not a consequence of emigration, but its most immediate cause (Puerta and Másdeu 2010). Seen this way, not only can the economic determinism found in many of the classical studies of migrations be interrogated, but also the impact of other causalities on international migration (in general) and on “love migrants” (in particular) can be given due emphasis (Roca 2007, 2009, 2016)<sup>2</sup>. However, in escaping economic determinism, it is essential not to fall into other determinisms, for even though intimacy is decisive in our analysis, it is far from being the only social framework in which the construction of migration projects takes shape. In addition to love, I found many other circumstances, reasons and interests, especially economic ones, that inform migration, leading me to agree with Palriwala and Uberoi (2005, vii) that “a meaningful distinction between ‘marriage’ or ‘family’ migration on the one hand, and ‘labor migration’ on the other, is impossible to sustain”.

On a global scale, the vast majority of so-called love and/or marriage migration involves flows of women from developing countries (mainly Southeast Asia and Latin America) to more prosperous countries. The flow of Northern men to Southern countries – the reverse phenomenon in terms of both gender and geography – is less common and has been little studied. The context of Ponta Negra confirms the international tendency, since the number of Brazilian women that migrate to Europe with their partners or spouses is much larger than the inverse situation<sup>3</sup>. Elsewhere (Sacramento 2015, 2016b, 2017) my main concern has been to debate this dominant empirical configuration. In the present article, my preoccupation is to debate the less recurrent configuration – the migration of European men to the tropics with a view to achieving a transatlantic love project – a phenomenon that has undoubted social relevance and reveals the growing flexibility of transnational processes of intimacy and mobility.

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<sup>2</sup> At a time when expectations of achievement in the emotional sphere have gained a degree of precedence over material ambitions (Giddens 2001), it is not surprising that relationship issues become increasingly important in the major life choices individuals make.

<sup>3</sup> There is admittedly a much smaller number of European women who settle in Brazil having established a relationship with a Brazilian man, a social scenario that parallels what Toyota and Thang (2012) have classified as “reverse marriage migration”, in the case of Japanese women who meet and marry men from Bali and subsequently relocate to Indonesia.

## 2. From tourist to newcomer

The great majority of international tourists in Ponta Negra are from Europe – mainly from the Mediterranean region, and especially Italy. They are mainly males between 26 and 45 years old (Sacramento 2014). During their stay, it is frequently the case that an emotional connection is made with Brazilian women whom they meet at the beach, elsewhere at the resort, or in other parts of the city of Natal. Initially, many of these bonds of intimacy are established with women whose main activity is the provision of paid sexual services and who are socially designated as *garotas de programa* (call girls). However, many affairs begin outside the context of prostitution, in a broader set of conditions, circumstances and sociabilities that the tourism industry creates (McKercher and Bauer 2003). These are mainly the result of socialisation with women from the local community who work in the tourism sector (e.g. in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, souvenir shops or in informal commerce) or, less often, with women from elsewhere in Brazil who, just like the male tourists, are also there as tourists.

Some of these affairs endure beyond the initial time and place of the first encounter and continue after the return of the tourist to his country of origin. Here, as in many other contexts, the distance factor does not put an immediate end to the affair (Holmes 2004). Its transnational persistence is fed by various expectations and interests, on the part of both parties, and is facilitated by the communication technologies now readily available. Thus, new mobilities emerge – with European men repeatedly travelling to the Brazilian Northeast and their Brazilian women partners moving in the reverse direction – that do not correspond to the narrow dichotomy of tourism versus migration but contain a complex combination of both. The succession of separations and reunions tends to persist until legal, logistical, economic, family and other conditions have been satisfied, conferring on one of the parties involved the possibility of mobility to their partner's country or sometimes reciprocal mobilities that permit both partners to alternate seasonal stays in both Brazil and Europe.

As a result of successive and prolonged visits to Ponta Negra, many men from the European continent build links with the place that go far beyond the simple tourist experience and generate intense feelings of belonging, as can be seen from the follows testimony:

I feel that my life is here [in Ponta Negra]. The only thing I have in Italy is family [the interviewee becomes emotional]. I'm sorry, this always happens when I leave at the end of my holiday. Here, I feel that this my home. When I leave Italy to come here I don't have the same feeling that I'm leaving home (Italian tourist, 34 years, electrician).

Expressing similar feelings, two of my main Italian informants, Gentile (a 48 year old mason) and Ambrosini (43, also a mason), with more than a decade of consecutive extended visits to Ponta Negra, constantly evoke Brazil in their daily lives in Italy and admitted to saving and making plans for the holidays from one year to the next, feeding the hope that one day the conditions will exist (especially the material conditions) for a longer or even a permanent stay to be possible.

It is in this framework of progressive attachment to Ponta Negra that some European visitors make the transition from simple tourists to tourist-residents or to immigrants – newcomers (*chegantes*)<sup>4</sup> – especially if they establish marital ties with local women<sup>5</sup>. Whether or not for marital reasons, the same happens in other international (including European) tourist settings (Barretto 2009; Haug, Dann, and Mehmetoglu 2007; Müller 2002; O'Reilly 2003). These repeated movements form links in an evolving chain that is transformative, not only underscoring the fluidity of the boundaries between the two primordial categories in the anthropology of tourism (Cipollari 2010), namely hosts and guests (Smith 1989), but also demonstrating how the articulation between tourism and migration flows often generates complex hybridisms (Janoschka and Haas 2013). Beyond these hybridisms, the tourism-migration nexus can also be identified with the systemic relationships of reciprocal causality that contribute decisively to the development of extensive social circuits, to the moving of cultures (Clifford 1997; Rojek and Urry 1997) and to the formation of transnational spaces and communities. As can be deduced from the analysis of Williams and Hall (2002), these distinct flows tend to produce a dual effect of “entrainment”, generating more of the same while stimulating new flows with different characteristics. What happens within the framework of transatlantic relationships of intimacy is a prime example of this “snowball effect” of mobility: the movement of European tourists to Ponta Negra has both encouraged migrations along the same route, and promoted new tourist and migratory mobilities, especially those undertaken by women in the opposite direction, which in turn boost new flows in both directions.

There are several migratory movements that tourism directly stimulates: the migration not only of those who transnationally pursue emotional attachments, but also those working in the tourism sector, as well as retirees permanently migrating to places they have visited on holiday. Generally, as Barreto (2009) notes, these types of migrations are often preceded by one or more tourist stays that may promote new forms of tourism, as in the case of visits to family and friends, now often referred to in the literature as VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives). Mass tourism thus represents a powerful propulsive factor in the establishment of extensive and complex chains of mobility. Actually, as Oigenblick and Kirschenbaum (2002) underline, it is fairly common that the tourist experiences provide data on the socio-economical context of a given place, which may turn out to be decisive in the future choice of a migratory destination. Prospecting the viability of a hypothetical permanent settlement may actually be part of the initial expectations that the tourist attaches to the trip. A tourist stay, ostensibly only for purposes of leisure, can also furnish an opportunity to assess the employment, business or investment possibilities in a particular location, or even the gathering of information that may provide an idea of the quality of life or lifestyle that can be expected there. The facts and ideas that result from this kind of experience will allow potential migrants to establish points of contextual comparison between origin and destination that will influence the final decision

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<sup>4</sup> The emic designation used by Neverovsky (2005) to refer to persons from other Brazilian States or from outside the country who have established themselves in Ponta Negra, acquiring real estate property and adopting a specific economic activity.

<sup>5</sup> Although (the prospect of) marriage with a particular woman is a common and decisive factor in the decision to migrate, and typically precedes relocation to Natal, the sequence is sometimes reversed, with matrimony only coming later, when immigration has been consummated.

regarding long-term migration. As became evident in Ponta Negra, love, labour and lifestyle constitute the key parameters of contextual comparison.

### **3. Masculine mobilities and the quest for new intimacy configurations**

Transnational bonds of intimacy such as those established in Ponta Negra, reflect the increasing reflexivity and electivity of intimate life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2004; Giddens 2001; Roca 2007) and a deep dissatisfaction with gender identities and relations. Among European men, it is possible to identify experiences and trajectories of intimacy that contribute significantly to boosting their tourist mobility and their progressive openness to the realisation of a transatlantic migratory project. Their biographies highlight some of the key trends that help configure intimacy today: the difficulty of establishing satisfactory and durable emotional connections with the opposite sex, the proliferation of alternative forms of conjugality to marriage, and the declining stability of relationships (Sacramento 2016c). Taken together, these trends eloquently evoke the contemporary “chaos of love” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2004) and the antagonistic desires for sentimental fusion and fission that characterise it (Chaumier 2004a, 2004b).

The great number of European single men that travel to Ponta Negra and the significant proportion of them who are divorced or separated are indicative of the presence of significant “intimacy transformations” (Giddens 2001) – particularly in the models of cohabitation and sentimental alliances available (Coontz 2004) – from which result social conditions and subjective dispositions that are more favourable to the transnationalisation of one’s love life. The difficulties, intermittence and dissatisfactions of relationships in Europe, as noted in previous studies (O’Connell-Davidson 2001; Piscitelli 2004), constitute the main aspects of the intimate lives of these men. In their own discourse, the ostensibly excessive emancipation and loss of traditional values of European women are the major cause for the turbulence that has undermined the hitherto prevailing organisation of intimacy. With a certain nostalgia for their now diminished patriarchal role, men tend to identify greater female investment in their own careers and their growing concern with economic emancipation and material progress to the increasing detriment of their former love-, sex- and family-lives, as the key factors causing the main problems of intimacy that men face. They identify these problems as twofold: (i) on the part of women – especially those whom they most desire – a partial withdrawal from and heightened selectivity in the process of seduction and sexual conquest; and (ii) the difficulties in creating relationships in which both parties have similar ideas about the terms of their life together, especially those in which an extensive and intense emotional and sexual complicity exists, and a great need, mainly on the part of women, for there to be permanent investment in the building of consensus concerning family and employment projects.

On the other hand, for the majority of the male European informants interviewed in the present study, Brazilian women – who have come to be defined in terms of race, (hyper)sexualised as *mulatas* (mixed-race) and *quentes* (hot, passionate) while simultaneously being idealised as *simples* (uncomplicated) and unemancipated (compared to European women) – represent a “gender order” closer to what they believe are (or should be) “normal” male and female identities. They therefore hope to find in the tropics the kind of relationships that, allegedly, are becoming scarce in the West, in the belief they will restore – at least in their own lives –

the “natural” order between men and women that Western feminism has supposedly overturned. Regardless of the ideological bias underlying these expectations and opinions, they help to configure the subjectivities that make men look elsewhere for what they desire:

[...] many Northern men *do* experience some form of existential disempowerment brought on by the erosion of patriarchy and ‘traditional’ family values in the Northern public sphere, and seek to reaffirm their domination [...] in the Global South. (Veissière 2011, 31)

However, rather than looking for other types of femininity and trying to restore the lost powers, why aren’t men trying to change more rapidly and efficiently? The comment of Almeida (1995, 243) is clarifying: “for men it is more difficult to invent other forms of identity because, in line with their dichotomous thought, the alternative is [inevitably] inferior, feminine”. Faced with the aforementioned difficulty in modifying their identity, many men feel more comfortable deploying tourist and/or migratory mobility to cross spatial and identity boundaries and thereby pursue their untransformed ideas of masculinity and intimacy.

These men associate Brazil with a supposed female authenticity that is fast disappearing in Europe and is being replaced by identity traits that hitherto have only been associated with European masculinity. The comments of a 70 year-old Portuguese tourist-resident of Ponta Negra is enlightening: “Oh man, I think the women here are more feminine (...) much more than the Portuguese. The Portuguese woman, for me, has become too butch (*machona*), more possessive. I’ve seen it! She likes to control, likes to rule. But I think here they are gentler, sweeter”. This notion of authenticity is rooted in the patriarchal ideology of the docile woman, which is illustrated in the following testimony:

Here [Brazil], the girls are beautiful (*belíssimas*), because they are humble. Here I like their character much more. All the women in South America are humbler; here, the girls are beautiful, loving, true... (Italian, 28 years, small business owner)

The notion of the Brazilian as a real woman, truly feminine, incorporates also ethno-sexual attributes that highlight their “natural” erotic charge and their availability for sex, as opposed to the “less natural”, colder and more conservative European woman. Similar attributes are mobilised by other Western men about women from other Latin American countries (Brennan 2004; Schaeffer 2013; Simoni 2015) and Asian countries (Constable 2005).

A large part of male European migration to the Brazilian Northeast conform to this frame of Euro-Brazilian gender identities and configurations of intimacy, demonstrating that “gender matters” as a “critical force” in migrations (Mahler and Pessar 2006). Besides many other expectations, mainly related with the spheres of leisure and work, the migratory movement of male Europeans to Brazil may also be decisively influenced by the pronounced desire of their Brazilian spouses or girlfriends to stay in Ponta Negra, either because of their children, or due to unattractive images of Europe they may have, or as a result of previous negative experiences

on the other side of the Atlantic or, more rarely, for career reasons. Indeed, this desire is in some way welcomed by their male partners, despite the fact that they have all concretised their own wish to abandon their homeland, they consider that the Brazilian women undergo a complete change once they have left their tropical environment, and that maintaining a marital life with a Brazilian woman in Europe would impose many near-insuperable social constraints on both of them. In the first place, in many European countries, there exist deprecatory views about Brazil in general and, of a more explicitly sexual nature, regarding Brazilian women in particular (Padilla 2007; Pontes 2004)<sup>6</sup>. However, remaining in Brazil does not insulate women entirely from social stigma, for the mere fact of having established a transnational emotional relationship, even if validated by marriage, makes her the target for significant prejudice.

Just as in other migratory movements, the expectations and predictions that underpin this example of male transatlantic mobility often lag far behind the reality they subsequently encounter in Brazil. In spite of the experience they have gained as tourists, men arriving from Europe to settle in Brazil are confronted by surprises, difficulties and disappointments that oblige them to reconsider their previous, much more romanticised, view of Brazil through the tourist lens (Urry 1996). Some of the most disconcerting situations are related to marital life and family. I heard criticisms, for example, regarding the lack of work effort (both outside and inside the home) on the part of their Brazilian partners, when compared to the greater *work ethic*, *sense of responsibility* and *organizational capacity* of European women<sup>7</sup>. I also heard them complain of having to deal continually with their partner's *entire family* – as is expected and even demanded of them, both as spouses and as Europeans – with a view to solving each and every problem and, when necessary, to assume the financial burden of close, and often not so close, family members.

In the opinion of many of the European men I have met, “things would be very different” if the couple were living in Europe, although they also recognise that there, in addition to the above-mentioned “problems”, which may be attenuated but would not cease to exist, they would face others generated by the specific environment. This and other adverse situations, not only related to the family, marital and domestic spheres or to the couple's intimate life, progressively undermine the idyllic conceptions of Brazil that these men may have initially nurtured, and force them to face reality (*cair na real*) – a local expression that many are quick to learn. The divergence between the new life that has been imagined and the new life that is actually being lived – between the emigrant's illusions and the immigrant's delusions, as Sayad (1999) has called it – can cause disillusionment and spur the migrant to rethink and perhaps adjust his

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<sup>6</sup> The considerable contingent of Brazilian sex workers in Europe has contributed to the production of stigmas that extend to the majority of female immigrants of the same nationality (Duarte 2012). In Norway, there is a similar process in relation to Russian women, according to the description made by Sverdljuk (2009, 137): “As the local media and public consciousness had a tendency to associate the emerging transnational prostitution activities solely with ‘Russian women’, the derogative and vulgar ‘stigma of prostitution’ rapidly came into being. Russian migrant women in Northern Norway, including the so-called marriage migrants and students, have experienced whore-calling, sidelong glances and insults in everyday life”.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, they associate positively with European women precisely the same attributes that, in other discursive circumstances, they would consider profoundly negative.

relocation (and conjugal) project; it may even cause him to return to Europe, with or without his Brazilian partner.

#### 4. Business and labour opportunities

Euro-Brazilians' relationships of intimacy are deeply and extensively inscribed in the socio-economic and physical landscape of Ponta Negra, giving it a cosmopolitan identity in which diversity, dissonance and some social tensions and cleavages all intersect. The imposing apartment towers (*espigões*) stand out against the backdrop of the resort, high-rise accommodation the construction of which has been driven by the type of real estate capital (Ferreira, Bentes, and Clementino 2006) long associated with the expansion of European residential tourism (Clementino 2009; Silva and Fonseca 2010). This model of tourism displays greater place-specific embeddedness than classical beach tourism and, in some cases, contributes to stimulating more solid and longer-term relationships with local women and thereby to more male migration.

Typically, as part of their joint life-projects, Europeans and their Brazilian partners will acquire and refurbish property for their own accommodation and/or for their planned economic activities. It is quite common to see national symbols – such as the flags of Brazil and Italy side by side – on the shopfronts, business insignia and/or painted on inside walls of such buildings, especially those devoted to business. This iconography suggests that the transnationalisation of intimacy is inseparable from the strategies that partners develop to ensure their economic survival in their changed circumstances. Although noticeable in the restaurants, shops, hotels, nightlife venues and other commercial spaces that exist almost everywhere in the resort, the presence of European immigrants is particularly significant and visible at the beach-side, especially in the locations corresponding to Special Tourist Zone-1 (ZET-1; see Figure 1 below). Designated in 1987, ZET-1 covers a coastal strip approximately 400 meters wide that stretches for about four kilometers from the Morro do Careca to the beginning of the Parque das Dunas/Via Costeira on the northern limits of the resort. Height restrictions are imposed on constructions in this area, which allows an extraordinary diversity of activities related with the tourist trade to proliferate.

The ZET-1, as the heart of the resort's international tourism, constitutes a “post-national” zone (in the Habermasian sense of the term – Habermas 2001),

a space of which the traditional nation-state is not in complete control, meshing together, as it does, various kinds of ‘circulating’ populations with different kinds of ‘locals’ [...] a space densely and continuously connected to places beyond the nation (Inda 2000, 92-99).

The comprehensive mapping of all the stores of this zone that I undertook during April 2010, regardless of the sphere or scale of business involved, demonstrated that a substantial proportion are occupied by European entrepreneurs, either as owners or as tenants. Of the 208 stores identified (for which information on ownership was unavailable in nine cases), 158

belonged to Brazilians, 46 (almost one quarter) to Europeans, mainly Italian, and only four had non-European owners. The European firms are organised as sole proprietorships, or sometimes as partnerships of two, three or more persons, typically founded not only on the basis of bonds of nationality and/or friendship, but also often as a result of the common experiences of their owners in the locale since their first time there as tourists. The majority of the European owners are males, married to or with a close relationship with a Brazilian woman who, with rare exceptions, work alongside their partners. Only 12 Europeans (i.e. less than a third of the European-owned stores) do not match this pattern: eight live in Ponta Negra with their European wives, two have not yet established durable relationships, one is divorced, and in a single exceptional case, the business belongs to an Italian woman.

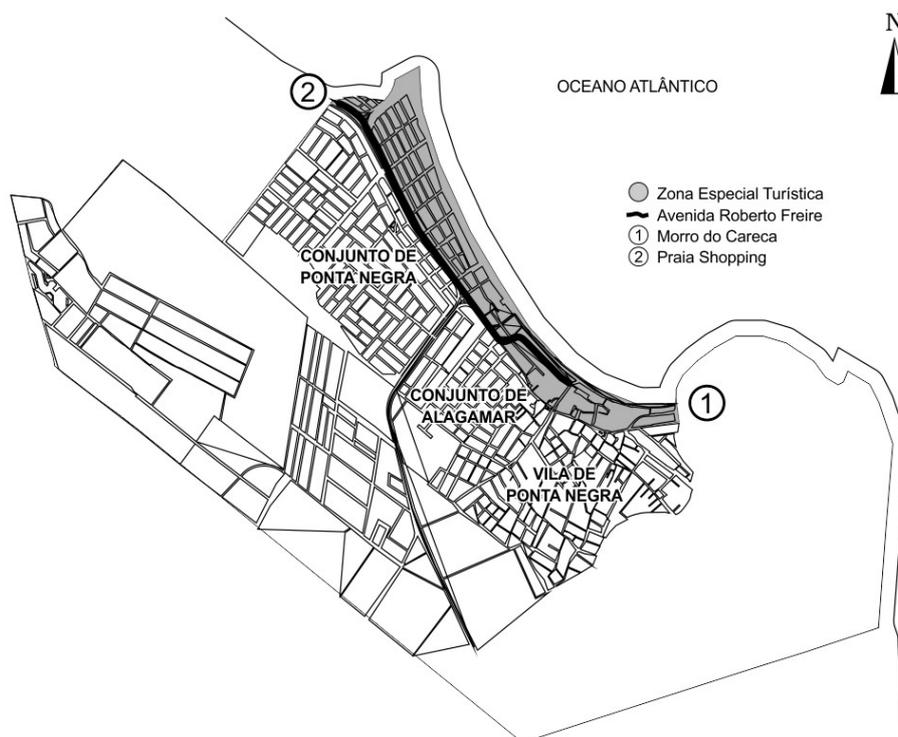


Fig. 1: The ZET-1 in the Ponta Negra resort. Source: SEMURB (2009, 43).

Except for ten enterprises of significant size (mainly hotels), the various activities belonging to Europeans are not large-scale businesses. Most notable are the restaurants, boarding houses/hostels (*pousadas*), Internet (*LAN-houses*) and phone centres (*pontos*). As a rule, European immigrants have launched these initiatives using their savings – modest sums that in their countries of origin would be insufficient to start such businesses. Sometimes, the investments are so low that they do not reach the minimum US\$50,000 required for a foreign investor's permanent visa to be issued. In such cases, marriage – even when it represents, as it often does, the formal expression of the bond of affection between the parties involved – is the

most convenient alternative strategy and solution, allowing Europeans without the necessary financial means to obtain immediate authorisation to stay in Brazil; a year later, they have the possibility of applying for naturalization<sup>8</sup>.

The less wealthy citizens of the rich countries, as was the case with some of my European informants, can find themselves being pushed into “illegal immigrant” status as a result of the tyranny of immigration and nationality regulations based almost entirely on economic criteria. I recall, for example, a 28 year old Italian plumber in Italy, who saw himself in precisely that situation. In March 2009, he was in Ponta Negra for a week’s holidays. Around a month later he returned and ended up staying, getting together with two fellow countrymen who had started a firm to rent and operate a boarding house (*pousada*) in the resort. Meanwhile, he also benefitted of a three months extension of his initial tourist visa, authorised by the federal police. When I first talked to him, in December 2009, his stay in Brazil had been “irregular” for more than three months. He told me that, having no money to invest, one of the obvious solutions to the problem was to marry his girlfriend, with whom he had established a relationship on a previous tourist visit.

Generally, among younger visitors and those experiencing less favourable labour conditions, moving across the Atlantic to the Brazilian Northeast offers a way out of precariousness<sup>9</sup>. To many of them it provides an opportunity to make the transition from a dissatisfied and poorly paid worker in Europe to a small business owner in Brazil, without excessive financial effort. It was with these expectations that, at the beginning of 2010, an Italian tourist (34 years old, electrician) prepared to move to Ponta Negra so that he could rent a property with his Brazilian girlfriend where they would open a restaurant. In addition to other reasons, he justified his decision by saying that he was unhappy with his everyday job and with the economic situation in Italy: “It’s always work, work, work, for nothing. With so many taxes and everything being so expensive, money disappears!”. Also discontent with his job as a mason in Italy, and having been long fascinated by Brazil, Gentile was likewise thinking of moving there permanently when I talked to him in Aosta (in the Northwest of Italy). Less typically, a further influence on his decision had been the attraction of being part of a business venture that his Brazilian girlfriend had been developing for some years in a sphere in which he had accumulated experience. Let us take a look at his case in more detail, based upon one of our many conversations:

Gentile goes on the 11th of November to Brazil, intending to spend about three months there so as to assess, along with his girlfriend, the possibility of going definitively. He will only go to Brazil if it is for something *safe*, something that will enable him to earn enough (he estimates about 4,000 R\$ [Brazilian *reais*] a month) so he can lead a *quiet life*, have holidays once a year

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<sup>8</sup> However, so-called green card marriages or marriages of convenience (*casamentos de aluguel*) are infrequent. Firstly, for the simple reason that, nationally, the number of residence requests based on marriage or stable union remains relatively low (Martín 2012); secondly, due to tight surveillance by the federal police, in their attempts to identify fraudulent applications. For a short overview of this issue, see Brettell (2017, 86-87).

<sup>9</sup> It should be remembered that the period in which I did fieldwork (2009/2010) coincided with the immediate aftermath of the most serious global economic and financial crisis, which had a particularly violent impact in Europe.

and be able to visit his parents in Italy. His idea is to establish in the Northeast a branch of the events organization business his girlfriend, currently in São Paulo [in the South of Brazil], already operates. He prefers the Northeast to the South of Brazil, where everyone's *under a lot of stress* and which is *further away from the beach*. [...] In his next trip to the Northeast, along with his girlfriend, he will survey the market for events organization in the towns around [the city of] João Pessoa [in Paraíba State] and Natal. If the indications are positive, in principle they will settle in one of these two cities, which will not only mean Gentile will have to migrate internationally, but also his partner will need to migrate internally, in this case from the South to the Northeast of Brazil. [...] He only will leave his current job as mason *when he is sure it is safe* to go to Brazil. Because it won't be easy for him to find work again in Italy, in case things go badly (field notes, Aosta, Italy, 10/10/2010).

For Europeans in more favourable financial circumstances, moving to Brazil offers new opportunities to invest the savings they have made out of their salaries, and/or reinvest the capital they may have realized through the sale of a store or restaurant, and/or any other assets they may have owned in Europe. The transnational shift of financial resources between economically disparate countries has an immediate multiplier effect on the economic means at the disposal of some of these immigrants. In the case of those from the business community, it allows them to start a business similar to what they had "at home", while leaving sufficient surplus to diversify their investments (e.g. buying property to rent) and to improve their overall living conditions. The euro-real exchange rate and the lower cost of living in the tropics are two of the main factors that help to consolidate and even improve the level of economic capacity that migration across the transatlantic requires.

Due to the progress in transport and communications, as well as to the new forms of organization that have transformed labour and production (Caulkins and Jordan 2012; Ellison 2004; Inda 2000; Kjaerulff 2010), it is to be expected that these male migration projects will become increasingly flexible, especially with regard to what Appadurai (1990), among others, has termed the "deterritorialization" of the labour process. There are several examples that prove this tendency. Thanks to the internet and to the possibility of fulfilling his professional duties "at arm's length", a 30 year old German advertising worker whom I met in Ponta Negra was able to spend most of his time with his Brazilian girlfriend. An Italian from Aosta (38 years old, and still working for a delivery company) had created a virtual travel agency which allowed him *to work from anywhere in the world* (as he was eager to emphasise) that would also make possible prolonged stays or even to move permanently move to Brazil to marry a Brazilian woman whom he had met on a previous tourist trip, and for whose children he was prepared to take responsibility. Thus, technological progress and the flexibilisation of production processes tend to mitigate some of the possible career obstacles that often undermine the realization of migratory projects associated with transnational bonds of conjugality.

## 5. Searching for alternative lifestyles

Along with reasons rooted in the spheres of intimacy and economics, most Europeans who migrate to the Brazilian Northeast are driven by expectations – anchored in the global image of “Brazilian-ness” as joy and hedonism (Sacramento and Ribeiro 2013) – related to the possibility of acquiring a rhythm and style of life they view as a desirable alternative to the heavy material burdens and oppressive social conformity to which they feel themselves being subjected in their daily lives in their countries of origin. Such migratory movements, closely associated as they are to the desire for “a better way of life”, display some of the features of so-called “lifestyle migration” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a, 2009b; Benson 2012; Janoschka and Haas 2013), which has been defined as the

spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time, to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential for a better quality of life. (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a, 8)

The value attributed to non-economic dimensions of moving to Brazil is so great that many of the Europeans who take the decision – though they will always mention the predictable emotional or sentimental motives – also strongly emphasise their profound dissatisfaction with the lifestyle they “enjoy” in Europe, allegedly dominated by the tyranny of professional responsibilities. In contrast, Brazil conjures up a fascinating and appealing prospect, even before any contact with the country or its people, something that is generally experienced for the first time as a tourist: *Even before I went there, at school, and on TV... I saw documentaries about Brazil, about Carnival, so I knew that Brazil was a very exotic place* (Dutch tourist, 30 years old, working in a catering company). With its geography symbolically associated with the notion of pleasure (DaMatta 1984, 1997; Parker 1991), Brazil is a desirable destination that promises a different way of life with greater élan, evoking the particular form of “presentism” that Maffesoli (1979, 1985) has attributed to today’s younger generation. The following testimony amply illustrates the extent to which the Europeans males who cross the Atlantic as migrants to Brazil believe they will experience a thoroughgoing transfiguration of their lives, ranging from relations of intimacy to routines of work and leisure:

In Italy and in almost everywhere in Europe we are just cogs in the machine. We work, we work and we don’t have any time to enjoy life, to talk with friends, to go out on dates. We make money, sometimes a lot of money, but we don’t have time to spend it. And we don’t even want to spend it. We are always thinking about the future. And thinking about the future, we have to sacrifice ourselves. We must save. We forget that we could die or lose everything from one moment to the next, as happened to our neighbours in Argentina. I was tired of that life. As time went by, I felt more and more a slave of work. I had my degree in Agrarian Sciences and worked in a support service for farmers. I lived for the job. And even when I wasn’t working, I didn’t stop worrying about work. It never seemed to go away. It was grinding me down too much. When I came here to Brazil [as a tourist] I saw that there were other ways to live. When I’m in Europe, it seems as if no another

kind of life is possible: it seems that life is only work and sacrifice. But after getting to know the lives of people here better, I was *drawn* to the kind of life they have here. So very quickly this idea appeared in my head that I should come here, even though I know I will earn less money than I would in Italy. I may have lost in terms of money, but I have gained in the quality of my life. Now I have time to myself, for my friends, for my girlfriend, to relate go people, to love. I don't feel pressured or controlled by the system any more (Italian immigrant, initially tourist, 34 years, partner in a small rented boarding house).

The central point is the wish for a simpler and calmer kind of life that many believe to be impossible in contemporary European society; as an Italian tourist told me (lawyer, 48 years old), he was tired of all the bustle of living in Milan and wanted to move permanently to the tropics, where he hoped to live a simpler, quieter, less consumerist and more authentic life, and to enjoy the small pleasures of daily life. Thus migratory mobility seems to provide a way of reinventing oneself, an identity transformation that evokes Foucault's "technologies of the self", the knowledge and practical skills that allow one to perform

a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves, in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (in Toyota and Thang 2012, 350).

This pursuit of transformation is a personal project that displays substantial transversality, cutting across the spheres of intimacy, work, leisure and lifestyle, and draws on the subject's reflexivity and the desire to adopt a more "authentic" identity.

In the subject's discourse, the will to abandon the *European lifestyle* and to live in a happier, quieter, more "passionate", simpler and more authentic environment is often represented by way of the metaphorical opposition of *heat* and *cold*, with the former denoting something positive, the latter something negative. The debilitating *cold* of Europe is contrasted to the invigorating *heat* of the tropics. A Catalan immigrant in Ponta Negra (50 years old), the owner of a small internet and phone centre where he works with his Brazilian girlfriend, comparing Barcelona to his present lifestyle as an immigrant was emphatic: "I like the heat, the sun... [...] Heat is happiness!". These metaphors function as symbolic points of reference for projecting and assessing the relative values of shifting across the Atlantic from West to East and vice versa. At the same time, they are used to project male subjectivities and male expressions of identity regarding everyday life in the tropics as opposed to the day-to-day in Europe; in doing so, they support symbolically the construction and self-legitimation of the transatlantic migratory project.

## 6. Final remarks

The resort of Ponta Negra is not only a mass tourism destination. It is, simultaneously, a platform for the migration of women to Europe, a location that attracts some male migratory flows from the European continent, and also the origin of and, above all, the destination for transatlantic visits of a conventional tourist kind. Besides being a leisure destination, the tropical tourist destinations may, therefore, also be conceived as possible destinations for the migrations from certain countries in the Northern hemisphere. It was precisely this less-palpably prominent yet under-researched aspect that has been under consideration in this article, which has debated the specific case of male migration from Europe to Ponta Negra, associated with European males constructing bonds of intimacy with Brazilian women, a phenomenon made possible by previous tourist visits and by a growing cultural attachment to the location. Using a case-study approach, an attempt has been made to understand the key social conditions and circumstances that promote male transatlantic movements, and to highlight the emotional and marital motivations that distinguish it from what has come to be known as “marriage migration”. Although in the social scientific literature these migrations have been very much associated with international flows of women, they in fact involve a substantial number of men, who migrate not only for economic reasons, but also motivated by emotional, marital, family and gender aspirations (Brettell 2017; Horevitz 2009; Mahler and Pessar 2006), in contrast to the assumptions and conclusions of many neoclassical studies of migration in which the patriarchal image of the male worker-provider tends to be overemphasised.

However, while the intimate in its many guises is incontrovertibly crucial in explaining flows of Europeans to Ponta Negra, recognition of this fact should not blind us to contribution of other factors in the constitution of the complex variable geometry and dense social framework of international migration, nor the recognition that these other influences undermine to some extent a model of marriage migrations that hitherto has been so dominant. In these male migrations, the marital motives are central, but not exclusive, as the term “marriage migrations” would have us believe. As we have seen throughout the present study, conjugal intentions coexist with other motives that are associated with the way that immigrants’ societies of origin are organised, with transnational strategies of individual material advancement and social mobility, and with the search for new lifestyles. The subjects themselves perceive that the various expectations underpinning their willingness to contemplate international migration are more likely to be realised in Brazil compared to their countries of origin. Both their evolving perceptions and subsequent experiences of Brazil allow them to construct a conjugal and family project more conducive to the attainment of their desires, offering them greater economic advantages and, at the same time, the possibility of establishing a different and more satisfactory lifestyle.

It seems inappropriate therefore to follow exclusive and dichotomous analysis schemes, opposing marriage migrations, lifestyle migrations and/or labour migrations (Jones 2012; Lauser 2008; Palriwala and Uberoi 2005; Piper and Roces 2003), proposed not simply by some scholars, but by immigration policies that tend to segregate marriage migration from migration that is economically invested (Schaeffer 2013). After all, intimacy is closely bound up with

economic interest and many other aspirations and life projects (Zelizer, 2005). The type of migration projects discussed in the present article have shown themselves to be, simultaneously and cumulatively, matrimonial, patrimonial and “civilisational”, embracing a much broader set of goals that involve, among many other factors, issues of intimacy, employment, investment, leisure and lifestyle. Despite the great importance of emotional involvement, it is therefore important not to forget or neglect the wider scope and transversality of these migrations. The same is true, probably, with regard to many other migratory flows primarily driven by other motivations and circumstances. The use of analytical typologies that are too narrow and strict may constitute an obstacle to more fully understanding, in a more systemic and detailed manner, the migratory flows occurring in the contemporary world-system.

### Acknowledgement

This work was supported by: (1) FEDER European Structural and Investment Funds, through its Operational Competitiveness and Internationalization Programme (COMPETE 2020) [Project N°. 006971 (UID/SOC/04011); Funding reference: POCI-01-0145-FEDER-006971]; and (2) national funds, provided to Project UID/SOC/04011/2013 through the Portuguese Foundation for Science & Technology (FCT).

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