

# The “Triennium of Disillusionment” in International Migrations of Brazilians<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

In the first article I wrote about the recent international migrations of Brazilians (Sales, 1991), I mentioned that, for the first time in its history, Brazil was experiencing flows of emigration to other countries. Brazil's history of dealing with international migrations began in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, when Brazil itself was the destination of migratory currents from Europe and, later, from Asia. Obviously, many Brazilians left to settle in other countries during earlier periods, but this had never taken on the proportions of a migratory current, that is, of a continuous flow of large numbers of people connected by social systems. There was a short period of emigration of Brazilians during the most repressive years of the military governments, and this could be characterized as a migration of refugees, but it was numerically insignificant: fewer than 3,000 political refugees left the country during this period, a good many of whom returned after political amnesty was declared.

This new reality of Brazil as a country that began reversing earlier trends in its history is one of the facets of our recent integration in the international context in times of globalization. As of the crisis of the 1980s, increasing numbers of Brazilians left

the country in search of a better life elsewhere. We began to leave the so-called “lost decade” behind through the departure gates of our international airports. Toward the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, Brazil received great numbers of immigrants, who brought with them their legacy of technique and culture. However, the recent migrations of Brazilians to the United States, Japan, Portugal, Italy and even to Paraguay are the portrait of a Brazil that has begun exporting the best it has, its own population, its young women and men on whom our (admittedly precarious) welfare state invested for their education and health, and who, at the most precious period in their lives, go abroad to do work in other countries that is usually below their true professional potential.

The Brazilian press was quicker than the academic world and the public authorities to publicize the situation of Brazilian immigrants abroad, sometimes with extensive journalistic coverage, including the causes of their emigration and various other aspects of this new phenomenon of the Brazilian population. The portrait of the Brazilian immigrant drawn by the press, however, has stressed the more negative aspects of these new migratory flows, related to a clandestine Brazil doing illegal work and becoming involved in crime, and the discrimination suffered by Brazilian

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a modified version of the Introduction and the Attachments to my book entitled *Brasileiros Longe de Casa* [Brazilians Far from Home] (São Paulo, Cortez Editora, 1999).

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immigrants in other countries. This can be clearly seen in a data bank of press items that I organized with students holding scholarships, related to my first research projects financed by CNPq [ a federal academic funding agency]. The data they garnered was analyzed in the article entitled "*Brasil migrante, Brasil clandestino* [Migrant Brazil, clandestine Brazil]" (Sales, 1994).

It was also the press that disclosed the first estimates of the numbers of Brazilian immigrants who left the country. The *Caderno Especial* [Special Section] of the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper of 7/18/1991 refers an estimated 1.25 million Brazilians who left the country between 1985 and 1987, without returning. This represents the departure of almost 1% of the country's total population. These data, first cited in a special report published in *Veja* magazine in its March 16, 1988 issue, were based on statistics provided by the Brazilian Federal Police (the article mentions 1,200,000 Brazilians who emigrated from the country between 1985 and 1988), and serve as an indication of the numerical extent of this new phenomenon involving the Brazilian population.

The data published until now on the emigration of Brazilians are very imprecise and we will continue having to navigate through suppositions and estimates until the results are in from the Brazilian Census of 2000, especially the information related to a question on this topic that has been added to the census questionnaire. But even with the inaccuracy of the information available, the similarity of the results published would lead to the supposition that the waves of Brazilians who emigrated, especially as of the mid-1980s, represents about 1% of the country's population (Carvalho, 1996; Foreign Relations Ministry, apud Patarra, 1996). According to the data of the Foreign Relations Ministry, most of this population went to the United States (38%), and lower percentages to Paraguay (30%), Japan (13%), and a number of European countries which jointly represent approximately 11%. There are reasonably reliable estimates for Brazilian immigrants in Japan, since

migrations there are controlled by government policy (Sasaki, 1999).

How many emigrants are there? When did they start leaving Brazil? And what do they experience in other countries? These are the most frequent questions I have been asked by a number of persons at conferences, interviews to the press, and even in informal conversations. To my surprise, on some of these public occasions (conferences and radio and television programs), people have asked for "tips" on how to get out of the country. From the above, it is undoubtedly clear to the reader that my answers at these moments indicated my nationalist bias (sometimes even old-fashioned for these times of globalization). I have usually resorted to describing the difficulties that immigrants face outside the country, the gloomy side of adaptation, such as the loneliness and the hard work, especially at the beginning. My response is basically to show that the place for Brazilians is in Brazil. But on these occasions, I never felt that my arguments were as convincing as the facts I had just described.

What, then, is leading so many young Brazilians (because it is mostly the young people who migrate) to seek abroad what they cannot find in their own country? Or, asked in another way, what new structural conditions of our country and of its relationship with the globalized context in the world today are operating to favor these migratory movements, that are unprecedented in our history?

The field research that I carried out in several periods of variable duration between 1991 and 1997 in the Boston Metropolitan Region gave me information I needed to analyze the points mentioned in the preceding paragraph. (In Exhibit I describe the methodological procedures of this research and some of the data already processed for a different study I did in Governador Valadares in 1997).

In this present article, I intend to discuss two questions: When do Brazilians migrate? And, Why do Brazilians migrate? The second question (Why do Brazilians migrate?) is a very controversial matter, subject to various

explanations, depending on the analytic perspective of persons who study the phenomenon. As for *when* Brazilians migrate, there seems to be consensus concerning the period when the various migratory flows began leaving Brazil and moving to foreign countries. I will therefore begin by locating Brazilian emigration in time, but based solely on a single migratory flow, that which went to the Metropolitan Region of Boston, in the United States.

## 2. When Brazilian Emigration Began

I will start off with numerically more limited information, but with which I have greater familiarity, namely, the data provided by my own respondents in the field work. The responses of the 49 persons I interviewed in Boston, distributed here in a simple table showing absolute and relative frequency (Table 1), indicate that almost half emigrated for the first time between 1985 and 1989. One fact that does not appear on this table but that nevertheless deserves note is that the two initial periods of migration (from 1967 till 1984), which can be said to

be comprised of the pioneers, included a much larger contingent of young people between the ages of 17 and 24. Four of every five who emigrated between 1967 and 1979 were in this age bracket, as were five out of every six who emigrated between 1980 and 1984. The proportion of young people decreased progressively in the two following periods, a fact which corroborates what is known of migratory processes in general, with the younger groups migrating first.

Data from the United States Census Bureau also indicate that the highest rates of immigration of Brazilians were during this period. Table 2 shows that the percentage of Brazilians who arrived in the State of Massachusetts during the second half of the 1980s is higher still, the total being 66.6%. Of these, 15.9% arrived between 1985 and 1986, and 50.7% between 1987 and 1990 (among my respondents in Boston, these proportions were 24.4% and 32.7%, respectively). There is one important factor to consider in comparing these numbers, in that the study counts only those few Brazilian immigrants whom I interviewed in a more

**TABLE 1**  
Periods of arrival of Brazilian immigrants – Boston Metropolitan Region, 1995

Period of arrival	Frequency	Percentage
1967 to 1979	5	10.2
1980 to 1984	6	12.2
1985 to 1989	24	49.0
1990 to 1995	14	28.6
Total	49	100.0

Source: Field survey.

**TABLE 2**  
Brazilians living in Massachusetts, by year of arrival in the United States

Period of arrival	Frequency	Percentile
Until 1979	1,824	14.6
1980 to 1984	1,184	9.5
1985 to 1986	1,991	15.9
1987 to 1990	6,334	50.7
Born in the USA	1,165	9.3
Total	12,498	100.0

Source: United States Demographic Census, 1990. Special tabulations for Brazilians residing in the State of Massachusetts.

limited area, and it goes until the year of 1995. The census, on the other hand, also includes the population of Brazilian origin born in the United States, and ends its count in 1990.

The data from both my sample and that measured by the United States Census Bureau should be considered with reservations in terms of their numerical meaning. My own sample is numerically quite small and therefore not representative. On the other hand, the data from the US census underestimates the Brazilian population living in that country.<sup>3</sup> In spite of these shortcomings, however, both studies are useful, to the extent that they indicate the second half of the 1980s as the period in which the greatest numbers of Brazilians moved to the United States.

Table 3 shows the most numerically reliable data I have. The data is based on a survey of a random sample by simple conglomerates<sup>4</sup> carried out in Governador Valadares, with information on the

population that returned from migration abroad or were abroad at the time of the survey. The data shown on this table also indicate that more than half of the cases studied emigrated from Brazil during the second half of the 1980s. Even though this source of data is also limited, since it refers to a single geographical area as the origin of the flows, it is one more piece of information pointing to the period between 1985/89 as that which concentrates the most intense departure of Brazilian emigrants to other countries, especially to the United States. It should be noted that 86% of the immigrants studied in Governador Valadares went to the U.S.A., and almost half to Massachusetts.

Within the scope of the present article, it can be safely said that, confirming what has been widely publicized by the press, the second half of the 1980s was in fact the period when the flows of emigration from Brazil to other countries began.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of migrants from Governador Valadares, by period of first international migration**  
**Governador Valadares - 1997**

Period	Total	
	N	%
61 to 69	3	0.6
70 to 79	23	4.6
80 to 84	49	9.7
85 to 89	265	52.6
90 to 97	164	32.5
Total	504	100.0

Source: Survey of Sample

<sup>3</sup> The United States census, besides underestimating the Brazilian population in that country, possibly tends to record the older immigrants more accurately, as their legal status is more often in order. Margolis (1994) has pointed out this fact, which is generally attributed to inaccuracies in the indicators in the census itself in detecting this new group of immigrants, and to the fear of the Brazilians themselves, most of whom are illegally in the country. My study also indicated that respondents to the census commonly indicate a lower number of inhabitants than actually live in households, because there are municipal laws regulating the maximum number of persons allowed to live in each.

<sup>4</sup> More detailed explanations about the methods used in this study can be found in Scudeler (1999). The first tabulations of the research done in Governador Valadares are analyzed in that article. The main objective of the study was to characterize the migratory flow of the population from that municipality to foreign countries, as well as return migration. In the first phase of the study, 2,566 questionnaires were applied. It was seen that 18% of the domiciles in that city house a migrant who is either still abroad or has already returned, and that 6.7% of the population of the city of Governador Valadares is comprised of persons who had had the experience of international migration or were outside the country as migrants at the time of the survey (July, 1997). In the second phase of the study, when questionnaires were applied only in the households of the sample with returned migrants, and/or members currently outside the country, we arrived at the figures shown in Table 3.

### 3. Why Brazilians Emigrated

Before the field research of 1995/96, I had already studied a number of books and articles in the economic and sociological literature as to the causes of the recent international migrations (Sales, 1995). I will resume the examination of this bibliography, which may (or may not) be a help in understanding the causes of the migrations of Brazilians abroad, and why they began in the mid-1980s.

From the point of view of the neoclassical theory,<sup>5</sup> international migrations are interpreted as a market game whereby workers mobilize in reaction to stimuli related to wages or other earnings. From this perspective, the recent migrations of Brazilians abroad could be interpreted as the simple outcome of the years of crisis that marked the 1980s, in Brazil as well as in most other Latin-American countries. The explanation for the causes of the migrations from the point of view of neoclassical theory is based on the principle that the labor market is similar to that of any other merchandise that can be bought and sold freely and regularly on the market. In the logic of this explanation, income is the determining variable, and the mobility of the workers is the result of income variability. In fact, this theory is the basis of the traditional explanation for the factors of attraction and expulsion, and sees the migrant as an economically rational individual in search of better opportunities in life.

In contrast to the neoclassical theory, another theory, that could be generically called historical-structural, provides explanations of another nature for international migrations. I feel that two variations for explaining international migrations fit into this broad historical-structural category, and they both have a certain temporal continuity. The first, whose most expressive exponents in United States economics and sociology are represented by Michael Piore (1979) and Alejandro

Portes (1981), is based on earlier theorizations as to the segmentation of the labor market (Piore & Doeringer, 1971). This theory sets up a more explicit dialogue with neoclassical thinking by asserting particular characteristics of the labor market, in contrast to the market of things. The second, which has many points in common with and, to some degree gives continuity to the theorizations of Piore-Portes, is represented by Saskia Sassen (1988). One of its main pre-suppositions is the association between migrations of people and migrations of capital.

In temporal terms, the first line of thinking reflects the migrations that occurred especially during the Post World War II period, and is related to the demands of the industrialized countries for industrial labor. In contrast, the second line reflects the migratory flows of younger people seen in the late 1960s, whose integration into the labor market of the destination countries, the United States in the present case, gives prevalence to the service sector. One of the points that brings these two theorizations together is that both are related to the context of relations among nations, defined in terms of broad center-periphery concepts of capitalism.

The criticism that Michael Piore (1979) presents in regard to the neoclassical theory, which explains international migrations in terms of income, as well as, to some measure, by factors of excess population in the countries of origin, is based on the simple empirical perception that, even if the income of these countries increased or the population fell, there would still be flows of migrations toward the country of destination. According to his reasoning, this is because the factors that explain these migrations should be sought more in the context of the destination countries than in that of the origin countries. The massive migrations from underdeveloped to developed regions began through active recruiting by employers in the developed regions, such

<sup>5</sup> Today, Borjas (1990), is the model author for this theoretical line of thought applied to the study of international migrations.

as the *Guest Workers* programs of the 1950s and 1960s in Europe, and the Post World-War II *Bracero Program* in the United States.

Saskia Sassen (1988) takes up Piore's argument and considers that the mobility of capital has created new conditions for the mobility of labor. If, according to Thomas's hypothesis (1973), it was the free market at the end of the 19th century, under conditions of immobility of both labor and capital due to rigid social stratification, that resulted in processes of international migrations, today such migrations are the result of the internationalization of production through investments made abroad. Therefore, in contrast to the factors traditionally indicated as causes of emigration - such as poverty, excess population, and economic stagnation - Sassen refers to the reorganization of the worldwide economy during the last two decades, which resulted in the formation of a transnational space where the circulation of workers can be seen as one of several different types of flow, including capital, merchandise, labor, and information. For Sassen, foreign investment is therefore the basic variable to explain the flows of international migrations.

At this point, let us make a minor digression about Brazil. Toward the beginning of the 20th century, Brazil benefited from intense immigration from Europe to the new world and, shortly thereafter, benefited from the immigration of Japanese workers. In contrast, during the post-war period the country went through a dynamic process entirely contained within its own borders, as workers moved to the expanding labor markets. On the one hand, Brazil was not affected by the expansion of the labor market in the advanced industrial countries, as were the countries of origin of the intense migratory flows that moved to Europe and the United States during that period. On the other hand, however, neither did it import labor from other countries to handle the explosion of industrial growth that was set off in the country. Brazil therefore went through a process that was quite different from that experienced by other Latin-American countries, such as Mexico, whose borders increasingly served as

gateways for Mexican migrants entering the United States, or such as Argentina, which, in contrast, became the destination of many migratory flows from bordering countries, such as Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Brazil's process of economic development following world War II took place largely during the Kubitschek Administration [1955-1959]. On the side of capital, the country benefited from the internationalization of production with the arrival of substantial foreign capital for the new industries that were moving into the country. But the labor side also greatly benefited from the intense process of domestic migrations, from rural to urban areas and, especially, from one region of Brazil to another.

In her analysis of similar processes that took place later in countries of the Caribbean Region and in Southeast Asia, Sassen (1988) refers to foreign investments and to business, military and diplomatic activities in general and their disruptive effects on demographic settlements. According to that author, these were the main factors related to international migrations, based on her hypothesis of the association between the migration of people and the migration of capital. From this point of view, the decisive factor in the Asian and Caribbean migrations toward the United States was therefore the development of these countries based on exportation through massive U.S. investments.

In the case of Brazil, the transfer of capital - especially from the U.S.A. - which was essential for that decisive stage in the country's industrial development, did not have the disruptive consequences on traditional activities that usually result in flows of international migrations toward the countries where the industrial capital comes from, as Sassen saw in regard to the countries she analyzed. "The supply of cheap labor and the disruptive consequences in production relationships by the expansion of modern economic activities were, in reality, factors that contributed to significant migratory movements. But these migrations took place within the borders of Brazil's own immense

territory. The country's enormous size and the significant differences in development between regions may have been major causal factors in the internal migrations seen in Brazil, especially since the 1950s" (Sales, 1995: 128).

Sassen also refers to Exportation Processing Zones as one of the decisive factors in migrations from Asia and the Caribbean toward the United States. In Brazil, the experience of Exportation Processing Zones was not successful, and had no effect on migrations abroad.

Also in this digression about Brazil, it is interesting to realize today how strongly our theorizations on the broad processes of internal migrations of that period of industrial development (Balan, 1973, Lopes, 1973, Singer, 1973) were influenced by the historical-structural approach – as well as by the criticism against the neoclassical approach, such as the first trend mentioned above. This influence can be seen especially in Singer's classical text (1973) where he adapts the pre-suppositions of the historical-structural approach to the reality of Latin-American countries in order to explain its causes. Also significant is Singer's ingenious association of these explanations with classical theories on demography, to distinguish the causes of migrations, from the reasons, or motives, for migrating. In his view, these reasons can be explained largely by pre-suppositions of the neoclassical theory. This is a very well structured blend, worthy of the conciliatory spirit of this Brazilian intellectual, who was one of its most expressive theoreticians in the 1970s, the years of effervescence of studies on migration in Latin America.

Let us now return our attention to the point that led me to this digression on the Brazil of yesterday in order to better discuss the Brazil of today: How can these theories on international migrations shed light on the explication for the international migrations undertaken by Brazilians, which took on major proportions in the mid-1980s?

The pre-suppositions of the neoclassical theory in general help explain the migrations in general (because, after all, the decision to emigrate, in terms of the

individual, are always based on cost-benefit calculations). But they also explain very little when confronted with evidence to the contrary, such as those indicated by Piore, mentioned above, or others mentioned by Sassen, when this latter shows, for example, that the migrations from some countries of Asia to the United States took place at moments of high growth rates in these countries. It would not seem worth our while to mention contrary arguments already discussed frequently and refuted in the literature on international migrations.

Let us look, for example, at some of the arguments found in historical-structural theories, which give more emphasis to the destination countries than the origin countries to explain the causes of international migrations. In terms of specific programs organized by the destination countries to attract foreign immigrants, it cannot be said that any such programs were addressed to Brazil in the 1980s. However the migration of some of the *dekasseguis* (Brazilian descendants of Japanese in Brazil) can be related, not to any specific governmental program to attract them as workers to Japan, but to a series of incentives offered by Japanese companies in need of labor. The agents of these companies were largely responsible for triggering off this flow (Rossini, 1995). In addition, the large migration of Brazilians on the "farming frontier" toward Paraguay is partially related to the incentives of the Paraguayan government, as part of an agricultural development policy that ended up attracting Brazilians as both rural owners, and as workers subordinated to them. These groups later can to be known as "*brasiguaios*" ["Braziguayans"] (Palau, 1987; Sprandel, 1992; Salim, 1995; Sales, 1996). However, no direct or indirect incentive was carried out by European countries or the United States which could have influenced the beginning of the migration of Brazilians to those countries.

In view of the digression above concerning Brazil in the light of historical-structural theories, if these theories can partially explain some of the demographic movements inside our territory

as inter-regional migrations, they are of little help in explaining the recent international migrations of Brazilians. To try to explain these latter, I will now focus strictly on the international migrations of Brazilians who moved to the Metropolitan Region of Boston, in the U.S.A., since this is the most immediate concern of my research and about which I have the greatest amount of information.

There is consensus that the key moment in Brazilian international migrations took place during the second half of the 1980s. The most obvious explanation, and that which appears in a great many of the studies that focused on this question (Sales, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995; Goza, 1992; Margolis, 1994; Patarra and Baeninger, 1995; Bogus, 1995; Klagsbrunn, 1996; Carvalho, 1996), correlates this beginning with the period of economic crisis the country went through in that decade, characterized as the "lost decade." Also, in a number of different ways, the press called attention to the intense flows of emigration of Brazilians in the 1980s, understood as a consequence of the crisis of that period. Without discarding this hypothesis, which, in general, indicates only factors of expulsion that might have caused these flows in terms of the country of origin, I would like to add a line of discussion that I began to develop in an earlier paper (Sales, 1995) and which has been the subject of several engaging academic debates,<sup>6</sup> but which will in no way be exhausted here.

In that article I called attention to the fact that "the so-called lost decade was in fact much more than a period of economic recession. During that period, Brazilian society was mobilized and had created hopes. The country was redemocratized, segments of society became politically organized, political parties and social movements were organized, and the people went to the streets to demand direct presidential elections - we could once again exercise our right to vote for the president of

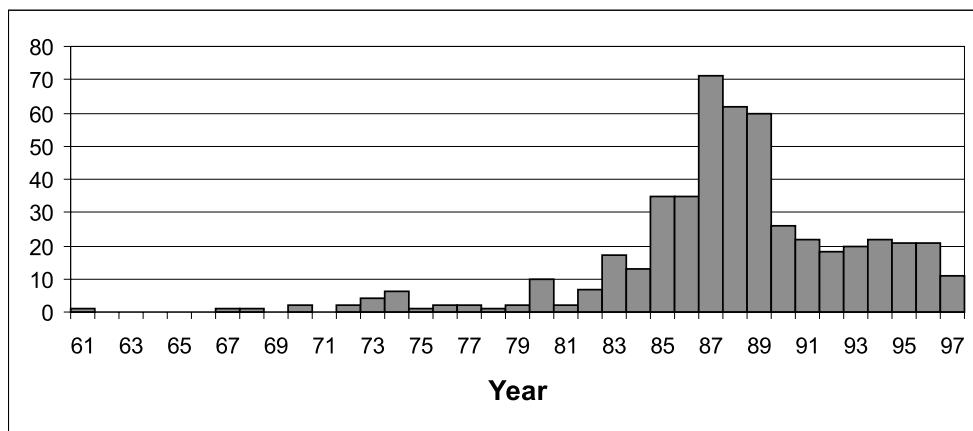
the country. Inflation, unemployment and recession did not come unaccompanied. They came hand-in-hand with many promising perspectives and even hopes for improvements with the *Cruzado Plan* or with the political promises renewed at each election and each grassroots mobilization. The political factor therefore had a some influence on the shifts in these international Brazilian migrations, if one considers the hopes and frustrations of the early years of our redemocratization" (Sales, 1995: 129).

The backdrop of the crisis, when described in this way, that is, with its political ingredients, seems much more suited to make room for the new actor to come on the scene, namely, the emigrants of the lost decade. However, one should delve further into the economic ingredients of the crisis itself and its relationship with the hopes and frustrations regarding the political context, as well as into the cycles of the crisis, in order to attempt to relate these cycles to the evolution of the international migrations of the 1980s.

I will begin this analysis by calling attention to Graph 1, which may cast some light on the relationship between the evolution of the migrations and the cycles of the crisis of the 1980s. This graph shows the distribution of the migrants from the city of Governador Valadares [in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil] in their first international trip, by year of departure. In a passage in the introduction, above, where the same data were presented by period of migration (Table 3), I showed that the second half of the 1980s was the period during which over 50% of the emigrants left Governador Valadares. Seeing this same distribution year by year on Graph 1, below, it can be seen that it increased at beginning of the decade, reaching a peak in the three-year period of 1987-1989. From then on, the emigration stabilized at a much lower level as compared to the peak years (less

<sup>6</sup> I would especially mention the first seminar of the Inter-institutional Evaluation and Follow-up Program on International Migrations in Brazil, organized by Prof. Neide Patarra at UNICAMP in 1995, and the seminar where I discussed the original draft of this book at the *Núcleo de Estudos de População (NEPO)* at UNICAMP, in 1998.

**Graph 1**  
**Distribution of the migrants from Governador Valadares on their first international trip, per year of departure**  
**Governador Valadares - 1997**



Source: Survey of the sample

than half, with the sole exception of 1997, when the level fell by half, possibly due to the fact that the study was carried out in July of that year).

In the first place, it should be obvious to the reader that the above data refer only to the population of Governador Valadares who were absent from the country or had returned there from international migrations. However, if we go back a few pages and look again at the data shown in Table 2, the peak of migrations from Governador Valadares in the triennium of 1987-1989 corresponds much more closely with the data on the Brazilians living in Massachusetts, where one can see that the peak period of arrival was between 1987 and 1990. For purposes of this analysis, however, we will refer only to the example of Governador Valadares, which is sufficient for our purposes here.

To the extent that emigration from the country extended to other regions besides Governador Valadares, it is possible, and even probable, that throughout the country as a whole the emigration level remained high and even increased. It is also possible that it dropped only in that city, where it reached its peak during this period, and that

other areas began to contribute to the migration currents. It is a fact, however, that the municipality of Governador Valadares was the pioneer in the international migrations of Brazilians, as several studies have shown (Margolis, 1994; Soares, 1999; Assis, 1999). In this case, Governador Valadares, for having been the pioneer, serves to illustrate the relationship between the evolution of the migrations and the cycles of evolution of the crisis of the 1980s.

I refer to studies published by several different economists who analyzed the situation of crisis of the 1980s (Batista Jr., 1983; Belluzzo & Almeida, 1992; Tavares & Fiori, 1993; Teixeira, 1992) merely as a frame of reference to situate certain key moments in this crisis which may have more directly affected the departures of Brazilian migrants. The key moments in the crisis to be described below, however, are very briefly summarized, in comparison with the technical arsenal of concepts and interpretations used by each of the authors mentioned. These key moments are useful here only as an attempt to associate them with the periods of the highest numbers of departures of Brazilians in international migratory movements. Other authors used

the same approach to study the situation of poverty in Brazil associated with the different cycles of the crisis of the 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

As of 1979, the Brazilian economy suffered an impact from the increase in the international interest rates and the second oil shock, followed by the maxidevaluation of the Brazilian currency in 1979, causing a major effect on inflation. Inflation rose to over 50% per year and, in late 1979, it reached the three-digit mark. To face the situation, the country adopted an openly recessive policy which included measures such as restricted credit, increased interest rates, cuts in public expenditures, and changes in the wage policy. In September, 1982, Mexico declared moratorium, which led to a freeze in international credits and forced Brazil to appeal to the IMF. This situation of crisis lasted until 1983, when there was another currency maxidevaluation in February of that year and reduction of imports by approximately 20%. As a result, industrial output between 1981 and 1983 fell at an annual rate of 4% and the GNP by approximately 1.3%.

A trend toward recovery began in 1984, with a boost from the export sector (Brazilian exports increased by over 23%), due partially to the enormous commercial deficits of the U.S.A.. However, there was no significant recovery of employment levels, and investments remained low. Only as of 1985, during the so-called "New Republic," did wage losses begin any sort of recovery. Public tariffs were held down, but later returned as the result of the inflation. The GNP grew 8.3%, the best performance of the decade, and the real minimum wage grew by 7.5%. The trade balance reached 12.5 billion, but inflation, the main villain in our emigratory history, rose to 225% per year.

What actually indicated a situation of improvement in income distribution, especially due to the effect of the control over the inflationary process, was the

implementation of the Cruzado Plan in February, 1986. Inflation was then reduced to very low levels, real wages increased, the GNP rose by 8.1%, and industrial production grew by 12.1%. However, the plan failed to attack the foreign and financial imbalance, and this resulted in its downfall less than a year after it was implemented, as the practices of charging premiums, creating inventory shortages and pressures to devalue the exchange rate became more intense. As of September of that same year of 1986, the trade balance began deteriorating and the government devaluated the currency.

The government's attempt to recover its spending capacity through fiscal adjustment, as part of the Cruzado Plan II, caused a return of inflation and reversed the initial successes of the preceding plan. In early 1987 there was a fall in the commercial balance as well as serious erosion in the level of foreign reserves, forcing the government to decree moratorium in February.

The last two years of the decade showed the highest levels of inflation rates: 685% in 1988, and 1320% in 1989, and a record trade surplus of approximately US\$ 35 billion, which was transferred abroad, allowing the foreign debt to be reduced by US\$ 10 billion. The Summer Plan, in January, 1989, resulted in a serious fall in real wages, and inflation quickly returned to its upward spiral, reaching an annual five-digit level at the end of 1989.

It was not by chance that I chose this form of presenting a few basic facts regarding the situation of economic crisis and recovery of the 1980s, a form which might not be very conventional for economists who may read this text. I see this situation of nervousness of such turbulent times before the backdrop of the curve shown in Graph 1, the data in Table 2, and the vivid depositions in the interviews held with Brazilian immigrants in Boston. The curve in Graph 1 shows very

<sup>7</sup> I refer here especially to the studies by Lopes (1990) and by de Oliveira et al (1991), which served as the most important sources of data for one of the chapters of my thesis for full-professorship, later published as an article (Sales, 1994a).

clearly what so many of my interviewees told me when they explained the reasons for their decision to emigrate: the high rate of inflation and the low salaries in Brazil and their disillusionment with the rise and fall of several governmental economic rescue plans. In figure 1, the *thriennium of disillusionment* is clearly indicated in the last three years of the decade which witnessed the rise and fall of at least three governmental economic rescue plans. The disillusionment with the Cruzado Plan was possibly the strongest of the three, because greater hopes had been vested in the new administration, a new republic, and a new democracy. This was 1987, the year that saw the greatest numbers of emigrants leaving Governador Valadares.<sup>8</sup>

The reasons for migrating were related chiefly to employment opportunities (wanting a better job or a higher level of living, the possibility of accumulating funds in order to move back to Brazil, saving up some cash, being unemployed). 81% of the people surveyed in Governador Valadares and 61% in Boston Metropolitan region claimed work-related reasons for their emigrating. Reasons involving employment can be related either to an individual strategy or, more often, to a family strategy, involving projects for a better life (in both the interviews in Boston in 1995 and the qualitative interviews in Governador Valadares in 1996, I often heard the expression "I went [or came] looking for my house"), and can also represent a search for social and economic advancement which seemed impossible in Brazil.

If I had to summarize the reasons for which young Brazilians left for the United States, I would say that the most important one was the search for social and economic advancement denied them in Brazil. Still, even there, it is a limited advancement, because most Brazilians end up doing work in the United States that requires fewer professional skills than the work they did in

Brazil. The occupational profile of the Brazilian immigrants whom I interviewed in Boston, shows a decline in the status of their jobs in the United States, when compared with the jobs they held in Brazil. Social and economic advancement is represented, above all, by the possibility of greater consumption and takes into account substantial increases in salary levels in the United States.

Finally, it might be worthwhile to point out that both the family strategies for improving living conditions and the search for social ascent through international migrations, have as their backdrop the social networks that, in turn, also connect to the structural causes analyzed above.

From the standpoint of the structural causes of Brazilian migrations to the United States, a number of economic and political factors were taken into consideration. However, another group of factors should be added, related to the pre-existing social networks. These networks, in reaction to the impact of momentary political-economic crises, are what trigger off the first flows. This is because, in the genesis of migratory flows, there are always fortuitous, random and pioneering factors related to the migrations. In the case of Governador Valadares, for example, this chance factor seems to have been the existence of precious minerals in its subsoil that were useful for manufacturing radios during World War II (mica). This fact apparently created ties with the U.S.A. which later evolved into a migratory current that today consumes 7% of the city's population (Sales and Reis, 1999). The migratory currents from the State of Minas Gerais, especially of residents of Governador Valadares, which increased in the 1980s, therefore had pioneers on American soil who opened up paths for fellow Brazilians that migrated later. If this were not so, what else could explain that the structural causes of the crisis of the 1980s first affected the municipalities around Governador

<sup>8</sup> In Sales (1999), where I analyze the reasons that led Brazilian immigrants to decide to remain in the United States for a lengthy time, I mention the era of former-President Collor de Mello, which constituted a further period of disappointment with the Brazil of inflation and lack of opportunity.

Valadares, and not other regions in Brazil, especially the large urban areas, which were much more seriously affected by the crisis?

The pioneers of the Brazilian emigration in fact merely opened up a channel that would be widened many years later with the migratory flows of the mid-1980s.

#### 4. The Study in Boston

The study on which this article was based was carried out in the Metropolitan Region of Boston between August, 1995, and January, 1996. The fact that I had already lived in Boston in 1990/91<sup>9</sup> and had done exploratory research in 1993 helped me greatly in organizing the networks of contacts that were essential for a study on immigrants, most of whom were undocumented. These contact networks were sought first at churches, which, as I had already observed in 1993, are the places of the greatest concentration of Brazilian immigrants.

The interviews for the study were held in three stages, which were criss-crossed in time and included a number of municipalities in the Greater Boston Area. Interviews with persons and institutions that had relationships with the Brazilian community were included, based on a list of questions drawn up in advance. Some were interviews with groups of immigrants and with immigrants individually, while others consisted of individual interviews with some of the local businessman in Framingham.

My field of research consisted of 70 interviewees. Forty-nine interviews were based on the common script about migratory history, and another were 21 qualified interviews about the Brazilian community, held with priests, ministers, nuns, persons responsible for the Brazilian Consulate in Boston, lawyers, and members of active organizations related to the Brazilian community. The script for the interviews (17

individual interviews and 32 group interviews) dealt with items such as the experience of leaving Brazil and arriving in the U.S.A., the question of documents and clandestinity there, relationships with the various ethnic groups in American society, the question of whether to stay in the U.S.A. or go back to Brazil, social class in Brazil and in the U.S.A., housing, and education, health, leisure, and everyday life in general.

Besides these interviews, direct social contact and observation constituted the most productive aspect of my research, namely, participation in events of the community in religious services in general but, especially, participation in the everyday life of the community at St. Tarcisius Parish, in Framingham.

The way of making contact with these interviewees was through what is known as a "snowball sample," where the corpus of respondents was built up based on the first networks of contact established by the interviewer, continuing with subsequent referrals made by the respondents themselves. In the case of my research, there was an initial defining element, due to the fact that the first networks were within the sphere of the churches, even though they later extended, by the snowball process, to other relationships outside the first spheres.

#### 5. Socio-occupational profile of the Immigrants interviewed in Boston

Taking the age for migrating to the U.S.A. for the first time as a basic piece of data, it can be seen in Table 4 that young people predominate among the Brazilian immigrants in my sample, constituting 47% of the interviewees. The others, who made up a little over half of the sample, were part of the population of active age. This fact merely backs up what was to be expected: the younger contingents and those who are still of working age are the ones who leave,

<sup>9</sup> I participated in a post-doctorate program during the 1990/1991 academic year, as visiting scholar at the Center for International Studies, at MIT.

since the migratory current is basically aimed at finding work.

However, an immediate reservation has to be made at this point. Because of the characteristics mentioned in the Introduction above, this being a snowball sample, it is not representative of the population of Brazilian immigrants in that region. If it were representative, the number of men among the sample would possibly be higher, whereas they represent only about 40% of my interviewees, the female contingent being approximately 60%. Even without being representative in terms of distribution by sex, there is clearly a certain proportional equivalence of men and women in each age bracket: in the sample: 48.3% women and 45% men in the younger age bracket (ages 17 to 24); 37.9% and 35%, respectively, in the intermediate age bracket (ages 25 to 30); and a higher proportional weight of men only in the higher age bracket, between ages 31 and 40.

Maxine Margolis noted the high educational level of Brazilian immigrants in New York. Of her 100 respondents, 46% were in college and 31% were university graduates. In contrast, only 24% of the U.S.A. population in general hold a university degree. These findings are in even greater contrast to the general Brazilian population, where only 28% have finished the 12th grade and 12% succeed in entering college (Margolis, 1994: 147-148).

The data from my research is very similar to that of Margolis in percentages, even though we carried out our respective studies at different times and in different places. However, since the findings on formal education refer to the period preceding the migratory process to the same historical period (the immigrants in both my sample and hers left Brazil in the second half of the 1980s), this correspondence of data is not too surprising, Table 5 shows (with my data being only 1% to 3% higher than that of Margolis): that 47% had frequented some college course and 33% were college graduates. Seventeen of my respondents had finished the 12th grade (34%) and only a smaller proportion (8 cases, or 16%) had some high school education. There was only one case of an immigrant with an 8th grade education. Analyzing these findings on formal education by age bracket, it should be noted that the highest proportion of college graduates is in the older age bracket (between ages 31 and 40), whereas the highest proportion of persons who have finished only 12th grade is among those of the intermediate age bracket (between ages 25 and 30). For obvious reasons, those who migrated when still young show a more balanced distribution among the various levels of formal education, the most common being those who finished 12th grade.

**Table 4**  
**Brazilian immigrants by age and sex - Boston Metropolitan Area, 1995**

	Sex					
	Women		Men		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
17-24	14	48.3	9	45.0	23	47.0
25-30	11	37.9	7	35.0	18	36.7
31-40	4	13.8	4	20.0	8	16.3
Total	29	100.0	20	100.0	49	100.0
		(59.2)		(40.8)		

Source: Field research.

The difference between these figures and data on the Brazilian population in general is striking<sup>10</sup>. One need only note the accumulated proportion of those who have finished 12th grade, representing 74% of persons who left Brazil when still young, 83% of the intermediate age bracket (between ages 25 and 30), and 100% of those in the 31-40 age group. There is no doubt, therefore, that this sample shows higher indicators when compared with the general Brazilian population, both in terms of age bracket and educational level.

What is the social origin of these young people who emigrated with a high-school or college education? What did they do in Brazil before emigrating, and what do they do for a living in the United States?

The two tables below show the occupations of my respondents in their place of origin and their place of destination. Table 6 shows that, before emigrating, the great majority were workers. There are categories of students and non-workers only for those in the younger age bracket. But even these categories do not reach 30%.

The respondents' main occupations in Brazil were in the area of planning, which encompassed 41% of the interviewees. Then came office occupations, with 25% of the respondents and, finally, semi-qualified occupations, with 20%. Semi-qualified workers include both self-employed persons

in the area of commerce (6 cases), and other occupations, exercised by only one respondent each (army sergeant, electrotechnical worker, soccer player, and evangelical missionary). The white-collar occupations include office workers at companies (7 cases), bank workers (4 cases), and secretary in public service (1 case). The occupations in the planning area include high-school teachers (12 cases), university-level professions (6 cases), and commercial businessmen (2 cases). The university-level occupations, non-existent for the young age bracket, represented about one-fourth of the occupations for all the adult age brackets, and included journalists (2 cases), librarian, agronomist, university teacher, and biologist.

Let us now look at the occupations of my respondents in the U.S.A.. Before presenting the data shown on Table 7, one important reservation must be made. To facilitate the construction of the table, I decided to show only the last and main occupation. However, the most common process of occupational practice of the Brazilian immigrants I studied in my sample (and this seems to be a very common path) is a succession of occupations that usually starts with less-qualified and physically harder work, with the person holding down two or more different jobs at the time, and may (or may not) end up in more qualified occupations.

**Table 5**  
**Level of formal education of Brazilian immigrants by age bracket - Boston Metropolitan Region, 1995**

	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
8th Grade	1	4.3					1	2.0
9-11th Grade	5	21.7	3	16.7			8	16.3
12th Grade	8	34.9	8	44.4	1	12.5	17	34.7
Some college	5	21.7			2	25	7	14.3
Full College grad.	4	17.4	7	38.9	5	62.5	16	32.7
Total	23	100.0	18	100.0	8	100.0	49	100.0

Source: Field research.

<sup>10</sup> Data from the last census (1990) show that only 5% of the Brazilian population consists of college graduates, 11% have at least some senior high school, 7% have finished 4th grade, 57% have had only 1 to 3 years of schooling and 20% are illiterate.

**Table 6**  
**Occupation in Brazil of the Brazilian immigrants interviewed, by age bracket upon migration - Boston Metropolitan Region, 1995**

Hierarchical level of occupation in Brazil	Age bracket							
	-24		25-30		31-40		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Office Work	7	30.4	4	22.2	1	12.5	12	24.5
Planning Area	5	21.7	10	55.6	5	62.5	20	40.8
Semi-qualified	4	17.4	4	22.2	2	25.0	10	20.4
Students	3	13.1					3	6.1
Do not work	4	17.4					4	8.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field research.

**Table 7**  
**Last and main occupation of the Brazilian immigrants interviewed, by age bracket upon migration - Boston Metropolitan Region, 1995**

Hierarchical level of occupation in the U.S.A.	Age bracket							
	17-24		25-30		31-40		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Planning Area	3	13.0	5	27.8	2	25.0	10	20.4
Owners	5	21.7	2	11.0	2	25.0	9	18.4
Office work	2	8.7	1	5.6			3	6.1
Semi-qualif.	3	13.0	1	5.6	1	12.5	5	10.2
Non-qualif.	10	43.6	9	50.0	3	37.5	22	44.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field research.

The occupations in the planning area (first line on the table) include teachers (2), qualified workers in the areas of education and health (7), and journalist (1). The owners include individuals who have businesses in downtown Framingham or own small firms that provide either cleaning services for larger companies and residences, or construction maintenance services. These businesses are known as "landscaping companies," and do work ranging from gardening and snow shoveling (in the winter) to activities strictly related to construction and maintenance. The office occupations include one bank worker (assigned to a special customer service for Portuguese-speaking clients) and two secretaries at companies.

I placed somewhat dissimilar occupations in the category of semi-qualified workers, such as a baker, a cook and factory workers. Finally, in the non-qualified occupations I included a broad range of services that require no qualification, although there are great differences in wage and status among them. These professions include home-cleaning services (this is one of the most valued types of job because there is little need for documents and because the pay is good), cleaning at companies (generally through specialized firms, most of which are owned by Brazilians), manual labor in construction and maintenance companies (also often owned by other Brazilians), work as housemaids in hotels, box carriers in supermarkets, and newspaper deliverers.

One occupation does not appear in these results, but is almost symbolic as the typical occupation of Brazilian immigrants in this region of the U.S.A., and they are so ashamed of it that they have given it a name in Portuguese derived from the English: work at a *disha*, that is, as a dishwasher. Some of my interviewees still work in this type of job, but as a secondary occupation. It is almost a fatality for migrants, especially the young men, to have worked as a dishwasher at the beginning of their migratory history. In that region of the U.S.A., work "at the *disha*" is equivalent to the field of civil construction for northeastern Brazilians in São Paulo, that is, it is the entrance gate to the labor market. Also common as the first job for immigrants are other kinds heavy and dirty work, such as cleaning in restaurants and in homes for the aged.

More than the kind of heavy work involved in the initial occupations of Brazilian immigrants on the labor market in that region of the U.S.A., what characterizes their life style is that they take on more than one job at a time. Most hold one full-time job and another (or sometimes even several other) part time job or jobs. In most cases they left Brazil with unpaid debts and they take on any opening that comes up and that think they can handle,

Elias, for example, migrated at the end of the period that I classified as the pioneer period, in 1984, at the age of 22. He arrived from Brazil with considerable professional experience for a person of his age. He had started working in banks at 14 (always studying simultaneously), but he says that ever since he was six he sold ice-cream at his school (where his mother was also a teacher). Elias says he decided to emigrate because he lost his job at the bank where he worked. In the U.S.A., where he first emigrated with a group of other Brazilians, he began accumulating jobs. First he carried out two occupations, one at the *disha* and one with a cleaning company. He says that during that period, once a worker got into the country, there was no lack of jobs. Later he bought a car and for eight months he worked at three different places at the same time: two "at the *disha*" and one in cleaning.

He slept only three hours a day but he says he could take it because he was still young. Elias told me in detail about the hardships of his early years as an immigrant, but he told the story with great pride, because today he is one of the most successful Brazilian businessmen in the city of Framingham.

The women also take on heavy jobs at the beginning. One of my respondents, who now has a good professional position as a secretary in a company, says that she would be better off today if she were not afraid of rising in the company without having her papers in order. But she says she cleaned up a lot of dirt in homes for the aged, and has worked at the *disha* and as a *busgirl* [she used this English term even while speaking in Portuguese].

Another very common occupation for the women at the beginning of their occupational careers in the U.S.A. is as chamber maids in hotels. At the hotel where I stayed in Framingham for a short period to obtain more data for the 1997 study (this hotel belonged to an important American chain), all the chamber maids were Brazilian, and were under the command of a Latin-American *menager*.

At least in the Framingham region, where I was able to observe this aspect more closely, some occupations have turned out to be niches for Brazilian immigrants, especially hotel chamber maids or heavier and unstable jobs in restaurants (ranging from dish and pan washing to heavy cleaning work). Many also take on jobs as busboys, busgirls and in kitchen work, making salads and sandwiches in fast food restaurants. Anyone who enters a restaurant or luncheonette in Framingham, or anywhere else in the greater Boston area for that matter, can see this phenomenon. Another occupation that is now a niche for Brazilian immigrants, at least in the Framingham region, is work in homes for the aged, where Brazilians start off doing the heavy cleaning work and, little by little, rise in the institutions until they become nurse's aides. At least two of my interviewees sped up their occupational ascent by taking short courses in this kind of work.

Another field of businesses run by Brazilians (but cannot exactly be called a niche because companies owned by Americans still predominate in the area) has given rise to many jobs for Brazilian immigrants, the so-called “ethnic companies.” These companies carry out cleaning services for large American companies. There are also construction and maintenance companies, both of which were mentioned above, where the labor force is comprised basically of Brazilians hired by Brazilians. This is a reality that was not found by Margolis (1994: 182-183) in her study in New York, when she compared a group of Brazilian immigrants with other foreign groups that dominated certain business undertakings in that city, such as “traditional Chinese dry cleaners, Greek cafes, Korean grocery stores, and newspaper stands owned by Indians.”

Observing each of the individual paths, and taking occupation as the basic criterion, I learned that 20% went through a process of social ascent, whereas 47% descended and 32% remained on the same level. What does this mean? The appraisal was not based on the evaluation of the individuals themselves, which were very controversial. Some thought, for example, that, due to the different meanings of the manual occupations in the U.S.A. (where they are more respected and accepted than in Brazil), and due also to the better pay, the individuals considered that they were in a process of social ascent. Others, however, were clearly aware of the lowering of their status with the change of occupation, even though always underscoring the improvement in their buying power.

According to the criterion used here, whenever a person left a more qualified for another, less qualified occupation, there was a fall in status. A person who had been a teacher in Brazil (even earning the country's typically low teachers' salaries) or employed in office work, and who ended up taking on manual work in the U.S.A., which required no special qualification, fell in social status, according to my criterion.

If one observes to the change in functions of Brazilian immigrants in the

U.S.A., from non-qualified and heavier jobs to other work that, although also not requiring qualification, involves lighter work and pays better wages, it can be said that there is an overall process of social ascent among my respondents from the moment of migration until the time they were interviewed. Some also dream of even more promising perspectives for the future, including personal investment in education, especially in learning English. But only a minority can be said to have risen on the social scale in terms of the occupation they had in Brazil, as was already mentioned above.

There were two basic criteria to characterize social ascent: the length of time spent in the U.S.A. and, more importantly, a mastery of English. Among the ten interviewees who went through this process of social ascent, eight had emigrated young. Therefore, it is especially the young people who rise on the social scale.

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