

**DEALING WITH THE UK INNER BORDERS: A STUDY OF
BRAZILIANS AND THEIR TEMPORARY DWELLINGS IN LONDON.**

**NEGOCIAÇÕES COM AS FRONTEIRAS INTERNAS BRITÂNICAS:
UM ESTUDO SOBRE BRASILEIROS E SUAS MORADIAS
TEMPORÁRIAS EM LONDRES**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how undocumented migrants have struggled and dealt with the UK inner borders while living in London. Based on empirical findings collected in London and Minas Gerais, it shows how Brazilians tactically adapt themselves in temporary dwellings to escape from the harsh British immigration policies and the Home Office raids across London. This study particularly uses the concepts of inner borders, deportation and citizenship discussed by contemporary Border studies. Living in a multicultural city where identity controls are a social practice that permeates various daily activities, Brazilians have to constantly negotiate their existence through the inner borders of London without being denounced by their lack of visa.

Keywords: Inner borders. Undocumented Brazilians. Dwellings and London.

RESUMO

Este artigo explora como migrantes não documentados lidam com as fronteiras internas do Reino Unido enquanto vivem em Londres. Através de dados empíricos coletados em Londres e Minas Gerais, demonstramos como brasileiros taticamente adaptam suas vidas em moradias temporárias para escapar das políticas migratórias do Reino Unido e das blitzes migratórias do *Home Office* em domicílios. Este estudo vale-se, particularmente, dos conceitos de fronteiras internas, deportação e cidadania discutidos por estudos de fronteira contemporâneos. Almejando viver em uma

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cidade multicultural, onde os controles de identidade são uma prática social que permeia o cotidiano, migrantes não documentados têm de negociar constantemente sua existência através das fronteiras internas de Londres para não serem denunciados por seu status migratório irregular.

Palavras-chave: Fronteiras internas. Brasileiros indocumentados. Moradia e Londres

INTRODUCTION

Migration and border controls are two concepts that constantly appear in the international news headlines. They show the tense border negotiation between overseas travellers and border regimes. Vessels, filled with migrants, being tackled by EU coastguards in the Mediterranean; UK immigration officers searching for undocumented citizens; migrants hiding themselves under lorries crossing the Port of Calais are constantly reported in the press. Nonetheless, the scenario has worsened with the number of overseas migrants coming from different regions around Europe sharply increasing in the last year, and with deaths becoming a recurrent part of the daily news.

Alongside the reportage of death due to hazardous migration journeys, the European continent continues to invest in border security. Border Studies stress that the surveillance industry is a growing sector (ABRAM et al., 2016; DE GENOVA; TAZZIOLI, 2016; PERERA 2009; VERSTRAETE, 2010). Maguire, Frois and Zurawski (2014, p. 3) call attention to the fact that the “diverse security landscape is filled with state, non-state and international agencies, universities, think tanks, arms manufacturers, various private contractors, ‘user-experiences’ and the experiences of victims”. Known as *Smart Borders*, new border management systems are seen as efficient tools to restrain overseas migrants. Smart Borders are able to control the entry and exit of any non-European citizens, as well as storing their biometric data to be monitored in the inner territory (CURRY, 2004; GARELLI; SOSSI; TAZZIOLI, 2013; KUBAL 2014). Not surprisingly, the literature

highlights the emergence of terms such as *Fortress Europe* and *Machine of Governmentality* to express how strictly Europe has been managing its external and internal borders to stop the so-called *migration invasion of Europe* (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2014; MEZZADRA; NEILSON, 2013).

Despite the fact that Border Studies argue that borders are an important factor influencing migration into the European continent, there remains a relative lack of research examining how migrants tactically overcome border controls, especially with regard to the Home Office in the UK. The scholars' main emphasis is on critical analyses of how migration governmentality produces strict politics of mobility and attempts to define a 'citizenship of the borders' (BALIBAR, 2004, 2010; MEZZADRA, 2011). Yet the way in which migrants have negotiated their own presence with border controls has been largely under researched in these studies.

Aiming to move beyond this debate mainly centered on immigration policies, this article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the daily lives of undocumented migrants in the UK. It explores how the lack of legal status impacts on the lives of Brazilians in London and the tactics they put in place to deal with the UK inner borders. Housing mobility is the tactic unpacked in this paper.² In my study, migration is a negotiation with borders that involves elements of creative resistance, a way of operating *tactical manoeuvres*, while a given subjects moves from one place to another.

2 Despite the fact that this study was conducted with Brazilians, it is not my purpose to argue that such unfolded tactics involving temporary housing are exclusively designed by this nationality. Migration studies have pointed out that this type of accommodation is also experienced by undocumented migrants from other nationalities in the UK (BLOCH; SIGONA; ZETTER, 2011; PAI, 2008; SIGONA; HUGHES, 2012). Nonetheless, there is still very little research exploring how this invisible population tactically daily manage that way of life and its precariousness. So, housing mobility as a migration tactic to deal with the UK inner borders examined in this paper is part of the challenges faced by thousands of invisible non-citizens, who must daily negotiate their unwanted presence in the multicultural London.

Taking into account that Michel De Certeau (1997) has been praised for offering new perspectives to deal with the spatiality of urban life, I argue that his study can also work as a major theoretical framework for studies on migration in an urban environment. De Certeau (1997) focuses on the realm of *the art of doing* or *routine practices* such as walking and dwelling in the city to elucidate that, despite the repressive aspects of modern society, the act of moving defines the individual as a *consumer* acting in environments defined by *strategies* using *tactics*³. His concept of tactics (1997) provides this article with an approach which reveals how this resistance designed by undocumented migrants to deal with borders actually takes place in practice. In that sense, the *art of doing* requires those outside of the established power to become creative enough to reinvent their existence in spaces where they are not considered a part.

[W]ithout leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation (DE CERTEAU, 1997, p. 30).

Undocumented migrants as a dweller acting has also to creatively design an alternative power to circumvent the UK inner borders that monitors the geographical space of London. Although living in temporary dwellings is a precarious living condition imposed by the UK inner borders, I argue that it can be also understood as a tactic utilized by undocumented Brazilians to disorient the same border regime. So, finding and renting temporarily dwellings is understood

3 In general, these two concepts constitute the walker as far as s/he moves through the urban social fabric and negotiates with its rational power, and so will be important theoretical tools to reflect on migrants, in this study. By *strategy* De Certeau (1997) means the calculation of power relationships that a given subject with will and power can manage and delimit places with targets and threats. But there exists an element of creative resistance – defined as *tactics* – to these structures enacted by ordinary people. Tactics, therefore, are the microresistance of the weak

in this paper as one of the tactics of this creative resistance developed by undocumented migrants in London.

The empirical data at the basis of this article come from a broadly qualitative research, which comprised multi-sited fieldwork in London/UK and Minas Gerais/Brazil between 2011 and 2016. It is part of my PhD in Sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London (DIAS, 2016). Interviewees were mainly selected through the snowball technique, which enabled me to access a large number of undocumented Brazilians⁴ in both countries (15 + 31). The interview design followed an in-depth semi-structured format. Besides, I also explore observations and notes took in the fieldwork. As I had the opportunity to visit some of my respondents' living spaces, I could learn more about their life conditions as undocumented migrants in the United Kingdom. In fact, that proved to be valuable as the participants allowed more time for the interview and seemed comfortable introducing their private sphere to the interviewer. Listening to their conversation and opinions about the challenges of living and working in London gave me a good comprehension of the dynamic of these shared houses. It also enabled me to join them in leisure activities in those social spaces. So, birthday

4 Before beginning my interviews, I submitted my proposal to Goldsmiths Ethics Panel. After attending to the terms of the British Sociological Association ethics statement that the data collected does not have legal privilege and can be subject to subpoena, it was granted approval. The principle of informed consent was a crucial consideration during the entire research process: from the design of the interviews, to the fieldwork, and data analysis. I designed an information sheet (in Portuguese) for all research respondents in which I explained the nature of the study and how the information obtained would be used. Participation was voluntary, and the information sheet explained to participants that their anonymity would be preserved (all names were changed) and that they had the right to terminate their involvement in the interview/discussion at any point. I usually read through the information sheet with participants before the interview to make sure they were fully informed, as some were reluctant to read it. All these procedures also enabled the research participants to feel more comfortable about telling their personal stories. It was a very important point, as the research was exploring tactics of border crossing.

parties, barbecues or watching football matches on TV were some of the activities conducted in those overcrowded flats or shared houses without communal areas, in North London.

FRAMING THE UK INNER BORDERS

Immigration to the UK this century is greater and more diverse than at any point in its history (VERTOVEC, 2007). The Observatory of Migration (2016) reveals that between 1993 and 2014 the foreign-born population in the UK more than doubled from 3.8 million to around 8.3 million. “London has the greatest number of migrants (3.0 million foreign-born people in 2014) among all regions with comparable data in the UK. In 2014, the UK (OBSERVATORY OF MIGRATION, 2016, p. 2) population was 13.1% foreign-born (up from 7% in 1993) and 8.5% foreign citizens (up from 4% in 1993)”. Conforming to it, during the same period, the number of foreigner population increased from nearly 2 million to more than 5 million. Gradually, new UK immigration acts to control migration have been more restrictive in as much as the net migration increases in the country (DAVIES, 2015; MARTINS JUNIOR, 2017). Among all the types of migration movement to the UK, the government has most control over the mobility of non-European nationals. Brazilians, in this context, are affected by the current government policy that is focused on addressing levels of overseas net migration.

Martins Junior (2017) shows that in 1999, the Immigration and Asylum Act imposed new restrictions on work for migrants. Another Act was passed defining entry into the UK without real documents as a criminal offence, expanding police powers to immigration officials, in 2004. Two years later, “the Labour Party passed a new Act, giving powers to the Home Secretary allowing them the right to withdraw a citizen of their citizenship or right of abode. The idea was to ‘manage

migration’, and focus on reducing undocumented migration” (MARTINS JUNIOR, 2017, p. 99). In 2008, the government has been merciless in substituting the Work Permit Scheme by the points-based immigration system and new institutional arrangements. Students, workers and family/dependants have been the main target groups in the efforts to reduce and control the levels of non-EU net migration.

However, since the coalition government came to power, in 2010, the UK’s immigration policy has seen significant changes (OBSERVATORY OF MIGRATION, 2016). Public anxiety about immigration⁵, fuelled by the European debt crisis since the end of 2009, and the debate over Brexit and its consequences, has sharply risen in parallel with the numbers. In this context, UK policymakers have attempted to draw up policies to manage the circulation of migrants through the British territory.

Overseas migrants holding a visitor visa, main visa applied by Brazilian migrants in this study, must be able to show during their temporary visit that they do not intend to stay in the UK for more than 6 months – the maximum time limit – take paid or unpaid work, live in the UK for long periods of time through frequent visits, marry or register a civil partnership, or give notice of marriage or civil partnership, get public funds, receive free medical treatment from the National Health Service (NHS), housing support or renting a property. These restrictions impose strong controls and, therefore, shape the life of overseas migrants in the inner territory. The constraints are expected to be even *more dramatic* when the visitor status expired and they turn into ‘illegal migrants’ for the Home Office. This UK government department responsible for the police force, drugs policy, counter-terrorism and immigration defines ‘Illegal migration’ as:

5 Alongside that, TV programmes such as UK Border Forcer, daily presented on Sky1, help to create the panic picture of the UK as being invaded by a wave of migrants who flock together at the borders to invade the country and live at the expense of the state.

[...] a collective term for many forms of abuse of the immigration rules. It may be entering the country illegally – by attempting to get through the controls we have overseas, or at our border through fraudulent or clandestine entry – or by breaking the immigration rules in the UK – by working full time having been allowed in to study, or by failing to leave at the end of their stay (HOME OFFICE, 2016, p. 8).

The British immigration policies and the Home Office are designed to expose migrants to exclusion, discrimination and exploitation. They legitimate the British government to use their discriminatory power against refugees, travellers without papers, non-citizen migrants. “The racialized profile of so-called illegal migrants, reminded many non-citizens as well as citizens that the state still does not recognize them as real citizens. Borders violate not only human rights but also citizen rights.” (ABRAM et al., 2016, p. 10). Undocumented migration is classified as ‘a criminal offence’ that “can lead to prosecution and removal from the UK, being subject to a mandatory re-entry ban” as set out in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 in the UK (UKBA, 2013, p. 4). So, such production of illegality provides an apparatus for sustaining migrants’ vulnerability and tractability through their everyday sense of deportability.

Therefore, far from geographical barriers serving merely to block or obstruct the global passage of people, this article considers that the UK borders are flexible and in constant formation (BALIBAR, 2002, 2004, 2010; KUBAL 2013; MEZZADRA; NEILSON, 2013). The proliferation of UK borders invades and permeates localities, which calls for identification. As stated by Balibar (2004, p. 1), borders “are no longer entirely situated at the outer limit of territories; they are dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and is controlled – for example, in

cosmopolitan cities”. In that sense, I argue that the UK borders cannot be understood as things. They are rather relationships produced by border reinforcement policies and unwanted migrants (GARELLI; SOSSI; TAZZIOLI, 2013; VILA, 2000). Taking this into account, I define the British immigration policies and the Home Office immigration raids as the ‘UK inner borders’ in this study.

The UK inner borders impose, in a very blurred way, strict control on undocumented migrants (DIAS 2015, 2016). Although the rules are clear and can be easily found on their websites or in airport corridors and restaurants, the practice is unpredictable and that causes despair among the targets in the streets of London. It can be corroborated by the intensification of the number of immigration raids by the Home Office in London and their increasingly public character – checks conducted at bus stops, tube stations and other public places such as cafes and restaurants – by UK immigration officers in civilian clothing, targeting passers-by based on their so-called “foreign” appearance or accent, and applying measures openly borrowed from the domain of criminal law – handcuffing suspects in front of the wider public as potential criminals, arrests, detentions and deportations – has become a frightening everyday reality for many migrants in London (BLOCH; SIGONA; ZETTER, 2009; DE GENOVA, 2002; KUBAL, 2014).

However, these sudden governmental attacks in search of undocumented migrants are not only restricted to places like those described above, but can happen into private spaces as well. Inner borders can invade dwellings, search for documents, interrogate suspicious undocumented migrants and deport them. Thus, any potential mundane inspection of “documents, accompanied always by the interlocking threats of detection, interception, detention and deportation, may similarly generate a proliferation of spaces for the production of the Border Spectacle” (DE GENOVA, 2013, p. 4). This

surveillance practice transforms London into a place composed of tricky social spaces for undocumented Brazilians where the chances of being caught by Home Office agents are unpredictable.

FRAMING BRAZILIANS IN THE UK

In the last three decades, Brazil has become a country with more than 2.5 million Brazilians living abroad (BRASIL, 2012). The United Kingdom is currently the third European country with the largest number of Brazilians. Based on the numbers confirmed by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2012), there are roughly 118,000 Brazilians living in the UK alone. After Portugal (140,426) and Spain (128,238), traditionally known as the main destinations for Brazilians, the UK is the country with the highest Brazilian population in Europe. The presence of Brazilians in the UK has been expanding since the 1990s and particularly accelerated in the 2000s. The numbers sharply increased, particularly, after 9/11 when the US reinforced its external borders⁶, and the 2008 global financial crisis strongly impacted the economies of the two Iberian countries (SCHROOTEN; SALAZAR; DIAS, 2015).

Brazilians became a significant new migrant group in London whose presence contributes to the extensive diversification of migration circulation to the city that has led to Vertovec (2007) coining of the term 'superdiversity'. No wonder, the Home Office assumed a harsh attitude towards Brazilian emigration in the 2000s. Studies show that. Martins Junior(2017, p. 99)., for instance, states that "in 2002 the UK had 130,000 Brazilians entering the country out of which 2400 were refused; in 2003, 127,000 entered and 4385 were

6 Since the terrorist attacks, the established migration routes connecting Brazil to the Northeast of the United States – traditionally a main migration destination to Brazilians – have become less popular in favour of new destinations, among which London. For further information, see Dias (2015, 2016).

refused.” In the following years (2008-2010), Kubal, Bakewell and De Hass (2011) reveal that the number of Brazilian migrants entering the UK gradually dropped. “In 2007 and 2008, there were 7,040 and 7,715 entry clearances granted, respectively. In 2009 only 5,880 Brazilians were allowed to enter the UK, and in the first quarter of 2010 only 1,275 Brazilians were admitted” (KUBAL; BAKEWELL; DE HASS 2011, p. 5). Recent Home Office figures place Brazilians as the second most likely migration group to be deported (GORDON et al., 2009).

Brazilians are a very diverse group in the UK. They are “composed of people from different classes, regions, genders, who have different reasons for migrating” (MARTINS JUNIOR, 2017, p. 38). So, the Brazilians explored in this paper comprise a lower middle class who were not cast out of Minas Gerais by poverty and unemployment. Alongside the desire to work in jobs that can provide good financial return, these Brazilians also want to live temporarily in London and enjoy its superdiversity (see DIAS, 2016). My respondents expected to stay in the UK for a period of between one and five years, during which time they want to save money to invest in improving their life in Brazil. However, after 6 months of living in the British capital, when their visitor status expires they become undocumented and, therefore, subject to deportation. As a result, these Brazilians have to tactically negotiate their presence with the Home Office, who monitors the everyday spaces of London, including dwellings. So, finding and renting a place to live is one of the big challenges for them.

UNFOLDING THE TEMPORARY DWELLINGS

Following Adriano and Claudio and other Brazilians for 5 years allowed me to observe how the group showed a high degree of housing mobility in London. According to those in the research this intense mobility can be related to two tangled motives: the cost

of living in London and the unpleasant visits of Home Office border agents. In Adriano's words it should be understood that:

These [two main facts] are points that anyone who wants to live in London has to take into account...if, of course, they want to stay for longer than the visa allows. You know how expensive this city is, especially to live. We pay a high price in rent and it does not mean that you will get a good place to live. On the contrary, these dodgy landlords know that there is a demand for places and 'stick in the knife' without mercy. [...] Because of that you have to find cheap places. The other point is the immigration...living with other people without papers always draws attention to them. So, at some point you have to move to other places, because soon or later they [Home Office] will come...and you can be the next.

Conforming to the respondents, this temporary dwelling is normally chosen based on the basic amenities that a migrant needs in his/her everyday life. Nonetheless, it seems that location and access to public transport are factors they take into account. Pedro observes this when mentioning the elements he considered important when renting a room, *"access to the internet, rent with a reasonable price, and proximity to public transport and their jobs"*. He says, however, life in London is very unstable. Due to the lack of visa, they can swap jobs very easily and, depending on the distance, it can be better to change to residences closer to the new workplace.

In a city such as London where public transport is expensive and travelling daily from one place to another can be risky, living close to the workplace *"is a matter of saving money, gaining a few more hours of sleep during the week and not exposing yourself too much in the streets"*, in Gisele's words. As stated by her and other respondents in London and Minas Gerais, exposing themselves in the streets can call attention to *"the Men in Black"*⁷. It forces them to live unattached from housing and

7 The term 'Men in Black' is what some of my respondents, as well as other undocumented Brazilians I talked with during my fieldwork, called the Home Office agents. It is based on a Hollywood science-fiction movie. The undocumented respondents peculiarly noted the two

a permanent address and that, as the next section shows, produces a precarious temporariness.

MOVEMENT AS A TACTIC TO AVOID THE UNPLEASANT “KNOCK, KNOCK” AT THE DOOR

The tactic of moving from one house to another in order to avoid the Home Office knocking on their doors reveals the feeling of fear and living on the move shapes the everyday lives of these undocumented Brazilians in London. It also suggests how the UK inner borders produce a spectacle which “conjures up the fetish of transgression at the ever-multiplying points of interception in an amorphous border zone” where migrant lives may be interrupted at any time (DE GENOVA, 2013, p. 10). So, borders and their *modus operandi* shape the lives of undocumented migrants in London. Negotiation with the borders is part of everyday life for these subjects. And it also dramatically affects the way the Brazilians explored in this article dwells in the city. London, for them, becomes a place where there is no “deep connection although it is sometimes held in considerable affection” (KNOWLES; HARPER, 2010, p. 240). The UK inner borders are crucial in imposing boundaries upon people’s everyday experiences such as the type of dwelling. Claudio reinforces such argument by saying that most of his friends and colleagues who were deported “*were at home! The police [Home Office agents] have no mercy. If they know that you have no papers, they come and catch you*”.

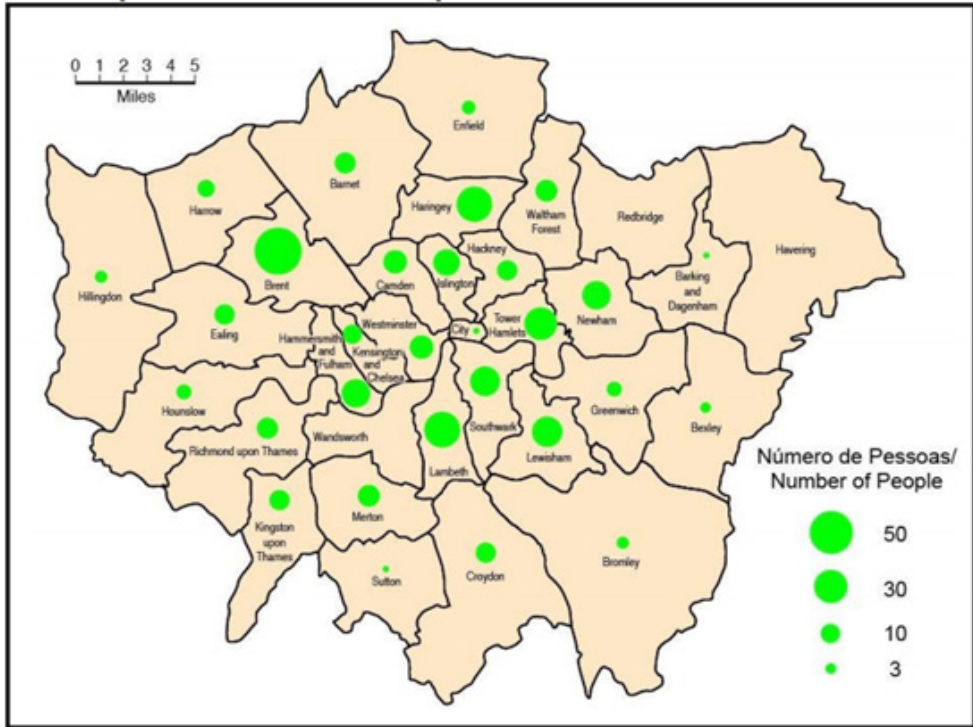
main characters of that movie and their goal of saving the Earth from intruder aliens as an example of the process of dehumanization daily experienced by themselves as unauthorized border crossers. So, moving through the streets and open areas of London means they can be recognized by the authorities and accused of occupying places where they are not expected to be. The burden of Brazilian citizenship is fixed in their bodies. In fact, stories about ‘capture’ were repeatedly relayed to me. In general, they emphasized the ‘immigration officer blitzes’ as ruthless. That is why they described the Home Office agents as ‘Men in Black’. Khosravi (2010) coincidentally came across the same term while conducting fieldwork with undocumented Iranians in Sweden.

Therefore, being always ready to move from one house to another is another tactic of border-crossing the inner borders utilized by these Brazilians.

So, these houses are temporary dwellings in which ‘unattached’ immigrants can change residence relatively easily according to their priorities. Gisele calls attention that the intense control produced by the Home Office forces undocumented migrants to constantly change address. As stated by her, *“people without paper has not much options left. We are always moving in search of a safe location in this city”*. This intense mobility from house to house suggests that Brazilian migrants in general are not clustered in particular London areas.

In the 1990s, an ethnographic study conducted by Torresan (1994, 1995) outlined that there were initially two small Brazilian clusters localized in the London areas of Bayswater (known within the community as *Brazilwater*) and Paddington at the beginning of the 1980s. According to her, these clusters consisted mainly of Brazilian workers and students who wanted to be in touch with each other while abroad. However, apart from Brazilian restaurants, hairdressers and shops, these areas are no longer exclusively inhabited by this nationality. The findings rather suggest that Brazilians are spread over the city. Rather than being gathered in one area, they are rather located in various regions of London. It seems that some of these areas gained preference among Brazilians at particular times. In fact, the interviews and the literature (EVANS et al., 2015; DIAS, 2016; MARTINS JUNIOR, 2017) support the evidence of the map below (Figure 1), which shows how Brazilians are spread out around the city of London:

Figure 1 – Presence of Brazilians in London



Source: Evans et al. (2015).

Some districts and boroughs are known for having higher concentrations of Brazilians. The Boroughs of Brent, Haringey and Islington in North London are good examples. Valéria, a Brazilian living in North London, says that due to the fact that *“real estate speculation makes the life of undocumented migrants with precarious jobs into a hell, North London is full of Brazilians without papers [visa] because it is the region where the cheapest rents can be found in the whole city”*. Reflecting on the particular case of Willesden Junction, she observes:

There is a [high concentration of Brazilians in that ward]. But it is not as strong as the African one. Because it is a new group and it is very volatile. I mean, people are always moving in search of a better location. So, I can say that there is no settlement of Brazilians from there [Alto Paranaíba], but they are still very

present in Willesden. There are money transfers, advocacies, associations, and so on. It gives us the feeling of a presence of Brazilians there [Willesden Junction]. If you go there, you will find butchers, hairdressers, cafes and restaurants...

Similarly, Laerte, another long-term migrant, tells me that Willesden Junction is currently one of the areas where Brazilians searching for dwellings tend to live. He recalls how he and some fellow citizens moved to that area in the early 2000s.

When I arrived in London, there was a friend waiting for us in Victoria [coach station], then he took us to Paddington. In Paddington we [4 people] all shared the same bedroom in the beginning, but we could not stay there. One night the [Home Office] agents arrived and took one of us who had just arrived from his workplace. So, my friend took us to a flat in Chamberlain Road. There were two free beds there. The owners were travelling to Greece. When they returned, we had to find a new place. After that we moved to Bayswater, we were constantly moving. You know there were many Brazilians and African living in those areas and that calls attention to the [Home Office] officers...

So, the cost of living and the risk of deportation forces Brazilians to live on the move while in London. Some regions of London gain prominence among them at certain times. That is currently the case with Willesden Junction. A large number of Brazilians choose that region as a way to escape from the inevitable presence of border agents at their door. As Lucio stresses, *“Living in regions where you find many Brazilians can attract the attention of the authorities, but the news spreads fast and it can tactically work in our favour. [...] I mean if the immigration [officers] appear, people share the information quickly!”* Housing mobility strongly shapes the lives of these Brazilians.

In the following section, I will get the reader into one of these peculiar houses. I explore how a life on movement caused by the fear of being caught by the UK inner borders produce very precarious housing conditions. So, overcrowded houses, lack of privacy, dodgy

landlords and pest infestation are some of the challenges faced by the Brazilians which are going to be examined below.

PRECARIOUS DWELLINGS

I visited eight people's accommodation in the Boroughs of Haringey and Brent during the fieldwork in London, and that provided me with a good insight into how constantly living on the move was a sign of the precarious housing conditions. The houses were often overcrowded and in poor condition. Bed bugs and mice infections, water leaks, temporary lack of electricity and gas were just some of the precarious living conditions found in these homes. As noted by the research respondents, sorting out these issues are actually some of the responsibilities of the landlord but sometimes the tenants had to sort out such issues themselves, as was the case for Lucio.

He was renting a room which once had a bed bug infestation. *"Our landlord was more concerned about the rent than our living conditions. And we had to do something quickly because of Douglas [2-year-old boy, the son of an undocumented Brazilian couple]"*. The tenants had to find and pay for a pest control company to come and eradicate the insects from the house. The whole process took a week and the cost was shared by the residents. Since then, the problem has disappeared, but *"the house management has not improved"*. One year later the landlord passed on the house to another Brazilian, as he was returning to Brazil. Lucio remembers that the first thing the new landlord did was to install a prepayment electricity meter⁸. *"He did not even introduce himself to us"*. Since then, *"we have struggled with days with no credit in the meter as he does not give us the key. That is not fair. You come home tired after a long*

8 In London, mechanical prepayment meters used to be common in rented houses. This equipment requires the customer to make advance payment before electricity can be used. If the available credit finishes then the supply of electricity is cut off by a relay.

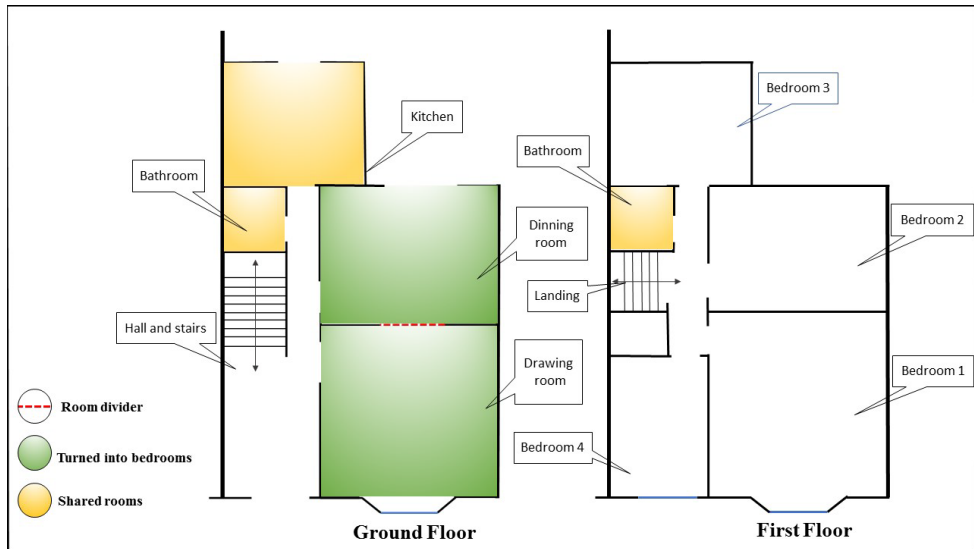
shift and are looking forward to having a hot bath and that damned shower does not have hot water”.

In fact, most of the time I could sense disappointment in the voices of my respondents. Gisele, like many others, recalled her first impressions on arriving in East Acton, North of London. It was the first time Gisele had left her parents’ house in Minas Gerais when she landed in London. She had recently turned 18 years old, and was welcomed by her cousin who allocated her a bedroom with three people. It was a house shared by nine people altogether from Minas Gerais and one from the Brazilian state of Paraná. She remembers, *“I felt that I was arriving in a hole. The house was horrible. You had to enter through a door behind...It was rubbish... oh my...it was disgusting. It all looked weird and old. I remember there were mice, because there was a restaurant on the ground floor”.*

These residences tend to be places organized by landlords – who are often migrants themselves – to accommodate the largest number of dwellers as possible. Lucio reveals that in London there is a profitable trade around the rental homes for Brazilians. *“Many landlords are Brazilians, who are settled and documented in the city, and explore this economic practice as a way to live and also make money. Thus, they use mortgage loans to purchase houses or then rent one [...]”* This is the case with several houses located in the northwest and north of London, specifically in Finsbury Park.

Common social areas such as the living room are often transformed into bedrooms, leaving the bathroom and the kitchen as the only common areas to be shared by all the residents (see Figure 2). Each bedroom and its wardrobes are shared by two or three people. It is not uncommon to find Brazilians crammed in with twelve other people of both sexes in a house with one or two bathrooms and one fridge. Based on the fieldwork notes collected while visiting these houses, the figure 2 shows a general picture of these houses.

Figure 2 – Property adapted to accommodate undocumented migrants.



Source: the author.

We can identify that the common areas or shared rooms are limited to the kitchen and the bathrooms. The kitchen, in particular, is pointed by my respondents as the only area where any eventual collective activity can happen. *“Sometimes, when you are cooking and some housemate who occupies another bedroom arrive...so, it is time to a brief chat. You know ‘Hi! How was your day’ or ‘Are you ok?’ and other everyday questions...that is all”,* Gisele observes. This figure also reveals that there is no room for collective interaction among the dwellers or leisure activities. According to Lucio, these kinds of activities generally occur in the backyard, during the summer. He adds that

[...] barbecues and birthdays tend to be celebrated in these areas. It is nice, because friends can also pop in. Days off or weekends if we are lucky are the days we can have some funny time over here [referring to his house]. I mean, if the house has a backyard. Otherwise, forget it. You have to know someone who has one!

These temporary dwellings play a very functional role. As the figure 2 and the interviews show, they are all divided to accommodate these transitory dwellers, who can leave at any time. Actually, even these dwellings can be rapidly emptied in case they call attention from the Home Office.

In fact, I identified signs indicating not just the precariousness as described above, but also temporariness. Since the migrants do not have attachment to the houses and, as explored above, most of the time it does not provide them with a feeling of being at home, the group in the research stressed that they could move any time they wanted or needed to. The presence of bags on the top of wardrobes or even behind them was noticeable when you entered their bedrooms, supporting their assertion. Some clothes remain packed after arriving in a new place. Shoes are kept together in boxes or under beds. Technological equipment such as laptops, CD players and speakers share the tiny space left next to the beds and wardrobes. Piles of CDs are beside their belongings. Most of this equipment is bought as soon as they find their first job in London. The sense of being ready to leave is always present in their everyday lives. In weeks or days they could be moving again. Therefore, their belongings assume a position of constant readiness. Claudio, for instance, says,

We were looking for a house, as in the same morning we got notice to leave the one we were living in. Notice is quick like that. The next morning you can be notified. A friend of mine told us about a Brazilian landlady. I just called her and that night we were moving in.

Thus, the notion of temporariness is very much associated with a feeling of readiness. In other words, clothes packed up not only means that the migrant is ready to depart in case the Home Office immigration officers knock at the door. It seems that, despite the precariousness, small rooms without communal spaces facilitate their

mobility in case of emergency situations. There is not much left behind in case of sudden moves, which enables them to assume a peripatetic migratory status in order to deal with the unpleasant presence of the UK inner borders.

Besides, the fieldwork conducted in these houses also suggests that tensions are very present among the dwellers. Such observation is corroborated by Sigona and Hughes (2012) study on undocumented migrants in the UK. As reported by them, poor housing conditions and overcrowding can easily result in conflict among fellow tenants in London. Roberto, a returned migrant, says that undocumented Brazilian migrants tend to denounce other compatriots with the same undocumented status for foolish reasons. Among the reasons listed he mentions “*influential position*” in the house. As reported by him, “*people can fight for a better bedroom, or even for the shelves of a refrigerator.*” Long-term migrants “*tend to have priorities*” in this sort of disputes. Roberto believes that people incorporate a stressful lifestyle in London. Working “*illegally*” long shifts under risky conditions, spending money on rent and public transport and still trying to send remittances “*puts people on the edge*”. Thus, disputes in overcrowded houses are often solved through threats such as calling the Home Office.

In fact, in the same way that the UK border agency officers may stop a passer-by in the street and request proof of identity when there is reason to assume that the person in question is an illegal migrant, “these officers are also authorized to enter, without the consent of the occupant, their home or place of dwelling if there is ‘a reasonable suspicion’ or ‘reasonable grounds’ that point to the person not being lawfully resident” (KUBAL, 2013, p.8). Kubal observes that the immigration officers’ power was given by the British Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Conforming to her, it is very similar to the powers of the police in the investigation of crime and the apprehension of suspects.

As some of the respondents told me, sharing a house with residents with a lack of legal immigration status affects the whole internal dynamic. They say that it is always a very delicate situation, which demands attention and precautions. For that reason, “[...] keeping one step ahead of immigration authorities necessitates being on the move” (BLOCH; SIGONA; ZETTER, 2009, p. 47). Gisele comments that *“sometimes the Home Office catch one of us and you have to move quickly to another house.”* After interrogating the migrant, the officers discover the residential address and go there in order to check if there are more migrants without legal immigration status. Gisele recalls one of the times that immigration officers suddenly knocked at her door early in the morning:

You know, they [Home Office agents] come and knock at the door, because they are looking for somebody. So we have to leave quickly [the house] if we do not want to leave the country. I have struggled a lot with this kind of pressure. It is very traumatic... when I was pregnant with my only child; they [Home Office agents] came to my house. We had to leave wearing pyjamas in the early morning....it was quite traumatic.

In cases like that, the house *“is burned”* as Adriano describes it. In other words, houses investigated by the Home Office become subject to recurrent unexpected visits during the night or the very early morning, when migrants are arriving from work or sleeping. Moreover, he explains that trying to use a burned address to open a bank account or sign a mobile contract can be very tricky as *“it announces who you are”*, in terms of immigration status. Therefore, once somebody is caught, the best option is to move out immediately from that residence to a *“clean one”*. As reported by Gisele, it is just a matter of time before the immigration officers arrive again at the door.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I explored how the globalized world is currently experiencing a proliferation of borders. In the European continent as a whole, border reinforcement is closely related to the development of its citizenship and the control of migration movement, and the border regime itself produces the foreigner. Borders studies demonstrate that both the European border regimes obstructs and produces a sense of exclusion, putting migration under constant regulation (KUBAL, 2013; MAGUIRE; FROIS; ZURAWSKI, 2014; VERSTRAETE, 2010). The implementation of high technology along with the use of agencies specializing in the security of European external borders has focused on filtering overseas migrants. However, border controls are no longer restricted to the geographical boundaries; they are rather elastic and also cover the inner territory. Borders are now recognized as part of the everyday life of undocumented migrants who have managed to overcome the frontiers of any State. That is the case of the UK borders – called in this study as the UK inner borders – which invade and permeates the everyday life of London.

Although the UK inner borders are improved daily to detect and remove migrants from the edges and inner territories, my study has revealed that migrants are still empowered social actors. The findings concur with studies which recognize that ‘borderlands’ are not impenetrable territories (BALIBAR, 2010; KHOSRAVI, 2010; PAPADOPOULOS; STEPHENSON; TSIANOS, 2008; PERERA, 2009). The fieldwork conducted with Brazilians shows that undocumented migrants rather produce alternative ways to reinvent their presence through the surveillance apparatus, which manages and delimits places with targets and threats. It suggests that a migrant is a skilled practitioner participating in the spaces they move through. Being

without papers means living on the move, where everyone or everything is temporary and can be interrupted at any time.

For them, London is a city whose tricky social spaces demand a life forced to forgo establishing emotional attachments to their dwellings or friends. Those are the tactics that allow them to move around London without being challenged by the 'blurred inner borders' which label them as subjects deprived of citizenship of the borders (BALIBAR, 2010) and, therefore, abnormal invaders without right to live and work in the UK. So, reinforcing their invisibility gives to undocumented migrants the only possibility to exist in the multicultural UK. It is tactical protection find by them to overcome the UK inner borders that cordons off large areas of public life.

Out of necessity and not for pleasure, they must live as acrobats in the manipulation of boundaries, presenting themselves to be adept and mainly flexible in the process of negotiation with the UK inner borders. In this context, by living on temporary dwellings and all precariousness it does generate, Brazilians reveal how undocumented migrants have to produce elements of creative resistance to circumvent the established power that monitors the everyday life in London.

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