

## **Brazilian Students in Argentina: A Case Study on the Reterritorialization Process**

### **Estudiantes brasileños en Argentina: un estudio de caso sobre el proceso de reterritorialización**

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#### ABSTRACT

This article aims at analyzing elements of the migration flow of Brazilians to the city of Rosario (Argentina) to study medicine. It seeks to understand the nuances of the reterritorialization process through the retrieval of life stories, emphasizing aspects such as difficulties in adapting to local culture and language, the impact on the local economy (especially in the real estate market), and future prospects, among others. The methodology involved individual interviews and the use of the Focus Group technique with 12 immigrants. The results evidence the specificities of a migration motivated by study (not work), including the importance of understanding other structural aspects such as national policies on education, the role of different actors in the reterritorialization process, and the mechanisms of mutual assistance through social networks.

*Keywords:* 1. international migration, 2. south-south migrations, 3. student migration, 4. Rosario, Argentina, 5. Brazil.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar elementos de la migración emprendida por brasileños hacia la Ciudad de Rosario (Argentina) para estudiar medicina. Se busca comprender las sutilezas del proceso de reterritorialización a través del rescate de la historia de vida, poniendo énfasis en aspectos como las dificultades de adaptación a la cultura y al idioma, el impacto en la economía local (especialmente en el mercado inmobiliario) y las perspectivas de futuro, entre otros. La metodología involucró entrevistas individuales y la técnica de Grupo Focal con 12 inmigrantes. Como resultados, se observaron las especificidades de una migración motivada por el estudio (no por trabajo), entre las cuales se pueden mencionar: la importancia de comprender otros aspectos estructurales como las políticas nacionales de educación, el papel de diferentes actores en el proceso de reterritorialización y los mecanismos de ayuda mutua a través de las redes sociales, etcétera.

*Palabras clave:* 1. migración internacional, 2. migraciones sur-sur, 3. migración de estudiantes, 4. Rosario, Argentina, 5. Brasil.

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration is a phenomenon embedded in the history and existence of human beings. Thus, over time, various thinkers have focused on it in order to deeply understand its causes, consequences, and implications in the most diverse social, economic, and cultural scenarios (Gaudemar, 1977; Martins, 1988; Asari, 1992; Margolis, 1994; Sayad, 1998). Thus, a rich theoretical and methodological framework is available to support the analysis carried out in this article. Still, given that migration as a phenomenon is complex, multifaceted, and a reflection of a particular spatial-temporal context, it is essential to produce new research—especially favoring empirical approaches—in order to observe and understand, from the subjects themselves, how they perceive and understand the phenomenon.

The arrival of Brazilians in Argentinian territory with the purpose of furthering their education in the medical field is on the rise, and can be more clearly seen in recent years (Oliveira, 2021; Brasil, 2018). It is in this context that the research presented here is being undertaken, and some of the results and points for discussion are shared.

In this analysis, the interference point of migration is the Brazilian educational policy for access to higher education, which is restrictive and privilege students who have greater purchasing power and can pay for preparatory courses to enroll in public universities, mainly to study competitive and elitist careers such as medicine. On the other hand, in Argentina, a more inclusive and democratic policy was adopted for access to higher education—an impossible dream for many in Brazil—, thus becoming an attainable possibility (Oliveira, 2021).

The spatial framework of our research is Rosario, province of Santa Fe, approximately 300 km from the national capital of Buenos Aires and 170 km from its provincial capital; the city is located on the banks of the great Paraná River. This privileged location was essential to its development, since, nested in the middle of the Pampas region,<sup>3</sup> it became strategic for the flow of agricultural production (De Marco, 2016).

Although this phenomenon can be observed in cities such as Buenos Aires, La Plata, Mar del Plata, among others, Rosario was chosen as study case for outstanding reasons: 1) its economic relevance at the regional and national level (despite not being the capital of the province of Santa Fe); 2) the influence of migrations in its history and socio-territorial formation; 3) the significant number of Brazilians who choose to live there; 4) the possibility of researching migration in a city of the interior; and 5) the presence of higher education private institutions that also attract Brazilians (Oliveira, 2021).

Rosario is one of the most important cities in Argentina. A boost in population growth has taken place there in the last decade (Barenboim & Zamler, 2017). This can be verified with data from the 2018 Yearbook of population and vital statistics (Dirección General de Estadística,

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<sup>3</sup> In general, the Pampas stands out as a region of Argentina with large extensions of fertile land, which has contributed to the development of agricultural activities. This zone covers the area of important cities such as Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Rosario, and Bahía Blanca.

2019), which shows that the growth between 2010 (967 844 inhabitants) and 2018 (995 497 inhabitants) was just over 2.8%. This percentage may seem minimal, but it corresponds to more than 27 600 people (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimates of the Evolution of Rosario's Population (2010-2018)<sup>4</sup>

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total	967 844	971 393	974 998	978 585	982 137	985 626	959 020	992 323	995 497
Men	459 497	461 182	462 894	464 597	466 283	467 940	469 549	471 119	472 626
Women	508 347	510 211	512 104	513 988	515 854	517 686	519 471	521 204	522 871

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Dirección General de Estadística (2019).

There is a large number of Brazilians enrolled at the National University of Rosario (UNR), particularly in the Medical School. In 2012, the majority of foreign students at the UNR were Peruvian, a state of things that changed five years after, as Brazilians increased from 311 in 2012 to 2 577 in 2017 (see Table 2) (Angelucci & Pozzo, 2020).

Table 2. Total Number of Students from South American Countries at UNR (2012-2017)

	Brazil	Peru	Colombia	Other
2012 (total: 1 089)	311	501	100	177
2017 (total: 3 918)	2 577	623	334	384

Source: Own elaboration based on Angelucci and Pozzo (2020).

Of the total 2 577 Brazilian students enrolled at UNR, about 97% (2 492) of the students were in the Medical School. Data point out that in 2017 Brazilians represented 74.7% (2 492) of the students in the medical curriculum, 71.2 % (2 734) in 2018, and 71.4% (3 029) in 2019; thus, even if the percentage went lower, there was an increase of 537 Brazilian students in absolute numbers, when compared to 2017 (Table 3) (Universidad Nacional de Rosario [UNR], 2018, 2019, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The population data derived from the 2010 Demographic Census, and those published in the yearbook, are different. Upon contacting the General Directorate of Statistics of the Municipality of Rosario to understand this discrepancy, we were informed that the yearbook estimates are made annually as of July 1, and seek to correct differences resulting from problems such as lack of coverage, omissions, and other difficulties.

Table 3. Percentage and comparison between the number of enrolled students originating from Brazil and elsewhere (2017-2019)

	Total number of students in medical school	Brazilians in medical school	Brazilians in medical school (%)
2017	3 337	2 492	74.7
2018	3 841	2 734	71.2
2019	4 244	3 029	71.4

Note: Data from 2017 onwards have been included exclusively, as the university did not provide a career-specific breakdown of information before that. Instead, it grouped the numbers under the *health area* category. It is worth mentioning that the Medical School comprises the academic programs of medicine, nursing, and phonoaudiology.

Source: Own elaboration based on UNR (2018, 2019, 2020).

A qualitative approach was followed in order to understand the dynamics surrounding Brazilian emigration and subsequent immigration in Rosario. In February 2020, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 immigrants from different regions of Brazil: four were conducted individually, and two by means of the focus group technique—one session had three participants and the other five—. Based on the experiences of these individuals, it was possible to understand the particularities of a type of migration between South American countries that does not have as its main objective insertion into the labor market.

The main characteristics of the migrant analyzed are: 1) their main motivation to migrate is education and not the search for work opportunities, as is common in other realities; 2) these migrants are attracted by Argentina's inclusive educational policies; 3) their migration is favored by international agreements—such as MERCOSUR—that facilitate the entry of residents from member countries; 4) initially their migration is temporary, although many consider settling in Argentina after graduating; 5) their migration is between underdeveloped countries in South America, and therefore remittances come from the place of origin (a practice opposite to labor migrations); 6) they favor the local economy by injecting remittances originating from Brazil, without these migrants occupying job positions in turn; 7) language is one of their main difficulties for reterritorialization; and 8) they are mostly young migrants who already have some academic training and come from different parts of Brazil.

This article is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the relevance of the category of territory in supporting geographical analyses involving the migratory phenomenon; the second addresses the different variables that were mapped and that have a significant influence on the reterritorialization process of Brazilian migrants: 1) their impact on the local economy, 2) the difficulties they find in adapting to the language and the teaching method, and 3) the influence of social networks in this migration flow.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE GEOGRAPHIC CATEGORY OF TERRITORY TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIGRATION PHENOMENON

Geography has reached its golden age at the end of this century, because ‘geographicity’ imposes itself as a historical condition, insofar as nothing considered essential today is done in the world that can avoid the knowledge of what the territory is. The territory is the place where all actions, all passions, all powers, all strengths, all weaknesses merge, that is, where the history of man is fully realized from the manifestations of his existence. Geography becomes that discipline that is more capable of showing the dramas of the world, of the nation, of the place (Santos, 1999, p. 7).

It was decided to open this section with the words of Milton Santos, since they summarize the interest of briefly presenting in this article the importance of territory for geography, especially in analyses involving migratory phenomena. The category of territory is known to be complex; one with a long tradition within the human sciences, and that has been used as a reference for the instrumentalization of research in various fields from an interdisciplinary approach (Cunha & Antonello, 2020). There is no consensus on territory even within geography, given the divergences between the theoretical reflections that conceptualize it. There is a common tendency towards the idea that territory consists of a portion of space delimited by social relations of power (Vale et al., 2005).

Based on the category of territory and the concepts coined based on this term, geographic analyses have been moving forwards through discussions on the relationship between humans and the environment, mediated by variables such as power, identity, conflict, strategies of permanence in territories with which affective relationships are established, networks, among others. In convergence with this conception, it can be noted that:

Territory is a product of society-nature relations and a condition for social reproduction; a field of power that involves historically determined social constructions and relations (economic-political-cultural-environmental). The territory is both a result of and determining factor for the reproduction of the society-nature relationship, and the concomitant territorialization. Territories are reproduced in space-time by the power exertion of a given group or social class, and by their respective daily territorialities. Immateriality and materiality can be found both in the result-product and in the condition for-becoming (Saquet, 2015, p. 45).

Furthermore, from a methodological point of view, the statements by Santos (1999, 2005) become relevant, when on several occasions he argues that the geographer’s concern is not the territory itself, but the territory used, since this dimension is a human construct arising from concrete actions carried out by individuals and groups—such as the immigrants under analysis in this research—. The use of territory is a process that originates from and influences a variety of interactions of diverse nature, such as social, economic, cultural, and political interactions that take place within such territory. From this perspective, the territory used is not merely restricted to the materiality of static geographical boundaries, but is also of a dynamic and constantly

transforming nature, reflecting the power relations, conflicts, daily practices, and cultural identities of those who inhabit and participate in this complex spatiality.

Since space is the object of geography and territory is one of its main categories of analysis, it is important to consider that, as according to Raffestin (1993), although linked, territory and space are not synonymous. Territory is formed from the appropriation of space. Thus, “space is the ‘original prison’, while territory is the prison that men design for themselves” (Raffestin, 1993, p. 144).

Thus, territory must be understood as the territory used, since it is there where the systematic changes in nature mediated by work and the establishment of social relations of power between different actors, which may culminate in cooperation or conflict, take place. It is within this territory where exchanges—both material and immaterial—take place, and where identity is constructed, which can be read as the feeling of belonging.

When addressing territory in discussions on migration, it is worth remembering that migration theories considered classical emphasize the macroeconomic field, approaching culture and politics as second-rate variables (Saquet & Mondardo, 2008). Thus, by prioritizing this field, the migration phenomenon is limited to labor mobility and regional differences as push and pull factors. In this context, other important aspects for a deeper understanding are neglected:

The daily experiences of those who leave one territory for another, their diverse social practices, the strategies and resources made available, the contacts woven along their migration path, the relations of sociability and estrangement among migrants, and the internal and external articulations within and outside their group are not accounted for in macrostructural analyses (Saquet & Mondardo, 2008).

The potential of Raffestin’s (1993) notion of territory for the study of migration is evidenced by Saquet and Mondardo (2008) when they explain that, for the aforementioned French author, a territory is constituted by the dialectics of territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization (TDR), and by the networks that characterize each territory (both in the material and immaterial sense). Thus, when migrants leave and occupy territories, they interfere with the organization and pre-established socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of such places; their presence and quest for permanence may cause, for example, conflicts with local residents. Migrants may use different resistance strategies, such as mutual cooperation between recent migrants and those already settled.

It is also understood that the migratory phenomenon is mostly linked to territorial networks of interaction. Territories are culturally, politically, and economically interconnected; likewise, the migrant maintains relationships with the territory of origin and destination, with migrants and non-migrants, developing complex social ties (Saquet & Mondardo, 2008). As such, “the process of territorialization, therefore, is linked to migration and even to the creation of networks of increasingly broad and interconnected social relations between different and distant places” (Saquet & Mondardo, 2008, p. 120). Thus:

Today, therefore, migrations constitute an “integrated experience” of space, yet only possible if migrants are articulated in a network through multiple relationships that often extend from the local to the global. Between the territories of origin and destination, there are various relationships and social links developed by migrants as they traverse their trajectories and reterritorialize. The construction of territories during migration goes through a network dynamic that interconnects different nodes by means of the links and contacts established (Saquet & Mondardo, 2008, p. 120).

It is thus clear that, in addition to the complex social power relations, the understanding of the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization undertaken by migrants in the most diverse contexts and scales, requires paying special attention to the constitution of networks that link the territory of origin and that of destination, having migrants as a bridge. For our case study, the migrations of Brazilians in Rosario, despite being considered a recent phenomenon, already evidences the establishment of several networks, such as the connection with Brazil through the air and road network; sending and receiving money transfers; contact with family by Internet and telephone; institutional links through research projects between universities, and so on. Thus, “in this conception, there is no territory without networks, meshes, and knots; territories are always permeated by power relations” (Saquet & Mondardo, 2008, p. 121).

Based on the assumptions presented so far in this section, it was observed that the territory allows for us to understand migration from a historical and relational conception, bringing together the economic, political, and cultural fields, valuing its reticular and multidimensional character. Likewise, the process of migrant reterritorialization is constituted by experiences that reflect strategies, resources, and social relations between individuals in the territories of origin and destination, where, by delving into the complex processes involved in reterritorialization, a deeper and more complete vision can be obtained.

## THE RETERRITORIALIZATION PROCESS

### *The Impact of Brazilian of the Presence in Rosario*

This subsection presents some aspects related to the reterritorialization process of Brazilians in Argentine territory. In seeking to understand this migrant process, several geographical concepts can be evoked to support the analysis. In the case of territory, this allows working on the subject from different angles: national sovereignty, territorial identity, territorial praxis for migrant permanence and resistance, power relations in which conflict and cooperation between different actors are mapped, and so on. This subsection is based on interviews with 12 Brazilian migrants from different cities, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Ribeirão Preto, Brasília, Londrina, Manaus, Frutal, Cametá, and Macapá.

Thus, territory is thought of as a social construct, both objectively and subjectively, marked by power relations that are linked to the processes of appropriation and domination of space (Saquet, 2015). Regarding appropriation, the author points out:

Appropriation has three main meanings: a) as possession, ownership, control, individual and/or collective dominion by present or absent individuals of the appropriated space, through immaterial and material mechanisms and mediators; b) as delimitation, with or without precision, parceling, division; and c) as use, inference, and utilization of objects, instruments, machines, land, streets, buildings, individuals, in short, of space and nature (Saquet, 2015, pp. 108-109).

The phenomenon under analysis can fit into the three meanings of appropriation presented, as all are in some way imbued with the lived experience of migrants. Still, the third one stands out as the most relevant: “inference, and utilization of objects, instruments, machines, land, streets, buildings, individuals” (Saquet, 2015, pp. 108-109). Brazilian migrants arriving in Argentina occupy a portion of the space (wherein they establish their residence). In the case of those who migrate for reasons of education, the university is the concrete and symbolic space where they will be nourished with knowledge.

By choosing to reside in a foreign nation, immigrants gradually begin to appropriate and use spaces that until then had unknown forms and functions. It is through daily practice that a relationship of belonging to the new spatiality is gradually built. In the case of the Brazilians interviewed, it was observed that when they begin to occupy public spaces, such as streets, squares, and the university itself, what Saquet (2015) calls symbolic appropriation takes place: “when a group of people frequently occupies certain streets, there is, there, a symbolic and concrete appropriation without titles, but with demarcation, intentionality, and interference with their presence in that space, thus constituted into their territory of action” (Saquet, 2015, p. 109).

By migrating to Rosario, these Brazilian students undertake the process of reterritorialization, which can be interpreted as the appropriation of a certain space (Saquet, 2015). The author’s reflections allow understanding that territorialization is not a homogeneous process, as it involves social relations between actors that may be different in each reality analyzed, reflecting on aspects such as rules and norms, working conditions, networks, conflicts, among others. Thus, in each context, territorialization is shaped according to the characteristics of each territory.

The presence of Brazilian migrants in Rosario has different geographic impacts when compared to that of other groups. Thus, the particularities inherent to this group—such as language, worldview, economic condition, and ethnic/racial composition—will make their experience different from that of Haitians or Chileans, for example. The presence of Brazilians will have impacts on already established local territorialities because these are flexible and change in the face of a given spatial-temporal context (Saquet, 2015). Therefore, many of these territorialities in Rosario can be substantially altered at the most diverse scales: streets, neighborhoods, universities, and political spaces.

During the research, the different variables that interfere in the reterritorialization process of Brazilian migrants on Argentinian soil were mapped. This article will highlight three: 1) the impact of migrants on the local economy; 2) the difficulties in adapting to the language and the teaching method; and 3) the influence of social networks.



## IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

### *The Economic Boost Generated by the Brazilian Community*

According to reflections on the concept of territory based on Saquet and Mondardo (2008), and Raffestin (1993), territories can be understood as being interconnected by networks. In the case of migrants, they establish links between the territories left behind during their emigration process and those they occupy now in their reterritorialization process. These contacts are forged in different ways and for different purposes, whether through intangible networks, such as the Internet, or material ones, such as air transport. These networks enable communication with family and friends, as well as the smooth transfer of monthly remittances between migrants and their families. This last aspect will be analyzed in detail due to its close relationship with the positive impact that Brazilian migration has had on the local economy of Rosario, particularly in the real estate sector.

The urban space is known to be at once fragmented and articulated through visible flows—such as the coming and going of goods, people, and vehicles—and invisible flows—such as power relations, interests, incomes, and wages—(Oliveira & Antonello, 2021). Thus, in urban space there is a complex network of dynamics and relationships that produce and transform the city. When one takes a closer look at urban processes, the relationships between different social actors and their specific interests become clearer, among which one can mention the owners of the means of production, landowners, marginalized social groups, real estate developers, and the State (Corrêa, 1989).

The urban space production process in Latin American cities is complex because, at the same time that it is shaped by common dynamics derived from capitalist logic, it also exhibits specific features linked to cultural and structural aspects. In the case of Rosario, for example, a very particular characteristic can be seen in the commercialization of urban land as a commodity, where exchange value prevails over use value. This specific feature is the result of the financial crisis that has affected Argentina in recent years, and is manifested in the sale of properties in U.S. dollars (USD), which influences the process of reterritorialization of migrants, who must deal with this variable. During the elaboration of the master's thesis from which this article is derived (Oliveira, 2021), contact was established with the owner of a real estate company in Rosario, who clarified that the purchase and sale of properties in USD is an unnatural practice that has been taking place throughout Argentina for at least 25 years now. This is a reflection of the financial crisis and the lack of credit, and immigrants contribute to energize this market.

The positive impact of Brazilian migration on the local economy has been noticeable in the real estate market. The rent expense accounts for most of the monthly income of these migrants. It is worth noting how research has revealed that the Rosario real estate market is also driven by the migration of students from other regions of Argentina and Latin American countries. However, the contribution of the Brazilian community is particularly significant. This is due not only to the notable increase in Brazilian immigrants, but also to the fact that they pay their rents in Brazilian

reais (BRL), a currency that has increased its value in the face of the Argentinian peso devaluation, thus providing greater stability to these migrants and allowing them to take on longer rental contracts. It should be pointed out that this injection of money into the local economy is not accompanied by a greater filling of local job positions, since the main purpose of Brazilian migrants is to study and not to work.

As for the profile of Brazilian migrants, José,<sup>5</sup> who owns a real estate company, states that most of those who sign a contract are men and do so for a period of between 12 and 18 months. He comments that the expenses are usually divided between two or three migrants, that they are generally good payers, and that the amount of these expenses is around 10 000 Argentine pesos per month<sup>6</sup> (José González, personal communication, February 12, 2020).

Students generally tend to be located in the downtown area closest to the Medical School. This choice is made because of the ease of access to a series of urban benefits: diversified commerce, better urban mobility, and openness to public services, especially health and education (mainly for those who have children). Migrants who arrive and do not know the city, choose the downtown as the safest place to look for living space and settle down.

The location ends up being, at least initially, more important than the house structure. From the interviews insights were gained into the cases of many Brazilians who, upon arriving in the city, preferred to stay in student housing, without much comfort or privacy, rather than looking for living space in the peripheral region or in other municipalities of the metropolitan region that would be more affordable to rent than the mono-apartments in downtown Rosario.

The second reason is due to the social relations that attract them to the downtown: their social networks contacts that already live in these localities, the contact with students from other parts of Latin America and the interior of Argentina who also migrate to study at the UNR and choose the downtown to settle, especially in the vicinity of the Medical School.

The presence of Brazilians has led some real estate companies to develop new ways to exploit the more fragile condition of these foreigners in Rosario and in other Argentinian cities that receive Brazilian students. It is common for real estate companies to request certain corroborative documents before closing the contract: proof of income, property guarantee, among others. The requirements of the real estate companies may be higher or lower depending on the company; in some of them, it becomes practically impossible to rent.

Since Brazilians do not have an employment contract when they arrive in Argentina and do not know anyone who can act as a guarantor, real estate agencies offer the option of them (migrants) giving a large sum of money called a security deposit, which is returned at the end of the contract. The option of renting by means of said deposit is the only way that the great majority has to get a residence, which compromises their budget and makes the first few months difficult, since one has to pay the monthly rent altogether with the deposit, plus utility expenses: water, electricity,

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<sup>5</sup> The names of the interviewees were changed for privacy purposes.

<sup>6</sup> At the time of the interviews this figure amounted to 715 Brazilian BRL, or 162.92 USD.

gas, etc. In addition to the rent, the deposit, and the expenses, the real estate agencies charge a commission, making the first months of residence in Argentina even more expensive.

In Rosario, few are the Brazilians who take the responsibility of renting a residence by themselves. The implications of finding a place by oneself and the associated negotiations with the real estate agency (or directly with the owner), assuming the rent and other expenses, is a difficult dynamic, taking into account that many Brazilians arrive without good command of the language and without the necessary documentation. Therefore, most of them split the expenses with another one or more people.

Thus, from the moment Brazilians arrive until the end of their stay in Argentina, they establish an intimate relationship with the real estate market. This relationship remains hot mainly in the first months of the year when many Brazilians arrive desperate for a place to live and end up complying (out of ignorance or necessity). The conditions imposed by real estate companies exacerbate the cost of living and become a necessary evil. These companies know that Brazilians need housing, and that when they arrive in Argentina they bring with them financial resources to support and protect themselves in case something goes wrong. Therefore, assuming the law of supply and demand, real estate capital establishes conditions that end up being accepted.

When it comes to the initial expenses necessary to settle in Rosario, most of them pertain the gaining access to and the rent of housing. Martin, one of the Brazilians interviewed, recounts his initial expenses with the apartment:

When I arrived, I went to live in a small apartment that was shared by three people, the expenses were split accordingly. At that time, I was charged about 3 000 reais [approximately 697.67 USD]<sup>7</sup> to move in. This amount corresponded to 1 500 reais in rent plus 1 500 as a security deposit that would be split at the end of the contract. All this was split in three, so it was not too expensive (Martin Rodrigues, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

Regarding costs of rent, it is important to keep in mind that the amount of money spent is related to the migrants' length of stay. The research showed that Brazilians who have stayed longer in the city know its dynamics better, master the language, and are thus able to find better and more affordable housing. Martin, for example, who does not work and supports himself with remittances sent by his family from Brazil, lives with a monthly sum of around 800 BRL (approximately 185.36 USD) and commented that he lived at ease. Of that amount, about 500 BRL (approximately 116.27 USD) are allocated to rent (62.5% of his income), and he stated that the place is good. Many Brazilians, especially newcomers, usually pay that much for a single room.

It is important to address the relationship between Brazilian migrants and the real estate sector, because in addition to showing the positive impact of this population on the local economy, this relationship demonstrates the process in which Brazilian reterritorialization ceases to be restricted

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<sup>7</sup> The figures represent the conversion value at the time the interview.

to symbolic appropriation; after the signing of the lease, territorialization is institutionalized. For a better understanding of this dynamic, it is worth taking into account that:

When we buy a piece of land in the countryside or in the city, we receive the title (deed) from the State, regularizing it as private property with certain delimitation, which guarantees us the right of use, earthworks, cultivation, construction, forest conservation, and so on. It is a space of domain and appropriation, whose territorialization depends on our will, financial conditions, current legislation, that is, on our spatial-temporal practices regulated by social norms (Saquet, 2015, p. 109).

Thus, from the moment the contract is signed, the migrant receives the right to use of private property, and the territorialization—which occurs both at the symbolic and concrete levels—becomes effective in an agreement recognized by the State.

Another sector that directly receives the positive impact of Brazilian migrants is commerce, which is one of the most relevant sectors in the area (both in number of establishments and turnover) (Municipalidad de Rosario, 2015). The interviews showed that the establishments most frequented by Brazilians are kiosks and the market, but laundromats, gyms, pharmacies, and other stores appear in the interviewees' reports as well.

So as to ensure their stay in Argentinian territory throughout their education, many Brazilian students end up performing informal activities by offering products and services that are common in Brazil, but not easily accessible in Rosario (e.g., selling food). These are mainly offered on social media networks, which unites the Brazilian community in the online space.

Besides selling food, another activity of Brazilian immigrants is running student counseling companies that take care of the bureaucratic procedures related to the documentation to study in another country. This type of business is established mainly by older migrants, a situation found by Rossini (2003) in another context, where “the opportunities created by the first arrivals in Japan also make possible the creation of recruitment, information, and assistance services for the regularization of documentation” (Rossini, 2003, p. 75).

Along with their daily expending in local businesses, Brazilians who offer products of national origin and/or provide services contribute to the strengthening of the local economy by acquiring raw materials, including ingredients, and packaging. Thus, if on the one hand there is no monthly tuition fee at the public university, on the other hand there is a constant injection of resources into the local economy. This boosts the growth of the commerce sector, the real estate market, and other service-providing businesses.

### *Difficulties in Adapting to the Language and the Teaching Model*

Among the variables that interfere in the reterritorialization process of Brazilian migrants and their stay on Argentinian soil, especially that of newcomers, are the difficulties with the language and other aspects related to student life, such as the method of admission, teaching, and evaluations at the UNR, which is a novelty for most migrant students. We observed that, in terms of language,

difficulties are one of the variables that interfere the most in the successful reterritorialization of these migrants, since many migrate without knowing how to speak Spanish (Oliveira, 2021). These migrants leave their country believing that Spanish will be an easy language for them to learn, and that until they fully master it they can use Portuguese to communicate (which in practice does not happen).

Faced with difficulties found by migrants in adapting to the language, as of 2017 the UNR began to require that incoming students who do not come from Spanish-speaking countries prove B2 level proficiency, which corresponds to the intermediate level (Angelucci & Pozzo, 2020). This requirement took many newcomers and student counseling companies by surprise and was perceived by some as a way of gatekeeping against Brazilians, since a large number of them enter without full proficiency in Spanish and rather learn it over time (during the first year of study).

For María, another Brazilian migrant, the B2 requirement is a way to restrict access, yet not because of the test itself, but rather because of its high cost:<sup>8</sup>

Surely this requirement is intended to restrict, I actually do believe that the proof of competence is a reasonable measure, but I also believe that the university should have its own test and not one that is so expensive. This test is a restriction on those who cannot afford it (Oliveira, 2021).

On the other hand, another interviewee named Luis said he did not believe that the requirement of the B2 level proficiency test is a way to prevent Brazilians entry at the UNR, because knowing how to speak the language of the institution in which the student intends to study is the minimum requirement that he or she should fulfill. Furthermore, by requiring this test, the institution makes newcomers study Spanish more diligently and prepare better for classes (L. Souza, personal communication, February 19, 2020).

Thus, on the one hand, it can be seen that not having a previous command of the Spanish language becomes a source of frustration for many Brazilians; this is due to the initial belief that learning Spanish is a simple process. On the other hand, mastery of the language stands as one of the determining factors for continuity or abandonment of the curriculum; some students choose to return definitively to Brazil, while others postpone their education for a period in which they dedicate themselves to intensive study of Spanish (Angelucci, 2020). Thus, language is strongly related to the socio-territorial dynamics and practices of immigrants, being one of the determining factors in the process of reterritorialization in foreign lands.

The language barrier to reterritorialization is already there from the University Inclusion Module (Módulo de Inclusión Universitaria [MIU]), which is the admission method adopted by the UNR. It is during the MIU course that the frustration of the Brazilians concerning the Spanish language first arises, since the classes are not only directed by a teacher, but also depend on the participation of the students who have to make presentations before class and debate their opinions

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<sup>8</sup> In 2021, the cost of the B2 exam for Brazilians was 373 BRL (Cervantes Institute, 2021).

on the proposed guiding themes. This participation is part of the evaluation, so conversation is essential in the process.

As highlighted here, Argentinian universities do not operate under a restricted admission method based on a test score—as is the case in Brazilian universities—, so each university has its own admission method (as is the case of the MIU for the UNR). In this process, weekly classes are given on topics deemed important for the given degree and that the newly admitted students should be learned. The dynamics of these courses take the form of debates, homework, and group work. The topics discussed in the course for Medical School are human rights, health systems, and university citizenship, but the exercises go beyond the classroom, as is the case of the observation internship, where students must follow a doctor on-the-job for 16 hours and report on the activities witnessed: what the environment is like, why they chose the institution, how was the relationship with the doctor and the team, and so on. This dynamic can take place in Brazil or in Argentina.

It should be emphasized that the internship is observational only, the student should not intervene at any time in consultations or other medical actions. At the end of the observation, the supervising physician will write a brief report letter on the student's behavior. It is important to note that the MIU has already been modified several times by the UNR (a process that has been continuously updated to make it more democratic and transparent).

The interviews showed that the teachers are very understanding of the Brazilians' difficulty in the MIU and encourage them to interact despite their limitations in expressing themselves. Even so, it is common for Brazilians not to participate actively; even students who live in Rosario—already with a background in Spanish—tend not to participate as much in the classes due to a lack of confidence. Despite the difficulties Brazilians face in terms of language, interviewees' reports show that the MIU is perceived as an efficient, effective, and democratic method of admission. In addition, the MIU provides an understanding of the vision of health defended by the university, whose principle is that health is a human right inherent to all people, which must be respected and defended, contributing to the deconstruction of market ideas of health that many Brazilians bring with them.<sup>9</sup>

As for the teaching method used in the curriculum, Problem Based Learning (Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas [ABP]), it is a method relevant for the demands of medical training courses and has been deployed for decades in different institutions around the world (Gomes et al., 2009). This method stands out for subjecting students to problem situations that, upon being solved by them, turns them into active agents in their own training, contributing to the development of

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<sup>9</sup> Since the medical profession has been intrinsically linked to class issues, there is a common belief that obtaining a degree in medicine is equivalent to a successful, high-income professional career, high social status and prestige, among other aspects that have endured in the imagination of the Brazilian population since colonial times. This is because historically only the wealthiest families were able to pursue a career in medicine.

technical, cognitive, and attitudinal skills that will be required in the future when the students become health professionals.

As mentioned, the ABP is adopted by UNR; thus, there are no traditionally divided subjects; content is delivered in an integrated manner. This issue can be better understood in María's relation:

The content is delivered in an integrated manner; to give you an idea: in Growth and Development we study from the evolution theories of Charles Darwin and Jean Baptiste Lamarck to the genetics of Gregor Mendel, all of it in an integrated way. I studied from Jean Piaget to Sigmund Freud (Oliveira, 2021).

According to the interviews conducted and when it comes to the PBL method and its weekly activities, the student analyzes the question proposed and prepares to solve it; a tutor will then guide the students and walk them through the exercises. It is in this environment that the problem is discussed and the student presents his reflections to the tutor and his classmates. In this stage, they study on their own and familiarize themselves with the subjects.

The research found that the PBA method often puts off first-year students who are used to fragmented knowledge since this method consists in approaching problems as a whole. One of the interviewees revealed that a large number of Brazilians choose other Argentinian institutions to study medicine for fear of failing to adapt. Still, all our interviewees agreed that this methodology is efficient and effective since medical professionals should have a complex and comprehensive vision of the most diverse situations in order to provide the most complete care to patients.

## SOCIAL NETWORKS OF BRAZILIANS IN ROSARIO

### *The Territorialities of the Migrant-Student*

The role of social networks stands out when the concept of territory is employed to understand the migratory process, and the establishment of territorialities that can be marked by episodes of conflict and/or cooperation among the other social actors that are part of said process. The mutual aid and social networks established among migrants are a feature of reterritorialization, as well as of the symbolic and affective identities that are formed in the new territory (Saquet, 2005).

The value of social networks has been addressed in several studies that reinforce the potential of such networks to better understand the migration phenomenon. In this sense, and in the case of this analysis, social networks are established between Brazilians interested in facing this challenge—even before their arrival in Argentina—with those who have already settled (this networking is done over the Internet). This initial contact is aimed at obtaining information about the procedures, as well as at mapping people with whom, upon arrival, the rental costs can be divided. Social networks, both online and face-to-face, are fundamental for the reterritorialization process.

When speaking of the first days of Brazilian migrants in New York, Margolis (1994) reflected on the importance of social networks for support and adaptation, especially for newcomers. In the case analyzed by the author, contact with other Brazilians was identified as fundamental for finding a place to live and a job. She relates the case of Mrs. Dahlia's guesthouse, a Brazilian woman famous in the community for receiving many migrants during the first days of their arrival. It was related to her that when there were no vacancies, the owner of the guesthouse even chose to sleep on the floor so that her bed could be rented to migrants:

From conversations with several hosts and with Mrs. Dahlia herself, it became clear that her guesthouse is much more than just a place to stay. It is at once a school, a counseling center, an employment agency, and a legal aid association, which provides newcomer immigrants with most of the information they need and the aide they require during their first days in New York (Margolis, 1994, p. 119).

Also, in this discussion Margolis (1994) introduced the concept of chain migration, which is characterized by the fact that new migrants are pulled in by the encouragement of acquaintances who have already migrated. One of the migrants interviewed by the author said that every year each Brazilian migrant helps bring in at least two others, and so on. This reality applies to migration in Argentina for the purposes of the study; a good part of those who left for Argentina were influenced by a friend or acquaintance who was already there (Oliveira, 2021). This dynamic is further encouraged with the popularization of digital social networks in recent years: many migrants-to-be receive information from online friends who comment on the joys and frustrations of migrant life through digital publications on the Internet.

In Rosario there are no entities such as clubs or associations of Brazilians, a fact that contributes to the first impression that the community is not very united. However, it is clear that a Brazilian social network does exist, although it is not very extensive. This becomes evident in the apartments rented by Brazilians, which are oftentimes shared by two or more; each living space becomes a small support network. Following Granovetter's (1973) concept, the broadest social networks of Brazilians are formed by weak ties established with acquaintances, classmates, friends from online social networks, among others; while the strongest of bonds are established with those with whom the rent is shared and even with the family, which, despite being geographically distant, constitutes a great financial support. In relation to the non-existence of institutionalized spaces for socializing, Margolis (1994) found the same among Brazilians in New York. Among the author's explanations, which can also be extended to the reality of the migrant-student in Argentina, it is found that Brazilians in both contexts do not plan to stay permanently in the destination country. They think about returning, since a cultural element is also involved:

To begin with, Brazil does not have the same tradition of mutual interest clubs or associations as in the United States. As anthropologist Kottak noted, "[The] typical American belongs to innumerable groups that are not based on family ties. These groups may include churches, political parties, clubs, teams, professional groups, organizations, associations, and committees. In Brazil, where home and the extended family vigorously protect its members



from the outside world, associations that are not based on family ties are very rare.” Brazilians tend to live close to other family members, much more so than Americans, and spend much of their free time with them. Meeting strangers to talk about gardening or philately, or to plan a bake sale, strikes Brazilians as activities strange to them (Margolis, 1994, p. 304).

The interviews also revealed that Brazilians tend to establish ties with their compatriots right from the beginning when looking for someone to share apartment expenses with. They also, nonetheless, constantly seek to establish contact and friendship with Argentinians. This interest is based on the possibility that friendship with them will generate a deeper sense of belonging, as well as improve their command of Spanish. That is to say, just as there is bonding among Brazilians, they also seek to for a certain distance from one another, since no complete reterritorialization can take place without establishing significant relationships with Argentinians.

A complex network of both strong and weak ties was identified among migrants, in which each node has its respective influence on the decision to leave and on the strategies to stay. This network is made up of immigrant groups in digital social networks, student groups, churches, other migrants, consulting firms, Brazilian families, real estate agents, the local population, and Argentinian public institutions.

Upon arriving in a location, the migrant gradually establishes new social relationships; the construction of these networks is a strategy to facilitate their insertion, for example, in the labor market (Brumes & Da Silva, 2011). The constitution of social networks also articulates the migrant’s reality, as these networks provide migrants with a sense of belonging and identity. It is a way of strengthening themselves in the face of adaptation difficulties (Brumes, 2013).

One point of convergence between the current analysis and Margolis’ (1994) research is the claims made by Brazilians about their compatriots. Just as reported in New York, it is common for Brazilians in Rosario not to keep good communication among themselves; still, Margolis (1994) invites us to reflect on the extent to which these statements are factual, since, in the case of Brazilians in New York, their existence would not be possible without at least one other Brazilian in their social network. Moreover, most of them settled with the help of other compatriots. The author reminds us that free time is spent with other Brazilians, and the same is true in the case of Rosario. For example, when they arrive in Argentina, they soon seek out other Brazilians as first friendships, to share expenses, they look for older students to understand the day-to-day life at the university and receive advice for exams, and so on.

The Facebook group of Brazilians living in Rosario was consulted extensively during our research, and numerous cases were found that show that this community is really supportive. We witnessed a case in which a young man was the victim of a scam after renting a studio apartment and making the deposit before arriving in the city: when he arrived in Rosario, he realized that his money was scammed from him. He found himself without a place to stay and without resources to rent another. When he shared his situation in the group and asked for help, several compatriots showed their solidarity and he was provided with a place to stay for the first month without, cost-free, which allowed him to get back on his feet. In the group, it is also common to find people

who donate second-hand furniture and didactic material, as well as the exchange of relevant information for the newcomers, among other forms of support.

The topic of social networks went through several stages in the interviews but became rather explicit when surveying migrants in Focus Group 2, who are evangelicals and members of the same church (the Adventist Church). The topic of social networks was not a specific question in the interview, however, while in conversation with one of the interviewees, she evoked that issue and commented that the fellowship with her church members was very important for her adaptation. She also stated that the Argentinian members of the Adventist Church were quite welcoming, and this positively influenced her stay.

The fact that this social network is constituted not only by Brazilian migrants, but also by Argentinians, has strengthened them (migrants), even in the face of xenophobia, since their defense comes from Argentinian citizens. In the case of the Adventist Church, this network even aided in developing a sense of belonging, since the interviewee revealed that when they are together they feel part of a family, evidencing that at least in the moments when they are together, they do not perceive themselves as foreigners, but as part of a whole. Thus, the identity of the migrant gives way to that of the family member.

#### CLOSING REMARKS

Based on the assumptions presented so far in this article, the migratory movement of Brazilians into Argentina was perceived as motivated by the way in which educational policies of access to public higher education are structured in Brazil, since they favor people from wealthier social classes, thus maintaining the status quo of the Brazilian public university as an *elite space*. The migration of Brazilians to Argentina has proved to be a fruitful area of analysis, as it invites us to account for aspects beyond the economic dimension. In this case, we are dealing with a migration motivated by educational purposes, involving two underdeveloped South American countries, and with several notable specificities. It is noteworthy that this migration does not originate in the search for insertion in the labor market; moreover, the flow of remittances follows a direction contrary to what is observed in other migration studies. In this context, the money flows from the country of origin to the migrant in the destination, and is used in the process of reterritorialization.

If admission to a free public university in Brazil is already a complicated process (mainly for the working class, country people, full-blooded Native Americans, black people, transgender populations, etc.), the situation is even worse in schools such as the medical school, which enjoy social prestige and good incomes, and thus their vacancies end up being filled by those who had the financial conditions to invest in preparatory and private schools and courses. A way of circumventing this would be to gain admission into a private university, but the costs of medical school added to the law of supply and demand cause the monthly fees to be very high. In this context, migration appears as the only option for accessing public, free, and quality higher education, a reality available in Argentina.

Besides admission not depending on selection processes, other factors also contribute to making Argentina an attractive destination for Brazilians: 1) the proximity of the Argentinian territory (being viable to move between countries by car, bus, or plane); 2) the MERCOSUR agreement, which allows entry without requiring a visa; 3) the value of the Brazilian real against the Argentinian peso; 4) the high quality of the institutions that offer free services; 5) the possibility of learning and improving another language; and 6) in the case of Rosario, the lower cost of living when compared to Buenos Aires.

The Brazilian community, as well as migrants from other parts of Argentina and Latin America who migrate to Rosario to study, contribute to the local economy. In the case of Brazilians, there is the insertion of money in commerce and the real estate market without these migrants occupying job vacancies otherwise available for the local population to fill. This is one of the specificities of student migration that has the potential to be explored in other studies.

Social networks, formed among migrants and also including different social actors, are highly relevant to the success or failure of the reterritorialization process. In the case of Brazilian migrants, their networks are made up of people from both the territory of origin and that which they currently occupy. This makes the presence of migrants turn Rosario into a networked territory, and migrants into actors with influence in multiple fields of action. Social networks have proven to be a fertile topic for future research, especially taking into account the role of religious institutions.

The results of this study show that migration favors Brazilians in some areas, such as the value of the Brazilian real over the Argentinian peso. However, Brazilians are disadvantaged in other fields, especially when it comes to rent costs. Finally, it is important to note that many Brazilians migrate without being fluent in Spanish, which makes linguistic adaptation one of the main obstacles in their reterritorialization process.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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