

# “You’re Better Being Poor Here”: Migration Decision-Making and Political and Lifestyle Considerations Among Qualified Brazilians in Portugal

## “Es mejor ser pobre aquí”: procesos de toma de decisiones sobre migración y consideraciones políticas y de estilo de vida entre brasileños calificados en Portugal

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This article looks at the migration of qualified Brazilians to Portugal, with reference to the impact of political developments in Brazil on migration decision-making processes and their lifestyle aspirations in the host society. Original fieldwork consists of twenty in-depth interviews conducted with qualified Brazilians in the Lisbon area during 2019. These interviews illustrate how political and economic instability in Brazil contributed to establishing a strong migration imperative. In this scenario, Portugal is chosen as a destination due to its perceived social stability and emergence as a fashionable destination for skilled workers, with the promise of a “cosmopolitan” life. In conclusion, we emphasise the need to consider how political conditions in a sending society and lifestyle considerations interact in the migration decision-making of skilled migrants. This approach confronts assumptions that serve to disguise the precariousness of many Brazilian migrants in Portugal due to their relatively high skill levels and raising long-term concerns regarding the sustainability of lifestyle-oriented migration.



**Abstract**

*Este artículo analiza la migración de brasileños cualificados a Portugal, considerando el impacto de los acontecimientos políticos en Brasil en los procesos de toma de decisiones en proyectos migratorios en relación con las aspiraciones de estilo de vida en la sociedad receptora. El trabajo de campo consiste en veinte entrevistas en profundidad realizadas con brasileños cualificados, en el área de Lisboa, durante 2019. Nuestros análisis ilustran cómo la inestabilidad política y económica en Brasil contribuye a establecer un fuerte imperativo migratorio. En este escenario, Portugal es elegido lugar de destino debido a su imagen de país estable y su surgimiento como un destino de moda para trabajadores cualificados, con la promesa de una vida “cosmopolita”. En conclusión, enfatizamos la necesidad de considerar cómo las condiciones políticas de la sociedad de origen y las aspiraciones de estilo de vida “cosmopolitas” interactúan en la toma de decisiones de los migrantes cualificados. Este enfoque confronta viejos presupuestos que sirven para disfrazar la precariedad de muchos migrantes brasileños en Portugal debido a sus niveles de cualificación relativamente altos y, al mismo tiempo, plantea preocupaciones a largo plazo con respecto a la sostenibilidad de la migración orientada al estilo de vida.*

Migration decision-making; highly qualified; political instability; Brazil; Portugal

*Procesos de toma de decisión; migrantes cualificados; inestabilidad política; Brasil; Portugal*



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## 1. Introduction

Migration decision-making is a long-standing interest in research and policy debate, recognising the importance of personal and professional motivations for moving abroad (see, e.g., Hadler, 2006; Fontes, 2007; Haug, 2008). The study of social and economic mobility imperatives extends to investigating decision-making among youth and young adults, including students, trainees, and early career stage workers (Cairns, 2014; Cairns et al., 2017; see also Findlay, 2011). In this article, we explore this topic further, also considering political circumstances in the sending country and the appeal of “lifestyle migration” (see, e.g., Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, 2016), using the example of qualified people who have moved from Brazil to Portugal (Löwy, 2016).

In the context of the study, the category “qualified” relates to a heterogeneous group, with a wide range of tertiary education level credentials, with analysed group having an attainment level above the Brazilian average. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, in 2019, 17 percent of the Brazilian population aged over 25 years old completed higher education (IBGE, 2020), while most of our interviewees had already obtained higher education degrees before they migrated to Lisbon, with some obtaining additional qualifications while in Portugal. The focus in this article will be on their migration decision-making dimensions of qualified Brazilian migrants, also acknowledging the contradiction between moving to a country as part of a lifestyle migration project and accepting employment characterized by precariousness, arguing that seeking political stability can help mediate any potential tension.

In this study we are also revisiting a classic theme in Lusophone migration research (see Peixoto et al., 2015). Historically, Portugal has been a popular destination for Brazilians, attracted by social, cultural, colonial, and economic factors, as well as shared language, with many studies looking at Brazil-Portugal migration and the settlement experience (see, e.g., Feldman-Bianco, 2001; Malheiros, 2007; Padilla et al., 2015). While some of this work is a re-iteration of the neo-classical migration trope of economic determinism, some scholars have started to emphasise the importance of social and political conditions in sending country and host society, especially at times of instability in one or both (Malet Calvo et al., 2020; Nunan & Peixoto, 2012; Iorio, 2021), alongside recognition of the pursuit of “work-life balance, quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints” (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, p. 610; see also Robins, 2019).

Moving towards the present, and Portugal’s apparent economic recovery since 2015, following the end of unpopular austerity policies, and the outbreak of political instability in Brazil after Rousseff’s election in 2014, we now appear to be observing a new wave of qualified young Brazilians moving to Portugal. This is like what was observed in the 1980s (Malheiros, 2007), but with some new complications, including the rise of conservatism in Brazil.

At a conceptual level, we also acknowledge the challenge of working, and living in a society like Portugal, with precarious labour market conditions for graduates (Cerqueira et al., 2016), despite the outward image of a destination for the creative class (Montezuma & McGarrigle, 2019; Malet Calvo et al., 2022). This creates an interesting dilemma for prospective migrants from Brazil, with the escape from political instability and others social problems coming at the cost of enduring economic instability, risking a possible loss of status, and income. Furthermore, precariousness may compromise the “lifestyle” aspiration, as the available jobs may not deliver the expected “work-life balance,” even if moving away from an unsafe urban environment leads to a less problematic life in other respects. In opening up this debate, we aim to provide illustrations of this form of qualified migration, illustrating its possibly under-reported precarious underside, as well as what “lifestyle migration” actually *means* (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016) in practice to the skilled Brazilian migrants of our study.

## 2. Qualified migration from Brazil to Portugal and mobile subjects

As implied in the introductory discussion, migration from Brazil to Portugal tends to be seen as unproblematic economic escapism, especially for low skilled workers, with the bond between the two countries also seen as a reflection of historical and colonial ties (Malheiros, 2007). However, economic, and political crisis in Brazil from 2014 onwards has led many commentators to think differently, and to emphasise that many recent arrivals in Portugal are highly skilled and qualified, perhaps from relatively affluent backgrounds and certainly capable of making decisions that are not only grounded in material considerations (Fernandes et al., 2018; Iorio, 2021; França & Padilla, 2018).

Advancing this hypothesis further, we might also say that another key trope of neo-classical migration discourse is brought into question, namely the idea that these migrants are seeking permanent settlement in the host country. What emerges is a situation of “intentional unpredictability,” resembling Engbersen & Snel’s (2013) idea of liquid migration. In more sociological terms, Benson & O’Reilly (2016, p. 22) might see such individuals as “distinct in their

structural positioning as people who can approach migration as a form of consumption in contrast to the production orientation attributed to most other migration flows.” We might then argue that this new wave of Brazilian migration to Portugal could be seen as form of liquid migration, with movers seen as “mobile subjects” rather than “immigrants.” A crucial part of this distinction relates to the fact that mobile subjects are in possession of resources — including social and/or economic capital — and use their personal agency to seek out the best opportunities, as opposed to reacting to adverse economic circumstances (Engbersen & Snel, 2013; Cairns, 2014). While we are not claiming that the newer form of migration has entirely displaced the old model — this is patently untrue — we do see the practice as sociologically interesting, particularly in its capacity to inform ideas such as “lifestyle migration”.

We nevertheless need to remind ourselves of other concerns can have a major bearing upon decision-making: in the case of the Brazilian interviewees, a social and political crisis they have left behind, boosted by the election of the conservative president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, and more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. These factors could, in theory, also prolong the length of stays in Portugal, even if people are not enjoying the experience, to the extent of making their migrations appear like the more “classic” forms of population exchange, albeit without a sound economic basis or the desire to engage in permanent settlement. In simpler terms, harsh reality can intervene, putting certain aspirations on hold, moving people into a more traditional migration framework. We are therefore left with the prospect of studying migration decision-making in a state of flux; “a rational attitude developed in response to the institutional uncertainties and opportunities that they encounter” (Engbersen, 2018, p. 68).

We might also add that despite recognising a diversity of meaning in the migration portrayed in this discussion, other considerations are present in relation to decision-making, including gender, social class and even race. While not specific to the Portuguese context, such identifications must always be considered in migration research. In the specific case of this article, social class remains a significant variable to the point of subsuming other socio-demographic characteristics, as we are looking at the experiences of relatively privileged people in Brazil, all of whom have had access to higher education in the past and have been moving to Portugal in terms of lifestyle possibilities, rather than, say, escaping economic destitution or having been discriminated due to sexism or racism (see also Lundström, 2014, 2017; Kunz, 2020). This position lowers the visibility of these latter issues in our study, to the point where there were few, if any, reflections among the interviewees on these issues. We might then argue that the “lifestyle” dimension of their migration subsumes socio-demographic issues, explaining the relative absence of these question from the research, and the analysis that follows.

### 3. Methodology

Fieldwork involved 20 semi-structured interviews, conducted between October and November 2019 in the Portuguese capital city of Lisbon. All the interviewees were Brazilians who had arrived in Portugal after 2016, meaning that some had left the country before the start of the Bolsonaro presidency, at the time when the current wave of conservative politics in Brazil was still in its early stages. These interviewees, all of whom were aged between 21-29 years old and with (at least) undergraduate degrees or, in a small number of cases, were completing their studies in Lisbon, were sourced from contacts made at university faculties and workplaces in Portugal. The final sample had an equal balance between male and female, with representation from different regions in Brazil and a wide variety of educational and occupa-

tional backgrounds. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, with names changed along with any other identifying information to maintain anonymity. Ethical considerations were also considered, and the interviews were conducted only after explaining the purposes of the study and obtaining participants' oral consent.

Consider the preceding discussion, research questions were mainly concerned with migration decision-making: whether these individuals had sought to move to Portugal attracted by economic opportunities and/or social stability, taking into account personal security concerns, and this extends to lifestyle considerations including the quality of life on offer in Portugal. Furthermore, recognising that a migration decision is neither singular nor definitive but in a constant state of flux, and reversible, we also wished to know about the anticipated duration of stays in Portugal, and whether people wanted to return to Brazil. This perspective provides us with the ability to assess migration decision-making as a process, and to test some of the assumptions we, and other researchers, have made about circulation between Brazil and Portugal.

## 4. Findings

In the analytic section of this article, we focus on discussing our findings emerging from the interviews, dividing our attention between exploration of the original decision to leave Brazil, the experience of living in Portugal and prospects for return or further mobilities. The idea is to consider not only what inspired these people to leave but also what has led them to want to stay in their new country. We begin with exploration of the initial migration decision, and the process of leaving Brazil and arriving in Portugal.

### 4.1. Leaving Brazil

Various considerations were present in respect to the making the initial decision to leave Brazil, with the career stage of the interviewee seen as particularly important. Some concerns that emerged were relatively easy to identify and are what we might expect to find among a relatively young group of people: recent graduates wished to gain international experience and establish themselves in the labour market while others with more employment experience wanted to consolidate or improve upon their existing occupational position. Another transversal issue was the political crisis in Brazil, cited as a reason to migrate by all the interviewees, albeit not in the same manner. One way of explaining this was to cite the impact of economic and political turmoil, which threatened personal well-being, their lifestyle in Brazil and raised professional concerns, illustrated by the following account:

I did not feel happy in Brazil, it was making me ill, all that reality. [...] I worked in Brazil, but I didn't think I was compensated enough financially for the workload I had, and the market was not generous with professionals. As much as I tried to change jobs, it always seemed the same, and then, with the crisis in the country, it was harder to get a new job, and so I left. I left work to come here. (Leandro, 28 years old)

This extract is taken from an interview conducted with Leandro, who holds a bachelor's degree in journalism. His account illustrates how migration decisions, even within lifestyle projects, can be multi-faceted, with the political crisis in Brazil having an impact on social and

material concerns. As Knowles & Harper (2009) state, economic interests are also enmeshed in lifestyle motivations, providing us with a reminder of what might be regarded as more traditional or normative migration imperatives, in the form of a lack of satisfaction with salary levels. We might also cite educational interests as influencing decision-making, as Leandro originally came to Portugal to study for a master's degree (now successfully concluded).

Other issues that emerged from the interviews are more closely aligned to the norms of "migration" and mobility in the EU, including the idea that one needs to be constantly investing in oneself, with work seen as a transformative experience rather than a simple exercise in monetary gain, and spatial movement forming part of the broader process of completing the transition to adulthood (Cairns, 2014). There are then signs that people move abroad in search of a different life experience, as opposed to expecting immediate financial gains, especially if this the first time they have travelled outside Brazil.

I write, I was a copywriter at an agency in São Paulo, and I began to feel the need to study literature and go outside publicity. I always wrote for myself, but I had stopped writing for myself because I became a copywriter. My older sister has lived here longer than me, about eight, ten years. I had never lived abroad and thought, "Oh why don't I go there and spend some time studying something?" So, I came here a little crazy, with nothing, right? And then I found a postgraduate degree in literature, and it was this postgraduate study that kind of made me stay. (Carla, 28 years old)

Carla's account suggests a relatively carefree approach to migration, without definite plans or expectations. In Portugal, she has been able to adapt and make use of her talents, providing us with a reminder of the characteristic fluidity of much migration in Europe, contrasting with classical ideas of migration oriented around long-term settlement (Cairns, 2022). She also confirms the importance of Portugal as educational destination for talented and ambitious young people; in her case, focusing on possibilities for obtaining postgraduate level qualifications, as a strategy to produce social advantages and enhance competitiveness in the international global market. Another uplifting experience, this time in a professional context, has been enjoyed by Ricardo:

I am a jeweller, I study jewellery, and Lisbon is one of the jewellery capitals of the world. And I had a great desire to study here and had a school that I had dreamed of for years. I had lived abroad already and had the desire to leave Brazil. Then I was fired from my job in Brazil and won the jackpot with contract termination and unemployment insurance. And it came together with a project that I had just launched in jewellery, so I ended up having a lot of money and I thought: "It's now. If I don't go now, I will never go." Then I came with money to pay for a year of school and to spend three months settled. (Ricardo, 28 years old)

Ricardo, who like Carla has been doing a postgraduate course in Lisbon, also illustrates another aspect of contemporary migration in the EU: that it may involve a great deal of expenditure. In his case, a move to Portugal was facilitated by severance pay he had received from a previous job after it ended. We therefore have an illustration of the idea of the migrant as consumer; in Ricardo's case, coming to a European country to "buy" a year of education and "spend" time in Lisbon attempting to settle. This account gives us some hints as to how lifestyle migration can be a long-term project which encompasses different strategies for taking strategic advan-

tage of mobility capital, in this case linked to education opportunities, aiming at realizing future lifestyle aspirations (Prazeres et al., 2017).

In evaluating the decision-making of these interviewees, leaving Brazil can be seen as a choice made largely in personal and professional terms but with the spectre of political instability lurking in the shadows. For this reason, we cannot say that the interviewees moved to Portugal *only* because of the political crisis in Brazil but rather due to politics posing a threat to their career ambitions, sense of security and “lifestyle” aspirations. In the cases of Carla and Ricardo, we also observe the desire to obtain more educational credentials and experience a different kind of lifestyle respectively, resembling what King (2018) identifies about young people moving within Europe, attracted by a city’s “atmosphere” and opportunities for personal growth. We can hence observe signs that rather than seeking immediate riches, Portugal is seen as a safe place in which these individuals can invest in their own careers and in themselves, away from the chaos of Brazilian or urban living.

## 4.2. Life in Portugal

For many of the interviewees, their current stay in Portugal was their first significant international travel experience. As such, it is useful to examine issues that have had an impact on their everyday lives in their new country, that is, after they have arrived, considering their unfamiliarity with a different, if in some respects similar, culture. To meet this challenge, taking advantage of the experience of friends and relatives who are already living in Portugal was frequently cited as a way of making life much easier, especially in the period immediately after arrival in the country, suggesting that a mobilization of social capital continues to take place (Padilla, 2006). In more basic terms, this may include being provided with a place to stay by a close friend or relative, perhaps during an initial orientation period, soon after arrival. Gabriela, for example, came to Portugal to spend Christmas with her mother in the Alentejo region. Her original intention was to spend three months living in Portugal, but during this time she visited a friend in Lisbon who encouraged her to stay, helping her to find work in a bar.

This friend got me a job and in three, four days I was working informally in a bar, as a bartender. Because they didn’t offer me a contract, I was seen as a tourist. So, I kept working at this bar until late summer, July, August. By then I had made a home, made friends, I was already in a relationship, so I decided it was time to get organized. It had started as a disorganized joke but I was happy and I liked the city, I had already adapted, made important relationships, and I no longer thought about returning to Brazil. (Gabriela, 28 years old)

Gabriela’s account provides an illustration of gradually adjusting to life in a new country in a relatively unpremeditated, even casual, manner. Rather than being the result of a long series of conscious decisions she took advantage of opportunities as they arose, allied to the practical support provided by family and friends. Therefore, despite an apparent fluid and carefree air, Gabriela’s move to Portugal would not have happened without the help of her mother and a close friend, providing an example of dependency on social capital rather than, or as well as, economic resources. Her interview also revealed that an element of de-skilling had taken place in her professional life. In Brazil, she was studying Law at university, with hopes of someday becoming a solicitor. In Portugal, she was not able to return to her studies, explaining why

Gabriela has moved into the hospitality sector and taken on work that does not match her education and skill level.

In looking at the apparent ease with which the interviewees have adapted to life in Portugal, another important consideration concerns their legal status; Gabriela, for example, noted that her initial position as a tourist made it difficult for her to find legitimate work. While Brazilians may face fewer bureaucratic impediments to enter the country compared to people with other non-EU nationalities in Portugal, certain complications still exist. Most prominently, there is an official distinction between (postgraduate) student and what might be termed a regular “economic migrant.” Those who came to study for a master’s degree, and travelled on student visas, had few difficulties, since they are perceived as consumers of educational “products,” and as such, to be made welcome. In contrast, others who came to Portugal as tourists, found jobs and then sought to subsequently regularize their stays encountered problems in applying for a permanent residence permit due to issues such as the lack of a formal work contract. Gabriela in her interview also explains that a lack of knowledge regarding how the residency system operates in Portugal also formed part of the difficulty. In this sense, her pathway resembles what Favell (2011, p. 211) found in some cases of European intra-mobility, in which migrant lives became “adrift, in fragments, with no social or spatial coherence.”

Despite these complaints, no one regretted leaving Brazil. Many interviewees in fact claimed that they had attained a more relaxed style of life in Lisbon, citing the importance of being able to walk safely through the city’s streets at night and use a mobile phone in public without fear of robbery as examples of civic freedom unavailable to them in their former lives. Indeed, Benson & O’Reilly (2016, p. 22) state that “[d]estinations are often valued because of the contrast they offer to what was left behind, their natural and cultural environments significant because of what these offer by way of improving quality of life.” And as Gabriela further explains:

In terms of assault, aggression, this kind of violence, I’m not afraid here and I could not adapt to living again in Brazil knowing that I’m sitting here and I’m going to the bathroom and my suitcase is here and my phone is here, I have no problem with that. And I don’t know if I could ever go back to a life of hiding, not being able to use a headset, not being able to open my wallet on the street to see how much money I have, not being able to show my phone, not being able to take a bus. It’s a freedom that was taken from us a long time ago and we got used to living without that freedom and find it normal to have to take care of ourselves; to find it normal to have to drive around several times because you can’t enter your garage if you have another car standing behind you, and we think that’s normal. We got used to doing that. And now I got used to it in reverse. (Gabriela, 28 years old)

For those who had previously lived in the larger cities of Brazil, the freedom to move around cities like Lisbon relatively quickly and the improved quality of their commuting journeys were major positives. Thus, it allows them to experience a more relaxed urban routine compared to what they had in Brazil, also perceived as a more modern lifestyle in that they can enjoy public space, are not obliged to own a car (which is a fetishized among many middle-class Brazilians) and can even take public transport (Torresan, 2012). Others said that they had previously spent a lot of their time each day in traffic, a situation very different from what they now experienced in Lisbon.



I am from São Paulo and was from the east side of São Paulo. As much as I was from a nice area of the east, where there is a subway and I can go easily downtown, compared to other people it was complicated for me to go to work, depending on the time at which I needed to return home. The transportation, I had to be thinking all the time: “Oh, at this time it is dangerous.” And here, Lisbon is tiny, for me here walking on the street, doing things on foot, spending thirty euros a month for transportation (the cost of a monthly Lisboa Viva public transport pass at the time of the interview), but on transport that allows me to walk much more than I was doing in São Paulo, this is very good. (Ana, 28 years old).

Another reason for staying related to how much further their money seemed to go in Portugal. Although the interviewees did not generally earn large salaries and may have had to forgo a Brazilian middle-class standard marked by “luxuries” like owning a car, employing domestic workers at home or having private health insurance, they felt that they were able to attain the lifestyle they were expecting, looking at what they deemed a “better quality of life.” Compared to Brazil, they viewed life in Lisbon as being relatively cheap, despite the recent rapid increases in the city’s housing market because of the expansion of tourism into residential neighbourhoods (Malet Calvo, 2017). Rita, for example, came to do a master’s degree in Law in Portugal. She decided to stay here after her course had finished, even though she was earning less than she would have if she had returned to Brazil.

Even if I earned a lot there in Brazil, depending on the job, you get ten, 15 thousand reais, which does not happen here, where the salaries are very low. But I wouldn’t trade in making a lot of money there for the quality of life I have here. And this I hear from everyone, from my Brazilian friends here. People even joke: “Oh, between being poor there and being poor here, you’re better being poor here.” (Rita, 28 years old)

In looking at the accounts presented here and considering the question not so much of why the interviewees left Brazil but rather the reasons why they want to stay in Portugal, we can see that a better functioning civic life has enabled a substantive change in the way they live to take place, allowing them to find an approximation of the lifestyles they have longed for. However, this change has been contradictory, coming at the personal cost of enduring precarity, as most of the interviewees were unable to find work in their specialist areas in Portugal, but not to the point where this situation generated significant levels of consternation. In the short-term, we therefore have something of a trade-off taking place, with what could be looked upon as a potential economic loss compensated for by the immediate increase in personal liberty, as well as a change in lifestyle. Therefore, while not completely satisfied with their professional situations at present, the interviewees we cited still preferred their economically precarious lives in Lisbon to what they had left behind in Brazil, a situation that differs substantially from the young people interviewed by Torresan (2012) during the 1990s.

For those individuals from the previous generation, it would have been completely unthinkable to abandon their academic capital and undertake precarious work in Portugal; they would only have submitted to such a trade-off in more “prestigious” countries, such as England, where such sacrifices could be offset by the value of other attributes that were being acquired, such as becoming fluent in the English language. In summary, we can say that for the migrants of our study, lifestyle tends to be considered and seen as a priority, unlike other groups that have migrated for mostly economic and/or political reasons.

### 4.3. Return prospects

What then of prospects for returning to Brazil? This is where, during the interviews, the political crisis the interviewees had left behind became more prominent in the accounts, with a strong aversion towards the idea. This does not mean that *not returning* becomes intentional, especially as staying abroad for a prolonged period might not have been the original intention (see also Carling & Pettersen, 2014). However, following our lifestyle migration approach, we can see how the experience leads to an evolution of mindset, including change regarding the original plan. This helps explain why, out of the twenty people interviewed, only two said that they had plans to return to Brazil. Firstly, Cristina, who trained as a photographer in Brazil but now works at the reception of a hostel in Lisbon, stated that she did not want to do her present job for the rest of her life:

I still am not sure what I want. My plan is to stay a little longer in Lisbon to see if something happens. If nothing happens, I want to return to Brazil. (Cristina, 29 years old)

We can see that Cristina lacks satisfaction with her current position, which is perhaps too distant from her former role as trainee photographer, illustrating the limits of Portugal's attractiveness. Nevertheless, she has not given up, and in fact will "stay a little longer" and "see what happens." A degree of ambivalence is also present in the account of João, an engineer who came to Lisbon to study for a master's degree. But rather than seeking a definite return to Brazil, his position might be best described as undecided:

I have two reasons for not returning. One is that I can find a very good job, the other, to do a PhD here, and then a job of course, with someone funding me [...]. I see it here as a personal and professional experience, to spend just two years. But that is now. It may be that in six months or a year I will tell you that I want to stay. This is a very changeable project. (João, 27 years old)

We can therefore see that his position might best be described as in flux. The remaining eighteen interviewees meanwhile stated, with conviction, that they did not intend to return to Brazil. They indicated that they wanted to move on to another country or stay in Portugal, and all used the political crisis in Brazil as a justification for not wanting to go back, seeing this as something that could hinder their future career plans and be detrimental to their quality of life. For example, as a background to Ricardo had concerns about the current president, and a perception that returning would be taking a step backwards in lifestyle terms, as well as career development:

There are two things that make me not want to go back to Brazil. The first is politics. The president is very bad. I don't know if it's a caricature that people paint and we get from far away, but the feeling I have is that it's impossible. I'm not into living like that, and here we live very calmly. Of course, it's a struggle to live here too, that I've been working like crazy and always chasing things, but I feel that things here are moving forward, that I'm someone in jewellery, that I have an interesting body of work, that people are interested in my work, in buying it. In Brazil that feeling did not exist. (Ricardo, 28 years old)

This is a very strong and convincing rebuttal of the idea of returning to Brazil, with direct links to the Bolsonaro era social and political climate, one of the reasons for wanting to stay in

Portugal. Arthur, a physiotherapist who currently works at an English language school, said in his interview:

The political issue is now the main reason for not wanting to go back. We are experiencing an absurd loss of basic rights. Yesterday the social security reform was approved. It's bizarre to see basic rights, such basic things, being eroded, and people think it's best to take it away for the better. Just like the labour reform, they said that once they did it, it would get better, but unemployment has only increased. My father is 54 years old, worked 20 years in a company, was fired and they paid nothing to him. [...] This issue of unemployment, and the anger and hatred that people are feeling, and also the security issue. Here in Lisbon, it is not the safest city, but I walk quietly at night, two, three am. With a mobile phone in hand. (Arthur, 29 years old)

We also have instances of the desire to remain in Portugal remaining strong, despite evident hardship. Cristiano, a lawyer who stopped believing in the Brazilian legal system, cannot see a future for himself in Brazil. He certainly believes that he will have a better quality of life in Portugal, but his experience to date has been difficult. Without a job, he lives on his savings and is reliant on family financial support, but still does not want to return due to his prioritization of quality of wanting to live in a country with democratic stability. Cristiano's account also illustrates how in some cases "lifestyle" migrants are "consumers" of a mobility project without immediate or obvious economic gains, and a depletion of financial resources. In this case, we are blatantly confronted with the notion that pursuit of a better quality of life is not necessarily connected to an economic goal.

I didn't come to Portugal in search of money or urban security. I'm really looking for quality of life. It is scary for me to see the Brazilian people crying out for a military dictatorship, crying out for retrogression. 57 million people supporting Bolsonaro was the culmination for me, the final trigger. So, I decided to come here. I do not believe in the laws of Brazil, in the legal principles. I lost belief in that sort of thing. I came here without planning, with nothing. (Cristiano, 25 years old)

In evaluating these accounts, we can distinguish between those who want to stay in Portugal and others wishing to move on to other destinations, reflecting another aspect of the idea of the liquidity of the migration experience. Those who have plans to re-migrate also link their intentions to improving their career perspectives, something that can be seen as a response to uncertainties and opportunities, as well as the desire for security. In these cases, the promising "modern" Portuguese lifestyle does not compensate for its precarious labour market. There is however a degree of uncertainty regarding the future. Some of the younger interviewees are, perhaps understandably, still in the process of thinking where they want to go next. For instance, Daniela, a sociologist doing master's degree at a Lisbon university, knows that she doesn't want to stay in Portugal, but is not sure where else to go.

I have a plan to do my master's here in Portugal and then go somewhere else, to another country. Because I don't know if I want to stay here for a long time. But I don't intend to go back to Brazil, no. I've thought about going to Barcelona because there is a doctorate in the area I like, or Berlin because I like it there, but that's just ideas. (Daniela, 21 years old)

Countries like Germany and France emerge as idealized possibilities rather than definite destinations; a kind of wishful thinking that does not recognise the complex realities of these countries' labour markets and the challenge of foreign language acquisition. For example, in the case of João:

If I get a job earning well here in Europe, and there are several possibilities, I will not go back to Brazil. For example, in Germany, I know there is a lot of work in my area. But then I must learn German. Maybe I will start studying. (João, 27 years old)

In contrast, there are others who have accepted Portugal as their new “home” country and intend to remain there indefinitely. They also indicate that they wish to move towards an arrangement more closely resembling permanent settlement. Carla, for example, has enjoyed the lifestyle she has in Lisbon but now wants to stabilize her financial position, work in her own professional field, and buy her own apartment:

I keep comparing the life I have here with the lives of people like me who live in Brazil. I have no desire for anything there. I watch Instagram videos and have no desire to be there. [...] What I want to do here is to have a home, live alone, have my own space, and stay here. [...] I will grow up at work, I already have a nice network here. (Carla, 28 years old)

Towards a conclusion, there is a high degree of certainty about *not wanting* to return to Brazil, but also uncertainty as to where exactly to go next among the interviewees, except for people like Carla who are quite adamant that they want to remain in Portugal. Thus, as Engbersen (2018, p. 67) states, “the social position of migrants and the migration field in which they strategically operate, generates a specific migratory habitus of ‘intentional unpredictability.’” Some interviewees also see future migration happening in a more improvised way, dependent presumably on work opportunities when they arise in the future. Given this prevarication, it is easier to say what it is they don't want, even if it means putting aside some of their professional ambitions: there will be no return to Brazil while Bolsonaro is still president.

## 5. Conclusions

In the opening sections of this article, we asked if qualified Brazilian migrants might have moved to Portugal in response to the political unrest in Brazil, also considering a challenging economic situation in the host country and their lifestyle aspirations. Based on interviews we conclude that this is a real phenomenon, even if it means a decline in economic situation. This explains why one of the interviewees, Rita, stated: “you're better being poor here in Portugal rather than better off in Brazil”, explaining the title of this article.

At the same time, we need to recognise that the picture emerging from our evidence is more complex and nuanced, with the pathway between Brazil and Portugal having an element of liquidity, mirroring what we have found in prior studies of intra-European circulation (see, e.g., Cairns, 2017). The material discussed also illustrates how privileged incomers from Brazil enter a privatized negotiation in Portugal, with potential downward social mobility because of jobs of limited quality. Such a position represents a social and economic trade-off underpinning migration decision-making, in exchanging material concerns for personal safety, and the ability to escape from a highly problematic political crisis and enjoy a “cosmopolitan lifestyle.”

The appeal of such lifestyles, even if not yet attained, may explain why the accounts of settling in Portugal we have presented are upbeat, at least until it comes to discussing the future, and confronting the prospect of returning to Brazil. Putting this reflection into a broader context, we need to acknowledge that most of the interviewees are still relatively recent arrivals who may be content at present, but this position may change as their stays lengthen in duration and economic realities begin to bite. This may have even already happened with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic a few months after the interviews were conducted. As a final note, we might then say that there is still much to be learnt about the migrations of these individuals, including what happens at later stages in the life course.

## 6. Notes

Another contextual aspect to highlight regarding this article is that the data collection took place shortly before the world was transformed by the Covid-19 pandemic, with huge consequences for all forms of geographical circulation, including migration between Brazil and Portugal. In this way, the material presented here becomes valuable as a time capsule, and it allows us to observe the plans and expectations of these migrants at a time when they still could be guided by the global logic of circulation rather than epidemiological concerns. For insight into the impact of the pandemic on student migrants in Portugal, see Cairns et al., 2021a, 2021b; Malet Calvo et al., 2022.

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