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To cite this article: Rafael Azeredo (2023) Brazilians in Dongguan: Migration Across Analogous Industrial Clusters and (Re)creation of Homeland Abroad, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 44:3, 423-439, DOI: [10.1080/07256868.2023.2213883](https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2023.2213883)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2023.2213883>



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Published online: 18 May 2023.



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Brazilians in Dongguan: Migration Across Analogous Industrial Clusters and (Re)creation of Homeland Abroad

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ABSTRACT

This article explores a case of international migration across analogous industrial clusters (IMAAIC), a form of skilled migration largely linked to South-South migration flows. Using the migration from Southern Brazil to Dongguan, China as the unit of analysis, this article presents an ethnographic account based on documental research and participant observation data collected between 2017 and 2021. The findings map the origins of this migration wave and report on the collective homemaking practices of this community in China. The article discusses three characteristics of the Brazilian migration to Dongguan – namely peripheral, narrow, and contingent – and argues that these elements have constitutive effects on the community's social experiences of homemaking in China, particularly by intensifying practices of (re)creation of homeland abroad. This article contributes to the field of Brazilian diasporic research and South-South migration by reporting on an unexplored migrant community. It also proposes that international migration across analogous industrial clusters is a transnational phenomenon that requires further conceptualisation and study.

KEYWORDS

International migration;
Industrial clusters; Brazilian diaspora; Migration to China; South-South migration; Migrant homemaking

Introduction

Walking alone on a Friday evening in April 2019, I entered a café that played Brazilian music, where I ran into a former high school classmate whom I had not seen in over a decade. We greet warmly, as any Brazilian friends who had not seen each other in ages would do. I was then introduced to his friend, who studied in a different school in our city, a man who was a close friend of my cousin, and a woman who knew my parents. Soon, I was surrounded by somewhat familiar acquaintances, telling jokes and tales about the city where we were raised. For a minute, I forgot that I was not in my Southern Brazilian hometown of Novo Hamburgo, but on the other side of the world, more than 18,000 kilometres away from it, in Southeast China. Dongguan, a city in central Guangdong Province, was until pre-pandemic times home to a community of

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thousands of Brazilians who migrated to China throughout the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Away from the large centres of migration, this community remains unknown to most Brazilians and has never been explored by migration studies.

These Brazilians originate mostly from the German-descendant region of Vale dos Sinos, in Southern Brazil, and migrated to China connected to the leather and footwear industrial cluster. In his prominent article on economic development, Porter defines industrial clusters as ‘geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions [...] in a particular field that compete but also cooperate’ (Porter 2000: 15). In this sense, the migration from Vale dos Sinos to Dongguan can be understood as a case of international migration across analogous industrial clusters (IMAAIC), where specialised labourers from the leather and footwear industrial cluster moved internationally to an ‘analogous’ cluster (in the same field) located in Dongguan.

International migration of specialised labourers across analogous clusters is not a new phenomenon. Migration research has explored, for example, the concentration of Chinese migrants in Prato, Italy, linked to the fast-fashion industry (Ottati & Cologna 2015), of Gujarati workers in Antwerp, Belgium, linked to the diamond industry (Hofmeester 2013), and of Chinese migrants in Ghana, linked to the gold mining industry (Hilson et al. 2014). Despite that, migration research has never conceptualised a theory and typology for international migration across analogous industrial clusters. I argue that this type of migration phenomenon deserves further conceptualisation and research, particularly because they provide cases for understanding and studying long-distance international migration across the Global South.

In recent decades, migration scholarship has been repeatedly criticised for its biased focus on the Global North, particularly North America and Western Europe, as destinations for international migrants (e.g. Lucas 2007, Bakewell et al. 2009, IOM 2019). Currently, there is a widely recognised need to further study migration flows and communities beyond these regions and South-South migration phenomena. The focus of migration research on central areas is also seen at the intra-national level. Substantial research has been conducted on traditional metropolitan cities with a long history of immigration, established networks and support structures for immigrants (McAreavey 2017), while non-central destinations for migrants remain relatively unexplored.

This article explores the case of Brazilian migration to Dongguan to further understand international migration across analogous industrial clusters and South-South migration more broadly. In its attempt to conceptualise this case of IMAAIC, this article traces back the origins of the Brazilian migration to Dongguan and defines three characteristics of its nature. It is *peripheral*, in the sense that it occurs outside migration centres, both in terms of origin and destination. It is also *narrow*, as the skills and qualifications of these skilled migrants are specific to a narrow economic niche. And it is *contingent* in the sense that, despite being a form of skilled migration, it is not entirely voluntary. This article argues that these three elements have constitutive effects on the community’s social experiences of home and homemaking in China, particularly by intensifying practices of (re)creation of homeland abroad.

This article begins by exploring the literature and theoretical grounds that guided this research, followed by methodological considerations. Next, the article presents the research findings, which are described in two parts: The first part draws mostly on

documental research with local news repositories to study the genesis of the Brazilian migration to Dongguan. The second part provides an ethnographic account of the community's social practices of homemaking in Dongguan. Finally, the discussions aim to connect the two parts of the findings. They outline the peripheral, narrow, and contingent nature of this migration phenomenon, and explore how these elements have constitutive effects on the community's social experiences of homemaking in China, particularly by intensifying practices of (re)creation of homeland abroad.

Literature Review

The Brazilian Diaspora and South-South Migration Flows

For centuries, Brazil was predominantly a receiving country when it comes to international migration, and, before 1980, emigration from Brazil barely existed (Margolis 2013). In the past decades, however, Brazilian gradually shifted from a migration-receiving country to a sending country. Protracted and political economic crises, hyperinflation, and a generally pessimistic feeling towards the possibilities of work and wealth in Brazil led to a mass exodus of people from Brazil to other countries in the mid-1980s (Margolis, 1989, 1990; Tsuda, 1999), and, since then, a significant Brazilian diaspora overseas has emerged. In 2020, according to official Brazilian estimates, there were over 4 million Brazilians residing overseas, with the United States of America (USA), Portugal, Paraguay, the United Kingdom, Japan and Italy as their main countries of residence (MRE 2021).

Most of the literature on the Brazilian diaspora focuses on the communities in the Global North. The literature on Brazilian migration to the USA is somewhat robust, with a relatively high number of articles published since the late 1980s (e.g. Margolis 1989). The Brazilian *nikkeijin* migration to Japan is also well explored by literature, as several studies have explored this return migration phenomenon since the late 1990s (e.g. Tsuda 1998, 1999). More recently, particularly since the turn of the century, the literature on the Brazilian diaspora expanded, and several studies have been conducted on Brazilian migrants in Portugal (e.g. Machado 2004), the United Kingdom (e.g. Delamont & Stephens 2008), Spain (e.g. Piscitelli 2007) and Australia (e.g. Rocha 2006).

While the literature on the Brazilian migration to Japan, North America and Western Europe is relatively consolidated, fewer studies explore Brazilian migration to countries from the Global South. Major destinations of the Brazilian diaspora, such as Argentina, Lebanon, Israel and Angola, are nearly unexplored. Even though there were over 10,000 Brazilians residing in China in 2020 (MRE 2021), no research has ever been conducted about this diasporic community.

The lack of studies on the Brazilian migration to countries of the Global South relates to an acknowledged bias in migration research, that tends to focus on South–North migration and overlook South–South flows. Notwithstanding critiques around the definition of South–South migration (Bakewell et al. 2009), several scholars have called for increased attention to this phenomenon (e.g. Lucas 2007, Düvell 2020, Fiddian-Qasimiyeh 2020). South–South migration constitutes about one-third of international migration worldwide (Düvell 2020), and recent studies have shown that South–South migration cases can provide novel insights into migration phenomena. Intra-Asian

migration (Zhou & Benton 2017, Reza et al. 2019) and China–Africa migration (Hilson et al. 2014), are among the forms of South-South migration that have been receiving increased research attention. Despite the increased scholarly interest, South-South migration remains relatively unexplored, particularly South-South flows across long distances (Campillo Carrete 2013). This article aims to contribute to filling these literature gaps that exist in the study of the Brazilian diaspora and, more broadly, South-South migration flows.

Diasporic (Re)creation of Homeland Abroad

The notion of home has long been subject to sociological literature and found specific resonance within sociology of migration, where migrants' understanding, narratives and experiences of home and its relationship with place, identity and belonging have been subject to debate. In studying how Chinese migrants in Germany collectively create a sense of home away from home, Leung conceptualises homemaking as 'a process made up of efforts undergone by an individual or community in economic, social, psychological and political spheres to create a habitable domestic environment' (Leung 2008: 164). The approach to homemaking used in this article draws on Leung's conceptualisation, as sees the (re)creation of home abroad as a relational process undergone by individuals and the community to create a habitable and familiar environment away from home. While these relational processes often involve the formation of close connections with co-nationals, they also include the maintenance and reproduction of class structures and other intra-community dividers, as Gomes has shown when studying the everyday lives of Asian migrants in Singapore (Gomes 2019).

While migration research often conceptualises homemaking as practices occurring within the spaces of the house or dwelling (e.g. Blunt & Varley 2004, Boccagni 2014, Ghimire & Barry 2020), homemaking processes transcend domestic spaces (Arnold 2016). As proposed by Mallett, migrants' 'boundaries of home seemingly extend beyond its walls to the neighbourhood, even the suburb, town or city' (Mallett 2004: 63). Mallett argues that home is not only a place, but also 'a space inhabited by the family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived' (Mallett 2004: 63). The ethnographic account reported in this article emphasises these collective intra-community homemaking practices witnessed in Dongguan, China. It moves the focus beyond households, dwellings and family homemaking, and explores the social relations and routines through which diasporic communities (re)create homeland abroad.

Migrants' collective homemaking practices have also received attention from the relatively new lens of critical migration temporalities. In his seminal study, Cwerner (2001) conceptualises 'remembered times' as the ever-present danger of forgetting the memory of the homeland faced by migrants. Viewed in this way, collective practices of (re)creation of home abroad are an articulation of collective memory to deal with this experience. Cwerner's 'diasporic times', when diasporic communities recreate the social life rhythms of the homeland at the heart of the host society, can also be seen as collective practices of (re)creation of home abroad.

As illustrated in the previous paragraphs, the concept of home in migration studies is multifaceted and has different meaning depending on the angle of analysis (Leung 2007).

According to Ralph and Staeheli (2011), there are two paradigmatic ways in which migration studies have explored and problematised the notion of home. On the one hand, home is explored from the perspective of 'longing for a homeland' and migrants' ties to their country of origin (Fathi 2021). This perspective relates to what Ralph and Staeheli refer to as sedentarist or moored approaches to home. Analyses from this perspective emphasise the strength of migrants' identities and connections with their country of origin, even years after displacement. The other perspective, influenced by the emergence of the new mobilities and transnationalism paradigms (Sheller & Urry 2006), moves away from the homeland as the identifier of home for migrants and emphasises the homemaking processes in the present locations of migrants (Fathi 2021). This second approach also includes studies that emphasise how migrants' home is experienced transnationally, across time and distance (e.g. Wilding 2006).

As argued by Ralph and Staeheli (2011), the challenge for migration studies is to merge these two perspectives and to conceptualise home as both sedentarist and mobile, moored and dynamic. When analysing the homemaking practices of Brazilians in Dongguan, this article explores how these practices are transnational and embedded in the social circumstance and present life in China. However, it would be impossible to underplay the moored interpretations of homeland that are so present in these migrants' daily lives. As it will be argued throughout the article, due to the nature of this migration wave, senses of 'longing for home' are very present elements in migrants' everyday lives in Dongguan, which in turn contributes to intensified practices of (re)creation of homeland abroad. This article, therefore, attempts to provide both dynamic and moored interpretations of migrants' homemaking practices.

Method

This article draws on data from ethnographic research collected between 2017 and 2021. The first part of the findings, which maps the origins of the Brazilian community in Dongguan, is mostly based on documental data from local news repositories published in Portuguese. Even though there are no peer-reviewed publications about this migrant community, there is a limited volume of information published in Brazilian and Chinese newspaper articles and local university repositories, including interviews with several members of the community. These secondary sources were used to describe the leather and footwear industry at Vale dos Sinos, once this cluster knowingly lacks official and systemic records (Schemes et al. 2013). As the ethics procedures followed to collect these data are unknown, I decided not to use third-party interview excerpts and interviewees' names in this article.

The ethnographic account of homemaking practices, reported in the second part of this article's findings, draws on observational data collected during fieldwork conducted between 2017 and 2019. In this period, I visited Dongguan four times accompanied by community members. In these immersive field trips, I attended local fairs, visited households and businesses, attended usual places of social gatherings, joined traditional festivities, weekend barbecues, and family dinners, and took part in festivals and celebrations organised by and for the Brazilian community in Dongguan. In this article, I provide a personal account of these experiences in ways that preserve the identities of everyone involved.

From a researcher's positionality perspective, I was born and raised at Vale dos Sinos and, therefore, have had family members and friends who were part of this migration wave to China. During my fieldwork trips to Dongguan, I was accompanied by relatives and colleagues. Having resided at Vale dos Sinos throughout the 1990s and part of the 2000s, I witnessed first-hand the socioeconomic conjuncture that originated the migration to China. This prior knowledge guided my research around the origins of the community. Throughout this article, I use anecdotal elements of my memories and history for illustration purposes. This reflexive approach, however, does not constitute autoethnographic research. During all field trips to Dongguan, I have identified as an outsider to the community, and so are the impressions reported here. As a migration researcher based in Australia and familiar with Brazilian communities in different places of the world, I also make use of my understanding of other diasporic communities when describing the Brazilians in Dongguan and their idiosyncrasies.

The Origins of the Brazilian Community in Dongguan

Few migrant communities can have their origins traced to such a specific time and place as the Brazilian community in Dongguan. Castles (2010) coined the term 'Receiving Country Bias' referring to the tendency of migration research to focus on the country of destination and immigration phenomena, often neglecting the perspectives of the home country and the circumstances that led to emigration in the first place. Responding to this call, this section emphasises the social processes that originated the emigration flow from Southern Brazil to Dongguan. This phenomenon can be conceptualised as a case of international migration across analogous industrial clusters, where technically skilled migrants from the leather-footwear industrial cluster in Southern Brazil migrated to an 'analogous cluster' (in the same industry) in Southeast China.

The region known as *Vale do Rio dos Sinos* – commonly referred to by the short version *Vale dos Sinos* – is situated in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of Brazil. It encompasses 14 municipalities with an approximate total population of 1.4 million inhabitants (FEE 2020). The Vale dos Sinos region is often associated with the Germanic immigrants that settled in the region in the nineteenth century (Relly 2016), as illustrated by the names of the municipalities in the region – *Novo Hamburgo*, *São Leopoldo* and *Nova Hartz*, to mention a few. These Germanic settlements were established in Brazil as part of a migration program led by the Brazilian Empire to populate the Brazilian territory and consisted mostly of farmers, artisans and soldiers (Arendt et al. 2013). Germanic ancestry and culture are still very present in the daily lives and folklore of the region.

Vale dos Sinos is home to an important leather-footwear industrial cluster. The leather and footwear industry at Vale dos Sinos has its origins in the nineteenth century (Bruha 2014), but it was after the 1960s that it became a key international player in the industry (Schemes et al. 2013). An article from 1972 published in the New York Times already mentioned Vale dos Sinos' growing eminence as a world centre for footwear production, with its manufacturers replacing Italian and Spanish exporters of shoes (Maidenberg 1972). Being raised there in the 1990s, I recall constant visits of international business travellers from North America and Europe to the city, and the region was an internationalised industrial enclave within the mostly rural-based Southern Brazil.

The Leather-footwear Cluster Crisis and the Emergence of a Community of Gaúchos in China

What became known as the Vale dos Sinos leather-footwear sector crisis is a socio-economic phenomenon that occurred in the 1990s, often linked to the economic volatility and Washington Consensus measures applied in Brazil throughout that decade (Araujo et al. 2010, Gallagher 2016). These included the inflation-stabilisation economic measures known as *Plano Real* in 1994, which appreciated the Brazilian currency and furthered the crisis in the export-based sector (Schemes et al. 1998). But the greatest disruption to the region was the arrival of footwear manufacturing and exporting competitors based in China (Lopez 2010, Amaro 2012, Gallagher 2016). Throughout the 1990s many employees of the leather-footwear cluster at Vale dos Sinos lost their jobs in a series of bankruptcies and mass layoffs. In 1992, a local newspaper reported a shift in the unemployment profile of the region, which was reaching mostly experienced and older employees, instead of young people (Araujo et al. 2010).

It is important to note that a substantial part of these jobs was highly technical and specific to the leather and footwear industries. Technical and vocational qualifications were predominant even among high executives of the region. The knowledge was also shared informally through generations of shoemaker families – a person who later accompanied me on one of my trips to China, for example, recounted that their father taught them across all stages of a shoe manufacturing process when they were a kid. Consequently, these specialised employees could not easily transfer to other industries, contributing to the perpetuation of unemployment in the region.

A portion of these jobs lost in Brazil was found in China, particularly in Dongguan, a city in the Guangdong province that was home to an analogous leather and footwear cluster. There are records from as early as 1991 of Chinese companies placing job adverts in local newspapers of Vale dos Sinos seeking shoe technicians willing to migrate to Guangdong (Trevisan 2003). Since the mid-1990s, Brazilian companies from the leather-footwear cluster started gradually moving their operations to Dongguan. Some companies would even organise mass recruitment of Brazilians to China, bringing more than one hundred Brazilians at a time (Gallagher 2016). Brazilians who initially migrated as employees also opened their own companies and brought even more Brazilians to the region (Amaro 2012, Moura e Souza 2015).

The labourers were mostly shoe and leather technicians (Trevisan 2009), such as designers, pattern makers, and international trade specialists, and many did not speak any language other than Portuguese (Amaro 2012, Mattana & Aguiar 2020). Among reasons to migrate, Brazilians have reported the higher wages paid in China to footwear industry professionals and the difficulties in getting a job in Brazil (Gallagher 2016). Dongguan soon became home to thousands of Southern Brazilians, or *gaúchos* – the common demonym for the people and culture from the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul. In 2012, more than 3,500 Brazilians were living in Dongguan (Amaro 2012), of which almost half were reported to be *gaúchos* (Mattana & Aguiar 2020). There was also a substantial number of Brazilians who did not reside permanently in Dongguan but were transient migrants who travelled there often for business purposes. It is common to hear that Dongguan is the largest community of *gaúchos* outside of Rio

Grande do Sul. Although this affirmation is inaccurate in terms of absolute numbers, there may be some truth to it on a symbolic level – the connection to homeland and the *gaúcho* culture was stronger in Dongguan than in any other diasporic communities I had visited or studied.

In the last decade, with the rising labour costs of China, the footwear industry has moved its production to cheaper countries like Vietnam, Ethiopia and India (Moura e Souza 2015). Some Brazilians from Dongguan moved along with the industry, others moved back to Brazil, and others remained in Dongguan. Even though the financial incentives and high payments offered in China were reduced in the 2000s (Amaro 2012), there were still Brazilians arriving in Dongguan throughout the 2010s (Moura e Souza 2015). Such inflow stopped since 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic. Strict lockdowns, factory closures and tough border restrictions resulted in most Brazilians leaving the region and returning to Brazil. Many of those who were in Brazil during the pandemic were also not allowed back into the country, and this contributed to the dissolution of this migrant community, whose future is uncertain. After three years of tough restrictions, a community member estimated there were only 200 Brazilians still living in Dongguan in April 2023 (Mendes 2023).

Brazilian (Re)creation of Homeland in Dongguan

Walking on the streets of Dongcheng, a subdistrict of Dongguan, one could easily see people wearing jerseys of Brazilian football teams. Portuguese was the language spoken at tables of bars, and Brazilian music played on the speakers of several homes in building complexes. More than 18,000 kilometres apart, and literally on the other side of the world, the Brazilian community has managed to create a form of home away from home in China.

During the first of what came to be four visits I had to Dongguan between 2017 and 2019, I realised that there was something very peculiar to this community. It was very different to other Brazilian communities in the United States of America, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Australia. It was even different to the Brazilian community in Shanghai, where I had worked a few years before. Despite the significant number of migrants in the community, members seemed to know each other well, including each other's families, where they worked in Brazil, and where they lived in Dongguan. The Vale dos Sinos accent could be noticed in people's Portuguese, and migrants' routines followed those of Brazil. During working hours, the long and social lunch breaks that are common in Brazil were present. At social gatherings attended, conversation topics included the *telenovela* that was on air on Brazilian television, local news from Southern Brazil, and the Brazilian football championships. There was an abundance of Brazilian food, drinks, and local products. Portuguese was the main, if not the only, language spoken at these social gatherings, and there was even a campus of a Vale dos Sinos university in Dongguan to meet the demand of the Brazilian community. Although embedded in a Chinese environment, there was a welcoming provincial atmosphere to the Brazilian community in Dongguan, as if it was an extension of 'homeland'. As a Brazilian living in Australia, going to Dongguan brought me a nostalgic feeling, as if I was somehow visiting my hometown in Brazil.

Brazilian Ethnic Economies

Throughout the years, complex ethnic economies (Kaplan 1998) were developed by and for the Brazilian community. A Portuguese-language publication from Macau revealed how these Brazilian economies could be experienced in Dongguan:

There are all-you-can-eat barbecue restaurants, beauty salons with Brazilian products, schools that teach in Portuguese, Brazilian football coaches, dentists, and doctors who speak the language of Camões. [At the public market], Chinese merchants shout words in Portuguese. ‘Do you want onions? Tomato? Potato? We have cassava. It’s all good’, says a Chinese woman, without being able to continue the conversation in Portuguese (Amaro 2012) (Freely translated from Portuguese to English by the author).

Dongguan was home to Brazilian restaurants, bars, kindergartens, churches and retail stores. In every subsequent visit I had to Dongguan, I heard about a new Brazilian establishment – a restaurant that prepared Brazilian food, a bakery that sold Brazilian bread, or a butcher that sold Brazilian cuts. In most cases, the owner of the place was known to the person describing it – ‘it’s from the wife of so-and-so’, or ‘the owner used to work at that place’. As impressive as the number of formal Brazilian establishments was the more informal entrepreneurial networks of Brazilian products and services, which included Brazilian personal trainers, manicures, health therapists, and bakers. I came to realise that these entrepreneurs were mostly family members of Brazilians who migrated to China associated with the footwear and leather industry. Often, one of the family members would work in the industry, while their spouse, children or in-laws would engage in entrepreneurial activities targeted at the Brazilian community in Dongguan or a business dedicated to exporting Chinese products to Brazil.

Brazilians or Gaúchos?

If from one perspective there was evidence of a Brazilian home away from home in China, from another perspective the demonym ‘Brazilian’ would not accurately capture the complexity of the homemaking practices witnessed in Dongguan. As much as it was a Brazilian community, it was also a community of *gaúchos*, as people from the Southernmost state of Brazil are known. More specifically, *gaúchos* from Vale dos Sinos, who are known for their Germanic ancestry and culture. In bars and restaurants, Brazilian bands played Southern Brazilian songs. Every weekend, sometimes more often than that, migrants would gather in someone’s house for a *churrasco*, a barbecue-style meal and social practice that is traditional to Southern Brazil. *Chimarrão*, a tea that is widely consumed in Southern Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, was also very present in social events.

In Dongguan, which is home to a cultural centre for *gaúcho* traditions, expressions of diasporic time (Cwerner 2001) are also associated with the Southern Brazilian culture. The 20th of September, known as the day of the *gaúcho* was a festivity celebrated not only in households but also in Brazilian restaurants and schools. In dwellings, there were several *gaúcho* symbols and objects displayed, such as regional flags, traditional knives, and *churrasqueiras* (a kind of charcoal grill used to cook *churrasco*). As Tolia-Kelly (2004) argues, material objects from homeland work both as a buffer from pressures of the outside culture and also to produce a feeling of identity and belonging in

the foreign place. In this sense, the way in which *gaúcho* material objects were used to create a sense of home emphasises the cultural identity of the people who live in Dongguan. The German-Brazilian practices of Vale dos Sinos were also visible in food, anecdotes and slang used by migrants. Intercultural relations were seen among Brazilians, often involving Brazilians from the centre of the country being exposed to the outlying cultural practices of Rio Grande do Sul and the German-Brazilian practices of the Vale dos Sinos for the first time. ‘I learned how to cook *churrasco* with people from the South’, a person from central Brazil told me.

Social Spaces of Gathering

The Brazilian community in Dongguan is geographically concentrated in Dongcheng, a subdistrict of Dongguan, and often resides in the same building complexes. In my several visits to Dongguan, the main buildings where Brazilians lived changed slightly – there was always a new ‘Brazilian building’, meaning many Brazilians were living in that complex. In these complexes, it is common to see people drinking *chimarrão*, gathering for a *churrasco*, or listening to Brazilian music on speakers. But these complexes are not the ethnic enclaves found in several studies of migrant communities (Johnston et al. 2002, Qadeer and Kumar 2006, Eade 2012). They were sophisticated complexes, and, despite the Brazilian presence, the great majority of dwellings were Chinese. Newspaper articles mention that these are considered high-end residential complexes by Brazilian standards, and that many would not be able to live in such residencies in Brazil (Amaro 2012).

The community also frequently attended the same spaces of social gatherings, such as restaurants, bars, parks, markets, and shopping malls. There was often a Brazilian nickname for those places, that everyone was familiar with. As it happened with the residential spaces, in every subsequent visit I had to Dongguan, the go-to places of social gathering for Brazilians changed slightly – there was always a new establishment that had been recently opened or that had recently become a point of encounter for the Brazilian community.

Beyond the ‘Brazilian Bubble’

During my time in Dongguan, on several occasions I heard Brazilians referring to the ‘Brazilian bubble’. This expression comes from the fact that often Brazilians are seen together, and allegedly have limited integration with the host society or other migrant communities. This feeling of alienation has even been reported in newspaper articles (Moura e Souza 2015). Although I understand the reason for this expression, it would be inaccurate to describe Brazilians as oblivious or disconnected from the broader Chinese society, as intercultural relations were a very present element in daily lives. Every Brazilian migrant I encountered seemed to use Chinese technologies, such as WeChat and TaoBao, as constitutive elements of their daily lives. It was also relatively common to see Brazilians speaking Chinese languages, sometimes more fluently than English language. One of the residents explained to me that many Brazilians left Brazil without speaking a second language to work in Chinese factories, and this is how they learned to communicate so well in Chinese languages.

It was also common to see Brazilian-Chinese couples, usually a Brazilian man and a Chinese woman. Evidence of interculturality is also very present among children of Brazilian couples. Very often, children would study in Chinese schools, and young children would have Chinese babysitters. Some families, in fact, mentioned their children as one of the reasons for staying in China and not returning to Brazil – they wanted their children to learn the Chinese language and culture.

Part of the Chinese spaces also seemed integrated with the Brazilian community, to the point that I witnessed people successfully ordering an IPA beer at a Chinese restaurant using the Brazilian pronunciation – *i:pa:* – and purchasing a cut of meat at a Chinese butcher using the Brazilian term *picanha*. In 2003, there were at least three Brazilian barbecue restaurants in Dongguan (Trevisan 2003), where it was possible to see Chinese waiters dressed in traditional Southern Brazilian clothes. In one of the Brazilian companies I visited, I was surprisingly greeted by the Chinese staff with a cheek kiss and a friendly hug – I would never see that in Shanghai, I thought to myself. These intercultural interactions in the workplace were amusing. Staff were harmoniously working in a mix of Portuguese, Chinese and English languages. In one of the factories visited, I was told by the Brazilian manager that they instructed Brazilians to wear less perfume, as the Chinese were sensitive to the fragrances commonly used in Brazil. At another company, a Brazilian employee proudly told me how he had implemented the Brazilian etiquette of queueing before entering the elevator, and how now even Chinese people from other companies in the same building followed it.

Longing for ‘Homeland’

In his theorisation of time in migration through an analysis of Brazilian migrants in London, Cwerner writes that ‘nostalgia and homesickness, or rather, their Portuguese/Brazilian cultural variant *saudade*, is a major feature of the immigrant experience’ (Cwerner 2001, p. 24). This experience, which relates to Cwerner’s *remembered times*, implies that for many migrants, ‘the experience in the host country is a continuous struggle to overcome nostalgia’ (Cwerner 2001, p. 24). If from one perspective the practices of Brazilians in Dongguan blend elements of both worlds and create transnational configurations of home as mobile and dynamic, from another viewpoint, the narratives of homeland as distant, moored and fixed are very present. In comparison with other diasporic Brazilian communities, a strong sense of ‘longing for homeland’ (Fathi 2021) could be noticed amongst Brazilians in Dongguan.

A migrant with whom I was having dinner one day talked about Brazilians who spend their annual holidays in Southeast Asia, telling me they would never do that. They were in China ‘to make money, not to spend it’. On another occasion, I was having lunch at a restaurant with a man who used to live in Dongguan but had since then returned to Brazil, when a migrant who had been living in Dongguan for more than a decade approached. Asking my companion whether he knew of any job opportunities in Brazil, they claimed they would return immediately if they could. After this migrant left, the Brazilian with whom I was having dinner explained the situation to me. Jobs in Brazil do exist, but they are not as well paid as in China. There is often a ‘premium’ in the salary for Brazilians who live in China, and this is one of the reasons they stay. At the same time, the industry had changed, and the placement of senior factory and

technical professionals was more difficult. Consequently, many see their period in China, which commonly lasts for more than a decade, as a period of saving money to one day return to Brazil. For many, especially those who live in China without their families, life in Dongguan is not a matter of choice. They were moved by structural constraints and economic reasons. Arguably, if they could find a job in Brazil, they would go back.

The situations above illustrate some of the 'longing for home' narratives that are very present there. Migrants' conversations largely depicted their life in Dongguan as a liminal period of waiting to return to Brazil. Many migrants had properties in Brazil, while all of them were renting their residences in China. Many reported sending most of their income back to Brazil and keeping their assets there. China was the place to work, Brazil was the place to live. It was during their annual trip to Brazil, for example, that they would go to the doctor, to the dentist, and deal with administrative aspects of their lives. It was in Brazil that they would retire and eventually die.

These cases do not represent the entirety of the Brazilian community in Dongguan. There were Brazilians who, according to others, were 'outside the Brazilian bubble'. These Brazilians socialised mostly with Chinese people and other migrant communities and did not attend the places and events described above regularly. There was also a younger generation of Brazilians who was very connected to other international migrant communities of Dongguan. Even when narratives depict life in China as a liminal period, it is important to recognise that the experiences of these migrants cannot be reduced to a simple period of waiting. As Everaert (2021) found while researching asylum seekers on the border between Mexico and Guatemala, migrants 'inhabit the meanwhile'. Even under conditions of temporal uncertainty and waiting, migrants engage in concrete practices of space and time production.

The observations described in this section point towards intensified practices of (re)creation of homeland among Brazilians in Dongguan. Embedded in the Chinese environment, but anchored on moored notions of home, migrants aim to reproduce practices and routines that are very characteristic of Southern Brazil and Vale dos Sinos more intensively than other diasporic communities I have met and studied. These routines transcend dwellings and social lives and are also seen in the workplace and the city.

Discussions: The Constitutive Elements of Migrants' Homemaking Practices

As described in the second part of the findings, there is a provincial atmosphere to the daily lives of Brazilians in Dongguan, whose practices of (re)creation of homeland are somewhat intensified when compared to other Brazilian communities. This discussions section proposes that such intensified homemaking practices are related to the nature of this migration phenomenon, mapped in the first part of the findings. There are at least three idiosyncratic characteristics to the nature of this migration flow worth highlighting in this analysis – the migration from Southern Brazil to Dongguan is *peripheral*, *narrow*, and *contingent*.

Its *peripheral* nature means it occurs outside the main migration centres, both in terms of origin and destination. Not only it is peripheral in the sense that it is a South-South migration flow, but also in the sense that it is outside the main capitals, where there

are established networks and support structures for immigrants (McAreavey 2017). Its peripheral nature means it is embedded in less cosmopolitan environments, marginal to global cities (Sassen 2000). Consequently, it remains disconnected from the large communities of the centres, and it is relatively unknown and understudied. Its peripheral nature has implications for homemaking practices. Migrants cannot rely on existing networks and support structures, and therefore (re)create them in ways that resemble homeland practices. The peripheral nature also means that many migrants knew each other from the town of origin in Brazil, contributing to the provincial atmosphere witnessed in Dongguan. It also means that there are challenges to integration with other communities and centres – illustrated, for example, by the fact that many migrants moved without speaking English or any language other than Portuguese.

The migration from Vale dos Sinos to China is also *narrow* because, even though migrants are skilled labourers, their skills and qualifications are specific to a narrow economic niche. As noted throughout this article, Brazilian migrants in Dongguan were mostly technicians and experienced industry practitioners. Having higher education degrees was uncommon, although several had technical degrees and qualifications associated with the leather-footwear industry. The specificity of skills means they could not easily transfer across industries and regions. They were somewhat collectively locked in the peripheral context of the industrial cluster, facing specific challenges of integration and mobility, which intensified practices of homeland (re)creation.

The nature of this migration is also *contingent* because it challenges the notions of agency in skilled migration. Skilled migrants are often depicted as migrants who willingly move between countries. In this case, however, the main motivation of the movement is related to job losses and mass bankruptcies experienced in the region. While they are skilled migrants who sustain relatively high standards of living in China, they are not the ‘high flying’ business migrants (Mar 2005), corporate expatriates and transmigrants (Glick Schiller et al. 1995), who are commonly seen among Brazilians in Shanghai, for example. In this sense, the migration from Brazil to China can be framed as both voluntary and forced, challenging the dichotomic assumptions behind these concepts. This translates into the experiences and narratives of longing for homeland that are so present among these migrants and contributes to the nostalgic re-creation of homeland experiences. The contingent nature of this phenomenon means that many migrants moved with their families rather than alone. These families, which include spouses, children and in-laws, constitute an important element of re-creation of homeland via entrepreneurial activities and socialisation routines, which in turn also contributes to the provincial characteristics of the place.

I argue that these characteristics are constitutive elements that shape the experience of homemaking reported. More specifically, I argue that they contribute to intensifying the practices of re-creating homeland described before. Even though these discussions concern the Southern Brazilian migration to Dongguan only, it can be argued that they could be representative of other cases of international migration across analogous industrial clusters. I propose that migration scholarship should be concerned with outlining such phenomenon and include IMAAIC in migration theory and typology. Future studies could also analyse whether the characteristics found in the case of Southern Brazilian migration to Dongguan are also applicable in other cases of international migration across analogous industrial clusters.

Conclusions

This article responds to calls for migration study to further investigate South-South migration by exploring the community of Southern Brazilians in Dongguan, China – a relatively unknown migrant community located outside traditional migration centres. This migration phenomenon is a case of international migration across analogous industrial clusters, where technically skilled migrants from the leather-footwear industrial cluster in Southern Brazil migrated to an analogous cluster in Southeast China.

This article explores the origins and nature of this migration flow and provides an ethnographic account of migrants' collective experiences of homemaking in China. This article emphasises three characteristics of the nature of this migrant community. It is considered peripheral as it takes place outside of migration centres at both the starting and ending points. It is also narrow, as the skills and qualifications of these migrants are specific to a narrow economic niche. Additionally, it is contingent, as, although it involves skilled migrants, it is not entirely voluntary. The central argument of this article is that these three characteristics have constitutive effects on the community's social experiences of homemaking in China, particularly by intensifying practices of (re)creation of homeland abroad.

Apart from its empirical contribution reporting on a community thus far never explored by migration studies, this paper also contributes to discussions in sociology of migration and migrant homemaking theory. Studies on migrants' experiences of home tend to either emphasise the notion of home as moored and fixed, as or as mobile and dynamic, consisting of transnational practices of homemaking (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, Fathi 2021). This article attempts to merge these different views by emphasising both perspectives. It claims that, due to the peripheral, narrow, and contingent nature of this community, social homemaking in China is shaped by moored relationships with homeland, which translates into intensified practices of (re)creation of homeland abroad.

This paper proposes that international migration across analogous industrial clusters is a phenomenon that challenges traditional migration typologies and needs to be understood in its own complexity. A further conceptualisation of this phenomenon is required. Future studies can explore other communities to understand whether the peripheral, narrow, and contingent elements are specific to the case of Southern Brazilians in Dongguan, or are concepts that can be used to better understand the homemaking practices of similar communities worldwide.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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