

The Unbearable Lightness of Things

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The project "[Atlantic Crossings: materiality, contemporary movements and policies of belonging](#)" is a quest to follow the objects in particular, and "things" in general. From surveys in Lisbon, Oporto, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to ethnographies of transnational families spanning these contexts, the project will unpack the lived experiences of Brazilians and Portuguese circulating between their respective home countries. The goal is to understand the difference materiality makes in dynamics of international mobility. Instead of asking "what's in a name", we ask "what about what's in a suitcase?" And, for that matter, what's in the packages sent from home? What will be bought with remittances money? What will be acquired and fashioned to decorate one's new home? In short, the project explores how "things" can frame, organize and produce social reality in the specific context of international mobility.

The routes, temporalities and patterns underlying the traffic and appropriation of objects compose the lens from which to take a fresh look at the lives of the people in question. The moment in time is of the essence, as clearly reflected by the coverage of the flows of people and capital connecting both countries in their respective national media. The current economic crisis, and subsequent soaring unemployment rates in Portugal, hit the most qualified population the country has ever had. In turn, Brazil attracts attention because it has been emerging as an economic player that is looking to enhance the labour market through recruitment of specialized workers. Furthermore, it will be holding main sports events in the next few years (namely, the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2015), which promise work opportunities. The story, however, is not that simple. Massive protests concerning, in part, these very sports' events have recently startled policy makers and have been ushered the world to pay attention. Moving across the Atlantic to try one's chances in a rather hermetic labour market is also not the most affordable option either. Some Portuguese are

indeed managing to get their qualifications recognized. They are the ones feeding the narratives of successful emigration both through interpersonal social networks and through “Portuguese across the World” -like shows in mainstream media.

Yet, in truth, little is known about Portuguese abroad since the country became an immigration context in the late 70s – researchers focused on the transformations taking place within borders. It is still unclear how the current moment features in the long-standing, inter-connected histories linking the two Portuguese-speaking countries. How the post-colonial relationship re-articulated in the 21st century? More concretely: what consumption habits change when Portuguese engineers, architects and managers have to cope with living in extremely expensive cities? What do unemployed construction and domestic services’ workers who reach their limit bring home when s/he wants to impress friends and family (and keep some of Europe with him/her) but there is little s/he can afford? What business strategies do entrepreneurial Brazilian beauticians take in order to endure the crisis and keep alluring customers to strive for a Brazilian-like body? How do the material surroundings of Portuguese men who find themselves in the small hometowns of their Brazilian wives, whom they met in Portugal, change their view of Brazil – and of their own life-projects? How do the Portuguese wives who travel on the work visas of their husbands reinvent their daily routines, and the rules of conduct they teach their children, in cities that are often talked about as very dangerous in Portugal? We’re counting on “things” to tell the stories.