

Original Article

Re-thinking the Brazilian migration: the agency of highly educated Brazilian women

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DOI: 10.1590/39018/2024.

Abstract

Developing the concept of the “continuum of instability”, we recognise that different phenomena such as agency and resilience are useful to reframe the different dynamics and mechanisms of resettlement and job-education matching in a group of Brazilian women resettled in the Spanish context. This paper contributes to the scientific knowledge of the relationship between strategies of transnational mobility and the reframing of professional identity in the host society. Through the procedure of a qualitative methodology, the data were collected in different Autonomous Communities of Spain during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2021 and 2022. This paper explores the strategies used by highly educated Brazilian women to achieve job-education matches in Spain. To this end, we have analysed the structures of opportunities and constraints that have influenced their career paths in the Spanish socio-occupational context. On the other hand, by considering the micro-analytical level, subjectivity suffers relevant changes based on the negotiation with external factors at macro (structural) and meso (relational) levels, depending on the forms of adaptation and transformation of each woman. In this context, agency and resilience are the nudging factors and become active strategies through the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the new identity in the post-migration phase.

Keywords: Highly educated migrant women; agency; strategies; vulnerabilities; job-education match.

Repensando a migração brasileira: a agência de mulheres brasileiras altamente qualificadas

Resumo

Desenvolvendo o conceito de “continuum de instabilidade”, reconhecemos que diferentes fenômenos, como a agência e a resiliência, são úteis para reenquadrar as diferentes dinâmicas e mecanismos de reinstalação e de correspondência entre emprego e educação num grupo de mulheres brasileiras reinstaladas no contexto espanhol. Este artigo contribui para o conhecimento científico da relação entre as estratégias de mobilidade transnacional e o reenquadramento da identidade profissional na sociedade de acolhimento. Através do procedimento de uma metodologia qualitativa, os dados foram colhidos em diferentes Comunidades Autônomas da Espanha durante e após a pandemia de Covid-19, entre 2021 e 2022. Este artigo explora as

Recebido em: 01/11/2023 | Aprovado em: 06/18/2024



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estratégias utilizadas por mulheres brasileiras altamente qualificadas para alcançar empregos correspondentes à sua educação na Espanha. Para tal, analisamos as estruturas de oportunidades e limitações que influenciaram os seus percursos profissionais no contexto sócio-ocupacional espanhol. Por outro lado, ao considerar o nível micro-analítico, a subjetividade sofre alterações relevantes a partir da negociação com factores externos a nível macro (estrutural) e meso (relacional), dependendo das formas de adaptação e transformação de cada mulher. Neste contexto, a agência e a resiliência são os fatores de estímulo e tornam-se estratégias ativas por meio do processo de desconstrução e reconstrução da nova identidade na fase pós-migratória.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres migrantes com elevado nível de educação; agência; estratégias; vulnerabilidades; correspondência entre emprego e educação.

1. Introduction

The main position of this paper is that emigration and resettlement produce a profound identity transformation on migrant women who have moved from different areas of Brazil to Spain, and that resettlement is based on a “continuum of instability”. Precariat and instability are, in fact, constant elements in the process of achieving a permanent position in the context of the country of destination. It, thus, adopts the perspective of migratory careers (Martiniello and Rea, 2014) in order to explore different paths of emigration and resettlement, as well as different ways of managing the process of identity transformation. The existence of a “continuum of instability”, proposed as a term to reform personal experiences of migration and as a step in the transition from instability to a permanent status of stability in the personal and professional dimensions, is an important conceptualisation to explain the heterogeneous strategies adopted by Brazilians, which include: a) transnational mobility as a form of shifting between the home and the host country to find their professional path; and b) the processes of reframing and reconstruction based on a new ‘hybrid’ identity formation in a transnational setting. The migratory career lens allows us to explore the migratory trajectories of this group of highly educated Brazilian women from a multidimensional analytical perspective, taking into account different elements at the macro (structural), meso (relational) and micro (individual) dimensions of their migratory careers (Di Martino, 2024; Di Martino et al., 2020).

In order to contextualise the presence of Brazilian migrants in Spain, we should clarify that it can be divided into two periods: in the mid-1990s we found highly qualified profiles, in contrast to the low-skilled profiles of the 2000s (Parella and Cavalcanti, 2010). “*The type of work that these women do in Spain generally keeps them in an irregular situation, as they are women who have entered Spain as tourists with their passports and do not have a residence or work permit*” (p. 22). It should also be stressed that “*another characteristic of Brazilian immigration to Spain is the high rate of intermarriage with Spaniards*” (p. 19), which “*can favour social mobility aimed at achieving better labour insertion in Spain (obtaining papers, economic security if the spouse is employed, etc.) as well as relational mobility (opening up to the social networks of the host society)*” (p. 26).

2. The ‘migratory career’ and female migrants’ professional development

The concept of ‘migratory careers’ is the lens that allows us to go beyond the personal expectations, ambitions, aspirations and desires of individuals, in order to understand the invisible dynamics in a process of constant change among highly educated migrant women during the transitions from the home to the host country (Martiniello and Rea, 2014). This is an analytical tool useful for a better understanding of the articulation of

migrant women's migratory trajectories on different socio-analytical dimensions: the personal dimension (micro level), the relational and systemic dimension (meso level), and the dimension of structures of opportunities and constraints (macro level). In fact, this tool can help in the process of reconstructing migrant women's experiences in different life domains, taking into account the intersubjective and intra-subjective dimensions, the relational dimension and the influence of the macro-sociological dimension of each individual from a life course perspective. The conceptualisation of migratory careers has been used in previous studies on migrant women working in low-skilled sectors (Godin et al., 2015; Poncelet and Martiniello, 2015), but it has not been applied to analyse the migratory processes of highly educated women. The literature on highly skilled women has highlighted, on the one hand, that overqualification and deskilling are the main problems in the process of professional career building, due to structural constraints in the destination country (Liversage, 2009a; Liversage, 2009b; Kofman, 2012; Raghuram and Kofman, 2004). On the other hand, the loss of competencies and deskilling are also linked to family responsibilities (Meares, 2010; Roca, 2016; Timmerman et al., 2015). In fact, highly educated migrant women often have to enter the labour market through the quickest route, such as the domestic work and the care sector.

In this line, it should be noted that the literature on highly educated migrant women, or migrant women with tertiary educational studies, is quite new compared to the field of highly skilled migration studies (Kofman, 2000). It has been recognised that the international movement of highly skilled professionals is also a gendered phenomenon (Docquier et al., 2012) and that migration can be a means to overcome gender discrimination in the country of origin (Ruyssen and Salomone, 2018). Difficulties for migrant women to enter high-level labour markets have been identified in several countries, such as Denmark (Liversage, 2009a; Liversage, 2009b), New Zealand (Meares, 2010), Switzerland (Riaño and Baghadi, 2007; Riaño, 2016); the United Kingdom (Kofman and Raghuram, 2004); between Germany and the United Kingdom (Föbker and Imani, 2017); México (Ramírez and Tigau, 2018; Ramos, 2018); and Spain (Fernández and Parra, 2013; Roca, 2016; Shershneva and Fernández, 2018). Other international studies (Grigoleit-Richter, 2017; Killian and Manohar, 2016; Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan, 2016) also show that the intersection of gender and ethnicity is another constraint for the development of migrant women's careers and the achievement of a job-education match. Deskilling is the higher risk in the process of finding a socio-occupational position in the destination country (Raghuram and Kofman, 2004). Other studies focusing on the differences between migrant women and men in integration processes, such as Sandoz's (2019) study in Switzerland, show that the interplay between structures and agencies shapes different settings related to different opportunities and constraints for each migrant situation.

3. Regimes of mobility and female Brazilian migrants

Mobility regimes also affect the design and development of the migratory careers of migrants (Glick and Salazar, 2013), especially women (Di Martino et al., 2020). The migration system and visa policy in Spain are key factors that foster or hinder the entry of foreign populations with skills or a high level of education (university degree; master's or PhD), as well as privileged treatment in the acquisition of Spanish nationality (Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2020), within migration considered privileged (Petroff, 2017). Brazilian women do not need a visa to enter Spain as they can enter as tourists for a maximum of 90 days and, after that, they can enter the Spanish labour market irregularly, for example in the care sector economy (Lutz, 2008; Parella and Cavalcanti,

2010). If they choose this option and maintain it over time, they run many risks of increasing their vulnerability: falling into trafficking and smuggling networks (Parella and Cavalcanti, 2010); or becoming trapped in vicious circles of underemployment. Among the obstacles to labour market access in a situation of job-education mismatch for highly educated women is the process of accreditation of their university degrees, whose long and tedious procedure leads to hopelessness, increased feelings of inferiority (Shershneva and Fernández, 2018) and the emergence of phenomena of deskilling and occupational immobility (Kofman, 2000; Liversage, 2009a; Liversage, 2009b). The process of recognising foreign qualifications is the key to finding a job that matches their training; in fact, its absence leads to mismatches between jobs and training and to phenomena of over-qualification and loss of skills (Kofman, 2000; Liversage, 2009a; Liversage, 2009b; Shershneva and Fernández, 2018). At the same time, long-term visas are required for study, residence and work, and these must be applied for within six months of the start of the journey. In light of these elements, we will explore the complex ways in which highly educated Brazilian women have combined different strategies to overcome the structures of opportunities and constraints in Spain, in order to (re)construct their migratory careers. To this end, through the lens of the “migratory careers” (Martiniello and Rea, 2014), the *“intertwined logics that construct their migratory processes”* (Di Martino et al., 2020, p. 116) will be identified. Furthermore, through such a lens, opportunities and challenges can be identified on the basis of public and private spheres, and “made sense of and dealt with as their personal and professional trajectories abroad unfold”. In the process, *“the aspirations initially lodged in the migration project evolve to achieve job matching and work-life balance”* (Seiger et al., 2020, p. 18).

Finally, the study of spatio-temporal trajectories is linked to the strategies adopted by foreign women in the destination country, in order to understand in depth the interrelated elements that influence the decision-making process towards rootedness or return (Di Martino, 2019). The literature on highly educated women argues, from a macro and micro-analytical perspective, that overqualification and deskilling are the main problems in the process of professional career building due to structural constraints in the host country (Kofman, 2012; Liversage, 2009a; Liversage, 2009b; Raghuram and Kofman, 2004). Achieving a job-education match in high-skilled sectors in Spain requires a university degree and the recognition of their skills. Nevertheless, migrant women come without accreditation and not all migrant women can follow the accreditation process due to personal projections and family obligations. They accept all kinds of work, often falling into job-education mismatch and long-term unemployment situations (Raghuram and Kofman, 2004). Therefore, highly educated women use different strategies to enter the labour market, such as re-skilling and up-skilling (Di Martino, 2019; Raghuram and Kofman, 2004), in order to move from overqualification to job matching. This article highlights the multiple strategies by which highly educated Brazilian women migrate and the role of strategies in achieving job-skill matching after migration. This article makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the highly skilled migration of highly educated women in the global economy and in the landscape of precariousness and instability of the Spanish labour market.

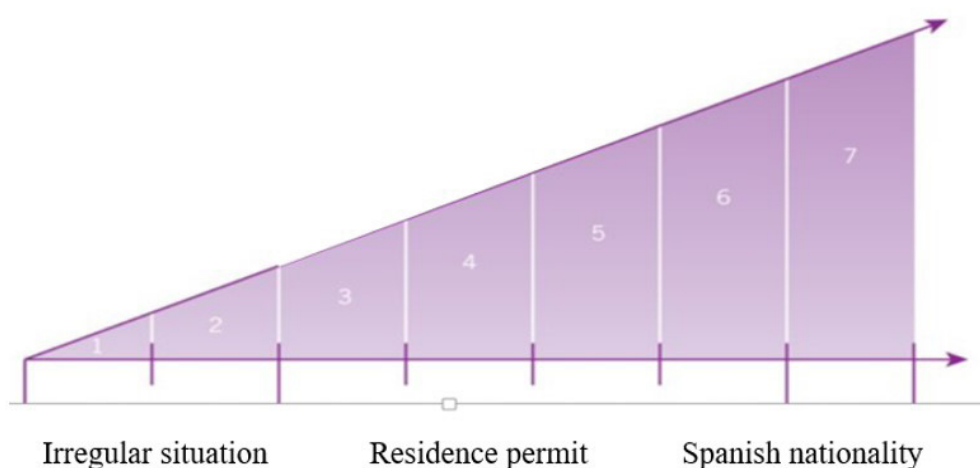
4. Methods

The empirical data in this paper are based on a broader project on Latin American and intra-European migrations to Spain, and the fieldwork was conducted between 2015 and 2022. The fieldwork produced data from 55 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in Spanish. In this case study, fourteen Brazilian women were selected and

interviewed about their migration trajectories in relation to intra-subjective (individual level) and inter-subjective (relational level) dimensions. The fourteen semi-structured and in-depth interviews were based on four axes of analysis: 1) professional; 2) educational; 3) relational; and 4) psychological. The interviews were conducted from the life course perspective (Wingens et al., 2011). The ages of the participants ranged from 30 to 52 years. The selection criteria were the following: a) being born in Brazil and therefore having Brazilian nationality and/or dual nationality; b) having, at the time of the interview, a tertiary level of education (undergraduate or graduate) obtained in Brazil or in Spain; c) having achieved the situation of job-education matching; d) respecting the “continuum of stability” (Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza, 2008, p.11), established by living in Spain for at least three years. The “continuum of stability” was developed by Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza (2008) to indicate the number of years of residence (seven) required to achieve the stability that translates into obtaining residence and work permits in Spain (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Continuum of Stability

Integration process



Source: Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza, 2008, p. 11.

Each interview was coded to guarantee anonymity and the interviewees signed the informed consent documents, relating to the ethical protocols. The snowball sampling technique was used, after approaching and interviewing key informants from migrant associations and women community leaders in the Basque Country (*Asociación Mujeres en la Diversidad; Asociación de Mujeres del Mundo*) and the university, as most of the highly educated Brazilian respondents had completed university courses, master's degrees or PhD studies. Among them, the reasons for leaving were linked to "*political disillusionment, feelings of social alienation and fear of crime, as well as more positive reasons such as cultural discovery or language acquisition. Some saw these movements as permanent, others as temporary*" (Robins, 2022, p. 4), as other studies have pointed out.

The total sample has maintained their position in Spain, most of them achieve the job-education matching by applying the strategy of upskilling, coursing a Master's degree or PhD studies; others achieve the job-education matching by obtaining their Bachelor's degree directly in Spain (Table 1).

Table 1 - Respondents' Professional Profiles

Before Emigration				Professional Trajectory in Spain		Family situation	
Code	Training in BR	Age	Pre-migratory experience	Training in SP	Post-migratory professional experience	Couple's Origin	Children
BR1	Psychology	35	Psychologist	PhD	Psychologist	ES (EU)	0
BR2	Psychology	22	Psychologist	MA + PhD	Psychologist (free-lance)	ES (EU)	1
BR3	Law	23	Assistant Public Prosecutor	MA (IT) + PhD (ES)	International Sector Academia	-	0
BR4	-	49	Domestic worker	BA	Health & Care	SP (BC)	3
BR5	Philosophy	31	Social Educator	MA	Partner Social Cooperative Worker	SP (BC)	1
BR6	Law	41	Lawyer	MA + PhD	NGO (before return to BR) + Academia	SP (MA)	1
BR7	Law	20	Law	MA + PhD	Academia (PDI) [1]	BR	1
BR8	History & Economy	30	Administration & Finance	Specialization Administrative	NGO	-	0
BR9	Academy of Arts	15/18	Early Childhood Art Educator	Decoration	Craft Workshop (Art)	SP (AN)	0
BR10	Human Resources	14/15	Hairdresser	BA + MA in Human Resources	Human Resources	SP (BC)	2
BR11	Economy	45	Group leader	MA International Cooperation	Worker in sector social	SP (CA)	2
BR12	Pedagogy	35	Trainer	Master + PhD Education	Professor and researcher	SP (BC)	1
BR13	Graphic Design	32	Graphic Design	Industrial design + MBA Design thinking	Waixo UX/UI Designer (front-end developer)	SP (BC)	1
BR14	Architecture	30	Architecture	MA Interior Design	Interior Designer	SP (BC)	1

Source: created by the author, based on data and information from the fieldwork.

5. The strategies for female Brazilian migrants' professional development

According to Martiniello and Rea (2014), migrant women's trajectories are generally not linear and not rationally planned, but are constructed by migrants based on the structures of opportunities and constraints they find along the way and through the application of their agency, which is manifested in the coping strategies migrants use to overcome obstacles and exploit opportunities. The analysis of the articulation of micro, meso and macro-sociological dimensions is, therefore, important (Figure 2). Moreover, the strategies adopted are useful for understanding the ways in which migrants reconcile their initial migratory aspirations and ambitions with the reality they find in the host country. While the opportunities and constraints are based on structures that reproduce situations of power and oppression (Di Martino et al., 2020) and increase the presence of vulnerable situations among migrant women, the coping strategies are an important driving force aimed at reframing and reconstructing their own aspirations and ambitions, but navigating through the barriers and difficulties. At the same time, they seek opportunities and employ different strategies for different concerns.

6. Analysis and results

6.1. Re-thinking the Brazilian migration of highly educated women

This section explores how the “continuum of instability” is a common element among the Brazilian respondents and could constitute the framework for activating the agency of highly educated Brazilian women living in Spain and driving the strategies for pursuing their aspirations, socio-occupational integration and job-education matching. The “continuum of instability” is the key element that drives the interviewees to take action to reconstruct their professional careers and profiles. In the first phase of immigration, respondents are confronted with the problem of highly educated migrant women: overqualification and unemployment. This is a common factor in the migrant careers of the interviewees and it is based on the length of time between their first post-migration phase and their more stable settlement in Spain, which corresponds to the “continuum of stability” (seven years in Spain) established by Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza (2008, p. 11) to describe the integration process (see Figure 1). If the “continuum of stability” is based on the time needed to fulfil the requirements for obtaining a residence permit and Spanish nationality, in this study it can be highlighted that the “continuum of instability”, corresponding to three years, is needed to start the integration process (see Figure 1). In fact, evidence shows that the “continuum of instability” is the time required for the activation of migrant women’s agency and resilience, and the articulation of coping strategies to confront and overcome the structure of opportunities and constraints.

With a particular focus on the articulation of the micro dimension of the subjects (personal aspirations, professional expectations and desires) and the inter-subjectivity at relational and systemic levels, through the interaction of the subjects with the structures of opportunities and constraints, the results show that there was an activation of new personal and professional paths based on overcoming this “continuum of instability”. This led to the achievement of job-education matching that gave them stability in the Spanish context. Indeed, the data show how the concept of the “continuum of instability” can express the articulation between the micro, meso and macro-sociological dimensions of socio-occupational integration and job-education matching situation. In fact, exploring this concept through such an articulation shifts the responsibility to non-sensitive gender policies and to the state, rather than to the vulnerable situation of migrant women resettled in Spain and their revictimisation from the beginning of the integration process.

In line with Gergen (2015) and Carling and Collins (2018), we focus on the role of systemic and communitarian dimensions of agency in moving from the “continuum of instability” to the “continuum of stability” and transnational practices in the balance of personal “*aspirations, professional expectations and job-education matching*” (Di Martino et al., 2020) in the Brazilian case. In Table 2, the articulation of the elements at the micro, meso and macro dimensions can explain the activation of the coping strategies of highly educated Brazilian women in the Spanish context (Table 2).

Critically analysing the contents of Table 2, it can be said that only a few studies have carried out a multidimensional analysis of the macro, meso and micro-sociological dimensions. In fact, only one dimension is taken into account in migration studies (Martiniello and Rea, 2014). In this sense, the macro-sociological dimension takes into account the political and legislative barriers and constraints in the host country; in particular, the work situation, the residence and work permits and study accreditation are the relevant factors that influence the job-education matching situation of highly educated migrant women. In order to overcome these constraints highly educated Brazilian women opt for, among other things, upskilling, reskilling, and learning the language of the host country.

I have completely changed my professional profile to adapt to the Spanish labour market, always in the same field, but with a different profile. I used to work as a consultant for big transnational companies. Then I did a doctorate and started working at the university as a researcher, and I am still there (23 years old. Researcher in law. 10 years in Spain) (BR3, 2021).

Table 2 - Structure of constraints, opportunities and coping strategies

Dimensions	Constraints	Opportunities	Strategies
Macro	Work, Residence Permits and Study Accreditation	Overcome the difficulties in learning official languages	Studying languages
		Finding job-education matching	Up-skilling/Re-skilling;
			Digital space;
			Long-term visa;
		Work/residence Permits	Processing work permits from the origin
			Establish the "stability continuum" in the country (Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza, 2008);
			Self-employment (free-lance);
			On-line work;
		Job contract (in precariat situation)	Transnational work
			Multi-employment and informal employment;
Better life-condition	Multitasking (studying and working); "bridging jobs" (Di Martino, 2019; Di Martino et al., 2020);		
	Seek ways to stay through training, work, marriage and obtaining long-term or permanent residence permits (Parella and Cavalcanti, 2010; D'Aoust, 2015).		
Meso	Limited networks and ties	Binational marriages	Marriage;
			Length of stay;
			Volunteering in NGOs and associations;
			Organising groups
	Immobility for life-work balance	Flexible jobs;	Flexibility in the couple;
Family's help		Flexibility with family in-laws	
Impossibility to find a job in the first post-migration phase	Support from (Spanish) partners' families	Building networks;	
		Participate in volunteering	
Micro	Migratory imaginaries	Reinventing oneself and putting oneself on the line	Resilience;
			Agency;
	"We have to demonstrate always who we are, because we are immigrants" (BR4)	Possibility of personal empowerment for (migrant) women, offered by local bodies, institutions, etc.	Perseverance;
			Skills for change
	Aspirations, desires, pre/postmigratory	Professional reframing;	Possibility of changing set trajectories;
Career adjustment with dual partners;			
Loneliness, "saudade", depression	Transnational activation	Decision-making	
		Personal empowerment and development	Learning how to select companies; Self-management

Source: Table created by the author, based on data and information collected from the fieldwork.

In relation to the meso-sociological and systemic dimensions, links, ties and networks are analysed. The main barriers are family responsibilities and parenthood, as well as work-life balance: "During the Covid-19 pandemic, we decided to move to Spain to have better health conditions and the support of my husband's family to raise our children, while we could work through the digital space and online context" (35 years old. Psychologist. 4 years in Spain) (BR1, 2021).

Different strategies are applied in the management of the relations and networks, such as the participation in migrants' associations or academic context networks.

I visited the people at the university where I did my doctorate. I was able to find a different job from the one I had before. In fact, I was involved in a multi-year research project, which gave me a lot of flexibility to raise my son and work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic (20 years old, Lawyer. 5 years in Spain) (BR7, 2021).

In the case of the social educator (BR5), she chose to participate as a volunteer in her husband's social cooperative. *"I was working as a volunteer for a year in my husband's social cooperative, together with the other members. After that time I was offered to become a member too and I started to work there as a peer"* (31 years old, Social educator. 4 years in Spain) (BR5, 2021).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that, in some cases, marriage is the fastest strategy for socio-professional integration in Spain, for obtaining long-term or permanent residence permits, as has been noted in previous studies (Parella and Cavalcanti, 2010).

My husband and I thought that the quickest way to find a job in Spain would be to get married and obtain all the necessary permits. The truth is that it was a good decision for me, as I was able to find a way to adapt more easily and quickly to my social and working environment (31 years old, social educator. 4 years in Spain) (BR5, 2021).

At the micro-analytical level, on the one hand, the individual's aspirations and professional expectations are considered as an input factor for socio-occupational integration. The strategies used to achieve the job-education match in this context are upskilling and reskilling, which lead to a change of professional profile, in order to adapt to the job offer in the destination country.

In Brazil I worked at the court (...) it was a very macho environment. I decided to come to Spain to change my professional profile, so I did a Master's degree and then decided to stay and do a PhD. This would give me more options in the world of work. I want to work in international organisations (23 years old, Lawyer. 4 years in Spain) (BR3, 2021).

On the other hand, the limitations encountered are feelings of *saudade*, depression and isolation. The main strategies used to overcome these feelings are self-management learning techniques. On the other hand, resilience and agency are undoubtedly the most important personal strategies that highly educated Brazilian women naturally use to overcome barriers and find the right opportunities to advance their careers and social integration in Spain.

I have gone through several stages in my life in Spain. I miss Brazil a lot and would love to go back. In fact, I have tried to work there many times, but it has always been a one-off job. I did my doctorate in Madrid and I have a family, I changed my professional profile and now my studies do not coincide in Brazil, but I tried to get into politics and I succeeded until Bolsonaro's government came and I had to leave. I returned to Spain with my family (41 years old, Lawyer. 17 years in Spain) (BR6, 2021).

The personal strategies (micro level) of the women interviewed are able to overcome obstacles at the meso and macro levels because agency and resilience are activated after experiencing situations at the limit, caused, on the one hand, by legal and institutional problems, and barriers to access to the local labour market; on the other hand, by problems related to family obligations. In this sense, the activation of work through the digital space, as well as the recapitalisation of personal competencies (e.g. knowledge of other languages) (Föbker and Imani, 2017), are important individual strategies (micro level) which are able to overcome both structural barriers (macro level) and relational and systemic barriers (meso level).

Since the "continuum of instability" is a common element in the migratory trajectories of the highly educated Brazilian women interviewed, it was found that in the first phase of their immigration, they seek to create a path in the international sphere, since they have not accredited their studies in Spain. In fact, they can use their personal capital and skills to develop a transnational career between Brazil and Spain. In most of the cases analysed, they also know several languages (Portuguese, Spanish and English), which allows them to work at a transnational level between Spain and Brazil. Nevertheless, they have families in Spain and it is difficult to achieve a life-work balance while developing a transnational career. In the end, they find and apply coping strategies to achieve the work-education match in Spain.

6.2. The agency: from the “continuum of instability” to stability

The migration career (Martiniello and Rea, 2014) is the multidimensional concept and analytical lens that allows us to understand the invisible dynamics in a process of development among highly educated Brazilian women in the transit path from the home to the host country. The data analysed show that the migration careers of the interviewees can be divided into: 1) the pre-migration stage, in which they prepare for emigration through established ex-ante study, work or partner opportunities; 2) the post-migration stages, which can be: a) temporary; or b) permanent. In the pre-migration stage, women organise all the necessary documents to start working directly in a company or to study; or they travel under the umbrella of “protection” offered by a partner with Spanish nationality. On the other hand, in the post-migration phase, there is a phase of exploring opportunities and another of settling in. The exploration phase passes through phases of study, work and living systems, in which women may experience situations of temporary overqualification (Shershneva and Fernández, 2018); or through “bridging jobs”, multitasking, underemployment and moonlighting (Di Martino, 2019; Di Martino et al., 2020).

During the years I was studying for my Master’s degree in Madrid, I worked as a housemaid and nanny. Once I fell for a false advertisement, where I was taken to a warehouse in a remote area and told that I had to clean the house of a wealthy man (...). Fortunately, I studied law and knew how to get out of it. I told them that I was in the process of obtaining my Spanish nationality and they let me go (...). Nevertheless, the man followed me for a long time, sending me messages and calling me all the time. I threatened to go to the police if he didn’t leave me alone (41 years old, Lawyer. 17 years in Spain) (BR6, 2021).

These are precarious conditions and informality in the domestic and care sectors, due to the migration regime in which they are embedded. This is not the case, however, when their migration from Brazil is managed with the security of a job in Spain. This confirms the findings of other studies carried out in Spain on groups of women of other origins (Di Martino, 2024; Di Martino et al., 2020; Roca, 2016; Shershneva and Fernández, 2018; Yahya and Silvestre, 2017). Among the cases analysed are experiences of trafficking and smuggling and the issue of debt incurred for coming to Spain to work, a risk highlighted by Parella and Cavalcanti (2010). In the final stage of settlement, the main reasons for settling are related to quality of life, finding a job that fits into a comfortable host society, and family and partner commitments. The language barrier does not seem to be one of the main problems for labour market integration.

6.3. Privileges and vulnerabilities

Women’s human mobility has evolved in the wave of socio-political challenges of the globalised world. However, migrant women are still trapped in complex relations of mobility and immobility, which have a strong impact on the reframing of their professional careers within migratory trajectories. In Spain, women’s migration trajectories have mostly been studied in the light of postcolonial relations (King, 2019), within the framework of domestic work and the care sector, revealing relations of privilege and vulnerability. In order to escape these dynamics, the interviewees use different strategies, linked to different needs, related to relational, familial, parental and other personal aspirations that change with time and opportunities (Di Martino et al., 2020).

Yvonne Riaño (2015) talks about the coping strategies of highly skilled Latin American women in Switzerland and speaks of them as “*marginalised elites*” and “*overcoming exclusion and expanding social networks*” (p. 13). The migration histories of the Brazilian interviewees are heterogeneous. However, a decisive element in the time it takes to achieve a stable socio-economic situation and a job corresponding to the level of higher education is linked to a better economic status from origin (in the case of women who already had a job corresponding to their education in Brazil), with a partner of Spanish

nationality, which allows them to develop a professional career more quickly thanks to greater labour flexibility and economic availability.

My husband helps me a lot at home and with bringing up our son. He has a steady job but with flexible hours. When I had to go to Brazil to look for something better, because my intention was always to return to Brazil, he took care of the child (41 years old, Lawyer. 17 years in Spain) (BR6, 2021).

In addition, respondents indicated that they would always have the support of their family or partner if the experience went badly. On the other hand, the medium level of difficulty is based on average living conditions, where women have tertiary education but have to support themselves while they are in the destination country developing their skills. As a result, they accept precarious jobs, underemployment, and moonlighting and often move within the context of the informal economy until they achieve their goals, residence and work permits that allow them to take other paths. *"I worked in several jobs at the international level, as an international consultant, because I couldn't find a job as a lawyer. Then I decided to do a PhD in law and now I work as a researcher at a university"* (20 years old, Lawyer. 5 years in Spain) (BR7, 2021).

Finally, there is a lower level at which women are single, have no external support from the family of origin or from a partner, and have to cope with multiple burdens, studying, working and bringing up their children at the same time, which is why they have slower careers and take longer to reach their jobs. It has been shown that in the case of women of Brazilian origin, the structures of obstacles and opportunities, at the local level (at origin) and in the related education and work systems at the destination are subject to what is known as "systemic vulnerability" (Tagliacozzo et al., 2021, p. 1), as there are systemic determinants that shape their migration experiences and careers, delay their plans or create continuous obstacles along the way.

When I came to Spain I was deceived, I thought I was going to work in a company with good working conditions. Instead, the woman who selected me for the supposed position belonged to a network of traffickers and smugglers (...) I was lucky enough to be able to decide whether I wanted to stay with them (...) I decided to leave, but first I had to pay off the debt I had acquired (...). I remember that I did not go out, I was afraid to go out because it was the time of Aznar and those people were being deported (49 years old, Nursing. 23 years in Spain) (BR4, 2021).

This is a real risk, confirming the findings of previous studies carried out in Spain by Parella and Cavalcanti (2010). Finally, it is shown that the network of structural vulnerabilities influencing the construction of their migratory careers and the decision-making process regarding permanent settlement, rootedness or return is systemic, as it is linked to several power systems and is based on existing weaknesses of various structures both in the country of origin (labour, health, security, family) and in the country of destination (Tagliacozzo et al., 2021). This confirms the findings of Lozano Ascencio (2004) in the study carried out with highly qualified professionals from Mexico to the United States, in which he states that the macro-structural dimensions of both countries and the characteristics of the migrant subject define heterogeneous migratory behaviours. In order to better understand some of the structures of obstacles and opportunities between the two countries analysed, it was essential to look more closely at the mobility patterns of the interviewees from a gender perspective.

I am a lawyer. I came to Spain to study for a Master's degree and then maybe go back to Brazil to have more options. In the end, I decided to stay in Spain. I worked as a nanny and as a waitress in the summer and gave private lessons. Until I decided to do a doctorate (...). Then I met my husband. I decided to stay, although I went back to Brazil to work because I could not find anything in Spain (...). There are times when I am in Brazil and times when I am in Spain (...). My husband and son follow me when they can (41 years old, Lawyer. 17 years in Spain) (BR6, 2021).

The spatiotemporal trajectories of the interviewees show that they are heterogeneous and can vary in time and space. In the following graphs, four different spatio-temporal trajectories have been drawn, marking the displacements of the respondents.

1) The first is unidirectional, a direct route from Brazil to Spain with no turning back. In this case, the women have no intention of returning to Brazil, mainly for sentimental reasons,

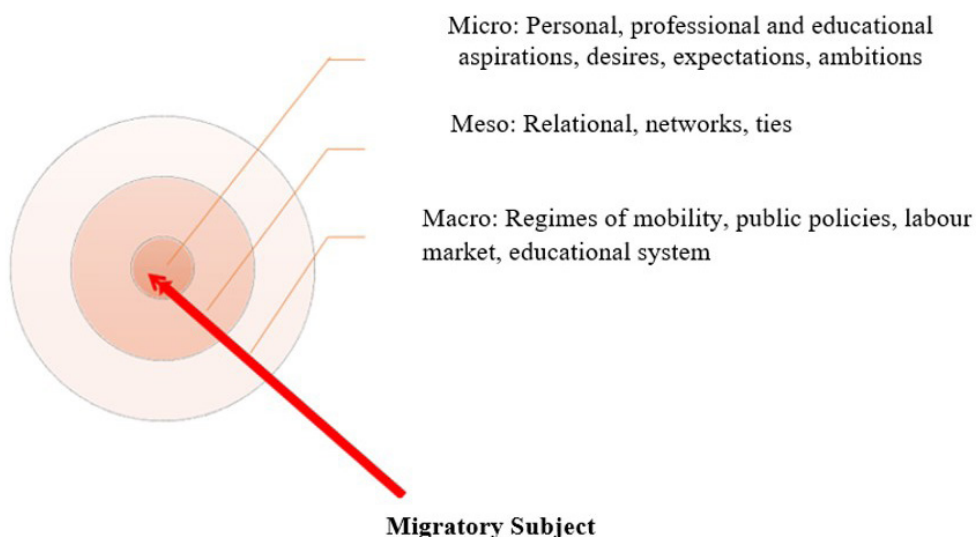
since their families are rooted in Spain. In parallel, there is always a higher quality of life in the country of roots, with no signs of suffering in terms of mental health and family reconciliation.

- 2) The second is the multiple trajectory. In these cases, women move alone or with their families in different directions and countries, with the prospect of returning to Brazil in the future. These families define themselves as “nomads” (BR3).
- 3) The third trajectory identified in the interviewees’ accounts is transnational, understood as the establishment of relationships and activities linked to both countries and the “*feeling of being in two places and in neither*” (BR6, 2021). According to the report of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2010, p. 1), “*leading a transnational, multi-sited life means that cross-border exchanges and interactions are a regular and sustained part of migrants’ realities and activities*”. Two cases fit this type: the case of a social educator who has joined the Spanish social cooperative that works actively with Brazil, so she regularly travels to Brazil with her family, as her husband also works there (BR5).
- 4) Finally, the last spatio-temporal trajectory has to do with a very strong bi-location between the two countries. This is the case of a law graduate specialising in environmental issues, who reflects a constant restlessness to return to Brazil, frustrated by meritocratic ceilings, glass ceilings and other mismatches between qualifications and the professional profile obtained in Brazil, which is incompatible with the upskilling obtained in Spain, and vice versa. In this case, the family is involved in a transnational dance with her as she tries to break through a professional barrier without success and, frustrated by these attempts, returns to Spain where her family lives and where her husband has a stable job with better conditions (BR6). This case opens the door to new reflections and possible future research on new ways of coping with life in binational families (Seminario and Le Feuvre, 2021).

The status of the bi-national partner exerts a strong influence on women’s mobility, due to the better systemic conditions (understood as a set of interlinked structures and systems) in the country of origin of the partner of Spanish nationality. Therefore, families in this situation have to base their moves and activities on an existential, physical and geographical agreement of “bi-locality”, alternating experiences in both countries. It is established that they will live in Brazil for a certain period of time and in Spain for another, allowing themselves another period of time to return to Brazil, always linking international moves to a job opportunity in one country or the other. However, in this particular case, the family project and the sentimental ties with a man of Spanish origin clearly compromise the classic form of transnationalism, since it is based on a power that is based on the best working conditions for the male sex within the couple.

7. Discussion

The migratory career is the lens through which I have analysed the migratory trajectories of highly educated Brazilian women in multidimensional settings. It allows us to see the structure of opportunities and constraints and to better understand the coping strategies they have adopted to achieve socio-occupational integration and job-education matching. These strategies are part of the resilience and agency. Indeed, migrant women’s agency refers to their ability to make decisions, act autonomously and exercise control over their own lives and circumstances, particularly in the context of migration. This concept focuses on how migrant women can influence their own destinies and the social, economic and political structures that surround them. There is evidence that the micro, meso and macro-sociological dimensions are linked and articulated in the migratory careers of highly educated Brazilian women (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Analytical dimensions

Source: created by the author, based on the reconceptualization of the “migratory career” lens (Martiniello and Rea, 2014).

The agency of highly educated Brazilian women in Spain is linked to factors such as autonomy in decision-making and economic processes. Capacity for choice: the ability of migrant women to make informed decisions about their migration, employment, education and personal lives. Control over resources: access to and control over the economic and social resources necessary to make effective choices. In addition, they have the opportunity to further their education and develop skills to improve their employability and autonomy.

First of all, in the initial exploratory phase before migration, Brazilian women reorient themselves towards other forms of socio-professional integration, since the mobility regimes are not adapted to the development of their migratory careers and their expectations. In fact, most of them have chosen not to homologate their educational titles and to find other strategies for their job-educational match, in some cases. In other cases, they have chosen to rethink and redesign their professional profile according to the possibilities and realities of the social context. Thus, the results show that their agency is activated when they see that the obstacles are more than opportunities, and at that moment they start to activate the coping strategies at macro, meso and micro-sociological levels. Furthermore, the subjects struggle to reconcile personal aspirations, professional expectations and work-education fit, as has been found in the case of other women of Latin American and European origin (Di Martino, 2019; Di Martino et al., 2020; Di Martino, 2024). Indeed, the micro, meso and macro dimensions are very much interrelated and a multidimensional analysis based on an intersectional perspective is also needed when studying highly educated women, as the sphere of life is embedded in structures of opportunities and constraints, power and oppression.

8. Conclusions

This paper has explored the structures of opportunities and constraints of highly educated Brazilian migrants, and the coping strategies employed to overcome the difficulties and barriers encountered by Brazilian migrant women in the Spanish immigration context. The central role of agency and resilience (at the micro-sociological level) emerged as key elements in the activation of coping strategies suitable for achieving job-education matching in Spain. The evidence shows that coping strategies respond to the structure of opportunities and constraints developed through the articulation of different elements at macro, meso and micro-sociological levels. Migrant women’s agency is crucial to their empowerment and well-being. Removing barriers and strengthening their capacities through inclusive

policies, empowerment programmes and support networks can significantly improve their ability to make choices and improve their lives and those of their communities.

The coping strategies used by each woman are therefore different and heterogeneous, as the highly educated Brazilian women interviewed react with a mix of strategies to achieve job-education matching and socio-professional integration in the host country. The strategies used also depend on the personal and professional situation of each of the women interviewed. For example, in the case of BR10 (Human Resources technician), she was a hairdresser, a mother of two children, and had many personal aspirations for her professional career. Her strategies for developing her career in Spain are therefore a mixture of macro, meso and micro. She opted for the bridging job as a hairdresser and for multitasking (work and study) by studying for a master's degree in Human Resources. After graduating, she started a period in a company and was hired. However, she had to delegate parenthood to her mother, who was responsible for helping the migrant family raise their children. Another important case is that of BR4 (nurse). She arrived in Spain through a network of traffickers and smugglers, from which she was able to escape after falling in love with one of their clients and paying off the debts she had incurred with the gangsters. She adopted different strategies to develop her career in Spain. After a period of multitasking, she radically changed her professional life by studying nursing while working as a domestic worker (bridgework). After graduating and doing a placement in a care home, she got a steady job but had to put it aside to bring up her children. In this case, her husband's family (family networks) helped her with the upbringing, but three children were too many, so she decided to look after them herself until the children were old enough and independent enough for her to go back to work.

Women's migration logic and projects are different, and this difference is based on the priorities that each of the interviewees gives to her migration career. However, the results provide evidence that these priorities can change over the years, as shown by an analysis carried out from a life course perspective, which covers the entire migration career from emigration to settlement in the destination country. On this basis, it can be said that there are three typologies of women: a) women whose priority is professional development; b) women whose priority is personal development through the study of a degree, master's or doctorate, which then allows them to change their professional career or diversify their profile and *curriculum vitae*; and c) other women, on the other hand, whose priority is the development of a family project. Depending on these priorities, their strategies obviously change (Table 3).

Table 3 - Priorities and migratory careers' strategies

Type of priority	Mixed strategies	Results
a. Professional development	Use of the digital space	Free-lance
	Language learning	Self-employers
	Via Academia	Researchers
	Personal networks	Cooperatives
	Volunteering	
b. Life-long learning	Up-skilling	Change the career profiles
	Re-skilling	
	Updating	
	Multitasking	
c. Family project	Multitasking	Free-lance
	Digital technologies	Self-employers
	Family's support	Digital space
	Family's networks	Life-work balance

Source: created by the author, based on the data collection.

Nevertheless, on the one hand, the respondents have such a structure in common and their privileges are mixed with a setting of vulnerability, recalling the concept of “marginalised elites” developed by Yvonne Riaño (2015, p. 3), who are in a privileged economic situation but live in precarious conditions with precarious work. Again, socio-occupational integration policies are scarce and Brazilian migrant women have to use different strategies to achieve job-education matching. Moreover, the respondents experience the symptoms of the migration experience, such as loneliness, temporary job-education mismatch, overqualification and “bridgework” (Di Martino et al., 2020). It should be stressed that such symptoms are also constructed on the basis of intersectional discrimination (gender, race/ethnicity, class, level of education, etc.). On the other hand, the imaginaries of migration and destination countries do not correspond to the reality that Brazilian women face in the post-migration phase. They come to Spain thinking that there is a favourable labour market and that they can easily find a job that corresponds to their professional profile, without thinking about the different barriers they have to face, such as the recognition of their diploma, the languages of the different Autonomous Communities, and the issue of intersectional discrimination as women, immigrants, etc. They also think that they will be able to find a job that corresponds to their professional profile.

In addition, it can be noted that the responsibility is shifted to insensitive gender policies and to the state, the “continuum of instability” pushes Brazilian women to seek new professional and educational paths; and it should be argued that the notion of “continuum of stability”, proposed by Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza (2008), is questioned in this study, as it is not relevant in this case since most of them do not follow the path of accreditation of their degree; but opt for transnational practices in the balance of personal “aspirations, professional expectations and job-education matching” (Di Martino et al., 2020). In Table 2, the articulation of the elements at the micro, meso and macro levels can explain the activation of the coping strategies of highly educated Brazilian women. The “continuum of instability” has been understood here as the key element for reconceptualising the development plans of the migratory careers of the group of highly educated Brazilian women in Spain whose coping strategies have been analysed. First of all, there is evidence that the “continuum of instability” in the immigration setting is the driving factor for the activation of the respondents’ agency and resilience. Consequently, it can be stressed that agency is the common element that drives Brazilian migrant women’s strategies towards balanced socio-occupational integration and job-education matching at the local level. The paper highlights the relational nature of the “continuum of instability” proposed by insensitive immigration policies. Indeed, the length of stay in Spain does not guarantee stability (Moreno Márquez and Aierdi Urraza, 2008) in the migration project of the interviewees. On the contrary, the agency of migrant women, through the activation of personal and different coping strategies for entering the local labour market, is the key to socio-occupational integration in Spain.

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