



**MONITORING THE EVOLUTION OF THE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND
PUBLIC DEBATE CONCERNING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

in

SÃO PAULO

Renato Cymbalista and Iara Rolnik Xavier

January 2007



REPORT

During the period September-December 2006, local media did not pay particular attention to the issue of international immigrants in São Paulo, as the limited number of articles selected on monitored newspapers demonstrates. As far as public policies are concerned, it has to be noted that the first project targeting immigrant population living in the city of São Paulo, launched by the municipality within the framework of the EU URBAL 10 programme, as described in the previous monitoring report, has not been further developed during the second semester of 2006, due to internal problems. This highlights the vulnerability of an agenda that has been pushed and promoted from outside: since migrants' integration is indeed not yet perceived as a local priority, the occurring of some administrative problems within URBAL, in particular the change of the officer in charge of the coordination of the project, led to the paralysis of the whole initiative.

Our research has then focused on the social and spatial organization of the Bolivian community in São Paulo, with two principal investigation fronts:

1. Defining the urban settling pattern of the Bolivian community in São Paulo.

Literature about immigrant communities in big cities mostly focuses on the spatial distribution of these groups within the cities of the North, i.e. in the huge inner-city ghettos of the USA or in the French peripheral *banlieues*. In the case of São Paulo, literature on migrants' spatial distribution within the city is largely influenced by the propagandistic idea of the city as a welcoming multicultural melting-pot, that mixes all cultures and races, and in which specific ethnic enclaves are rather positively seen.

Yet, the settlement pattern of the Bolivian community within the city differs both from the Northern models and from the picture proudly portrayed by local authorities. The nearly 100 thousand Bolivians living in the city are clearly not clustering in ethnic enclaves, neither in the inner city nor in particular areas of the urban periphery. Even if principally concentrating in few central neighborhoods, they rather are an invisible minority mixed up with other groups. Unlike other poor immigrant's communities in the North, unemployment among Bolivians in the city is almost inexistent. Since most of them are exploited in the expanding textile-apparel industry with long working hours and a single day-off weekly, the use they make of public spaces is very limited, this contributing to their invisibility. Our current research is thus exploring, through qualitative interviews, how Bolivians' working conditions are affecting their use of urban spaces. Field investigation is being carried out in the most important meeting point for the Bolivian community, the "Kantuta", where a weekly fair is set up. During the week, the interviews take place in the neighborhoods where they mostly circulate: Bom Retiro, Brás and Belém, in the Western part of Central São Paulo, where the city's dynamic clothing manufacturing and retail takes place.

The first results obtained seem to reinforce some consolidated images: ninety percent of the interviewed live and work in the same place, the sewing sweatshops, explaining also their scarce presence on the public transport system. The Bolivian community appears to be concentrated in the central neighborhoods of Brás, Bom Retiro and Belém, but a process of moving towards more peripheral areas was also identified, particularly the poorer quarters of the intermediate ring of the city such as Casa Verde, Limão, São Miguel Paulista, Penha, Vila Maria, Parque Edu Chaves and Vila Prudente.

2. Recognizing the working conditions of the Bolivian Community.

Media and Academy are unisonous in describing the working situation of the Bolivian community in São Paulo akin to slavery and forced labour. On the other hand, nothing seems to irritate Bolivians in São Paulo more than the standard image based on the trilogy

“Bolivian-undocumented-slaved”. Our research focuses on the divergence between these two different perceptions.

Bolivians tend to consider this prevailing notion as a pretty simplified one that only contributes to further defame the community's image. Rather, Bolivians prefer to picture themselves as hard workers, seldom recognizing their labor situation as slavish. They also normally deny that their employers are exploiting them. Instead they tend to consider their factories' owners as hard workers too, who are eventually exploited by the harsh and ultra competitive market conditions. In order to understand the reasons lying behind this gap, we are investigating how the notion of slavery is perceived and conceptualized among the Bolivian community itself. . Another focus of our research is to investigate and describe how these factories really work, and it seems that also in this point there is a multiplicity of arrangements.