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The Integration of LGBTI Refugees in Brazil: Sexual Democracies in the South, Processes of Racialization and Shared Precarities

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I focus on the integration practices and discourses regarding "LGBTI refugees" in Brazil, in contrast with the precarity faced by queer immigrants and refugees in the country. I argue that those integration practices and discourses tend to limit "LGBTI refugees" to their sexual and gender identities, in dynamics that overshadow the processes of racialization that they experience as queer migrants from/in the Global South. In a critical analysis based on ethnographic research, I argue that the precarity lived by those refugees can only be understood in their articulations among gender, sexuality, and race.

KEYWORDS

Gender; sexuality; migration; asylum; integration; queer

Introduction

"Being a gay refugee is not easy for anyone, and I am not the only foreign refugee who has left their country in search of a better life, there are many others. And the UNHCR is helping them, giving them hope for a better quality of life in another country." This is how Elvis, a 24-year-old refugee who had been living in Brazil for 2 years, begins to narrate his journey since he decided to leave Venezuela "due to the political situation, and also because of discrimination and homophobia." The excerpt is part of the video "Queer icon talks to an LGBTQIA + refugee supported by the UN Refugee Agency," in which a Venezuelan refugee spoke with a nationally famous Brazilian singer and drag queen. The video, available on the UNHCR website in Brazil and filmed as part of a global humanitarian campaign, was released in 2020 to celebrate both International LGBTI Pride Day and World Refugee Day. In the video Elvis tells of his difficult journey "through the jungle" on the border between Brazil and Venezuela, the months he was homeless in the city of Boa Vista (in the Brazilian North), the sexual and physical violence he suffered on the streets, and at last, his meeting with a UNHCR official who was responsible for sending him to Brasília the national capital 2,500 km away in Brazil's Midwest. In Brasilia, Elvis works in a humanitarian project and dreams about bringing his mother to live with him in Brazil.

Public conversations such as the one in the video result from the recent consolidation of a new category in the realm of migrations and asylum, the "LGBTI refugee" (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Intersex).[1] As stated by Malkki (1995, p. 498), people always sought refuge, but the category "refugee" became a "specific social category" and a "legal problem of global dimensions" after the Second World War. In that historical context, the

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Geneva Convention of 1951 (UN, 1951) was an important legal parameter for a contemporary definition of what it means to be a "refugee." Since then, the universal category of "refugee" seems to be unfolding into other categories, such as "refugee women," "refugee children" and "LGBTI refugee." In this context, LGBTI people have been recently understood as a potential "specific social group," qualifying for international protection in contexts in which the applicant presents "well-founded fear of persecution due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (UNHCR, 2012). The discussion between the Brazilian drag queen and a Venezuelan refugee can be understood in the context of an international humanitarian agenda dedicated to transforming this new category of "LGBTI refugee" into a more palpable one.

The extension of the refugee category toward more "specific social groups" and the integration actions that follow are evidently very important to guaranteeing rights for those identified as LGBTI but does not exclude the need for critical analysis of these processes. These are ambiguous and complex process that deserve a proper analysis. On one hand, the focus on the integration of "LGBTI refugees" brings sexuality to the debate regarding asylum and opens new possibilities of protection for those identified as "LGBTI." On the other hand, the emergence of this category and its corresponding integration practices and discourses frequently limits these "LGBTI refugees" to their sexual and gender identities while overshadowing their other belongings or positions of subject and how they are related to inequalities these refugees encounter daily. This is my main argument in this article.

This argument is presented here in four sections: the first discusses the research methodology. The second section examines the notion of "sexual democracies,"exploring how the ambiguous framework of sexual rights in Brazil shapes the setting of the integration of "LGBTI refugees" in the country. The third section describes initiatives related to the integration of "LGBTI refugees" in the country undertaken by various social agents, particularly efforts related to data gathering and sheltering. The fourth and largest section ethnographically explores the racialized experiences of precarity lived by refugees in the cities of Sao Paulo and Manaus, focusing on the articulation of gender, sexuality and race. I affirm that sexual and gender belongings are part of LGBTI immigrants and refugees' experiences, but do not account for the entirety of the various dimensions of precarity that these subjects face.

In this article I mobilize the open definition presented by Judith Butler, according to which "precarity" is a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer more than others from failing social and economic networks of support, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2015, p. 33). The concept of precarity as proposed by Butler allows connecting the precarity historically lived by racialized Brazilian citizens to that experienced by immigrants from African and Latin American countries, considering how sexuality, gender and race intersect in this context.

It is also important to mention that integration is a concept central to migration studies that has been repeatedly criticized for some of its assumptions, while it is defended or reformulated by others, as Saharso (2019) has discussed. In this article, before adopting or rejecting any normative understanding of the unsettling category of integration, I examine its uses and limits. I draw on the idea of integration as a discursive practice of power that "produces" the very population at which it is directed to. Concerning gender and sexuality, I understand that integration practices themselves produce a population of "LGBTI refugees" that they aim to "integrate."

Therefore, integration is understood here as a discursive practice, a "form of discipline exercised by various forms of state power (sovereign, pastoral or governmental) that engender the production of particular subjects" (Korteweg, 2017, p. 3). In the article I explore how these discursive practices produce an idealized "LGBTI refugee" whose profile differs from the everyday lives of refugees identified as LGBTI in Brazil, whose experience with settling cannot be encompassed by the normative concept of "integration" based exclusively on their sexual and gender identities.

Methods

The ethnographic material used in this article is part of a wider body of work gathered in research about the emergence of the category "LGBTI refugee" in the institutional realm of asylum. The fieldwork was conducted between 2015 and 2019 in Spain and Brazil, in different intermittent periods. The research combined document analysis, participant observation in humanitarian and migrant events, and semi-structured interviews with humanitarian workers and refugees. The material produced for the research complies with norms for ethical research in human sciences, and preserves the identity of participants and the confidentiality of the information. The interviewees were informed about the nature of the study and its methodology and consented to participate.

One of the main difficulties of the research in Sao Paulo was to identify asylum seekers who were recognized as "LGBTI+" during their fleeting passage through humanitarian institutions—a difficulty that I shared with other researchers working on this theme (Andrade, 2019). Since there was no entity or collective initiative focused on queer immigrants in Brazil during most of the research period, the approach to participants in the study was made possible with the help of humanitarian agents. This intermediation allowed me to have at least one encounter with a few participants in the research between 2016 and 2019. They were a Mozambican woman who self-identified as a lesbian; a Cameroonian man self-identified as gay; and two other men who identified themselves as bisexual, from Syria and Bangladesh. They were some of the 369 people who sought asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Brazil until 2016, as I will explore later. The data resulting from the encounters with these refugees was part of a larger research material, including interviews with humanitarian workers from civil society entities and from UNHCR-Brazil in the cities of Sao Paulo and Brasilia, and participant observation in events related to immigrants and refugees in Sao Paulo.

At the beginning of the study, the main entry point for asylum seekers was Sao Paulo, and they came mostly through international airports. Since 2016, the entrance of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants into northern Brazil over its terrestrial border changed the landscape of asylum in the country. By the end of 2019, 31,966 people were recognized as refugees in the country, 20,935 of whom were Venezuelans.[2] A significant portion of Venezuelan immigrants were registered as asylum seekers and recognized as refugees in a simplified process, which dismissed the requirement for individual interviews. The presence of thousands of newly arrived potential "refugees" resulted in an unprecedented visibility of a population identified as "LGBTI" at the country's northern border. The inauguration of the first shelter for "LGBTI refugees" in the city of Manaus, Amazon, in September 2018, was a consequence of this visibility.

The other source of data mobilized in this paper is a result of a ten-day period of fieldwork conducted in the shelter for "LGBTI refugees" in Manaus. In January 2019 I interviewed nine sheltered refugees, former residents and people involved in the shelter's management. In addition to the interviews, spending time with sheltered refugees and accompanying them in their activities in the city were important methodological strategies to learn more about their daily lives. The combination of those research strategies composes the ethnographic material used here to produce a contrast with the narratives from the humanitarian arena regarding the integration of immigrants identified as LGBTI in Brazil.

Sexual democracies, asylum, and national imaginaries

In the last 20 years, Brazil has shifted from being a country whose citizens sought asylum abroad because of sexuality and gender discrimination, to becoming a host country for LGBTI refugees. One can locate this shift in the context of a recent process to acknowledge the "LGBTI + population" as a subject of rights in the country in which the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court (STF) has recognized same sex marriage (2011) and the changing of name and sex in official documents for trans people (2018), and prohibited therapies to reverse one's sexual orientation

(2020). These recent achievements have been consolidated despite pressure from conservative movements that have gained public prominence and the subsequent establishment of anti-gender and anti-sexuality policies.

In 2019, the year President Jair Bolsonaro took office, high rates of violence against the LGBTI population were reported: data on lethal violence compiled by social movements identified 329 violent deaths of LGBTI people in the country (Oliveira & Mott, 2020). This alarming amount must be understood, however, in light of the Brazilian social movement's broader strategies to denounce and fight against violence toward the LGBTI population (Efrem Filho, 2016; Coacci, 2020). It is in this context that the controversial title "world champion of LGBTI homicides" is used by Brazilian activists to complicate the image of Brazil as a "sexual paradise" in the international tourism market (Simões, 2016). This emphasizes the disputed positions that gender and sexuality occupy in the Brazilian political context (Facchini & França, 2020). At the core of Brazilian national imaginaries, these narratives establish the foundation for discourses regarding the integration of LGBTI refugees. In these discourses, representations of the nation are at stake, as well as of sexual and gender otherness.

My understanding here is that gender and sexuality go beyond concrete subjects and operate as a language for the production of borders, within and beyond a nation (Scott, 1988). It is important to observe that struggles regarding gender and sexuality in contemporary politics go beyond the Brazilian context, considering the strength that far-right forces have gained transnationally. Anders Hellström et al. (2020) highlight how, in the European context, questions related to gender have been used strategically to construct a far-right ideological nationalism, distinguishing between "emancipated natives and deeply patriarchal migrants" (p. 7). Similarly, Eric Fassin discusses how the "new sexual nationalisms" pose a threat to values related to the idea of "sexual democracy," given "their Islamophobic, xenophobic, if not racist uses in today's Europe" (Fassin, 2012, p. 288).

Brazil is an ambiguous terrain when it comes to discursive fictions involving "sexual democracies." There are oppositions between efforts in recent decades to recognize LGBTI citizenship and hate speech and anti-gender anti-sexual-rights policies from the current far-right government. The country's image as a "sensual nation" contrasts with cruel lethal violence against the LGBTI population. Meanwhile, dated "colonial landscapes" persist in contemporary sexual politics, which represent certain places on Earth, like former European colonies, and especially African countries, as "anachronistic worlds of deprivation and unreality" (McClintock, 2010, p. 121). In the international arena, the intersections between asylum, gender, and sexuality, have been implicating the deepening of "representation of uncivilized and non-democratic others," collaborating in the production of a "moral geography for the world" (Fassin, 2016, p. 93).

In this "moral geography," Brazil seems to occupy a controversial space. During my research experience, Brazilians often asked me: "why on earth would anyone who identifies as LGBTI want to come to Brazil?." Because of an unawareness of the conditions in which choices are made in processes of forced displacement, this question also suggests that narrative models related to asylum and sexual diversity that usually associate the Global North as a natural destination for LGBTI refugees are out of context when observed in a country like Brazil. While it is impossible to define Brazil as a "sexual democracy," practices, and discourses on the integration of LGBTI refugees have been revised in an ambiguous fashion.

Integration discourses and practices for LGBTI refugees

Despite being a country with high levels of violence against the LGBTI population and being under a far-right government, according to UNHCR Brazil stands out "in the promotion of good practices regarding the protection and integration of LGBTI refugees."[3] There is an interest of UNHCR Brazil to align with an international human rights agenda which includes the defense of sexual rights, but the entity has been facing difficulties to give visibility to the theme of "LGBTI asylum" in the country (França, 2017). Among Brazilian humanitarian entities, attempts

to find a "LGBTI refugee spokesperson" frequently encounters refusals from refugees to take a public position or the inadequacy of their stories to normative expectations for the category.[4] This perception is aligned with what the administrator of an important organization for refugees in Brazil has identified as the frustration that many LGBTI refugees do not correspond to the expectations of those looking for them, either researchers, journalists or humanitarian workers.[5] Stories abound such as the one of a refugee from an African country who, once established in Brazil, entered therapy to reverse his homosexuality with "support" from a Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal church. Or the story of a refugee from a Middle Eastern country who began to question her own sexual identity as a lesbian, asking herself if her sexual identity could not be a result of the alleged repression of women's sexuality in her home country.

As one of its main initiatives to promote the integration of these not quite visible "LGBTI refugees" in Brazil, in 2018 the UNHCR office launched a data platform about the 369 applications based on sexual orientation and gender identity that they identified in the Brazilian databases of asylum.[6] The data did not include the recent influx of hundreds of thousands Venezuelans to Brazil since 2018. Presented by UNHCR as "another step toward the construction of a sensitive space for the specific protection of LGBTI people" in Brazil, the survey was the fourth of its kind in the world, along with others in England, Belgium, and Norway.[7] This initiative have been accompanied by constant training on the theme carried out by UNHCR in partnership with the Brazilian government and civil society, the release of booklets directed to this population and the organization of round-tables and events regarding the integration of LGBTI refugees.

Another important initiative regarding data gathering and the eligibility process was the consolidation in 2017 of a new asylum application form that does not presume the sexual orientation or gender identity of the asylum seeker, in an effort to make the application process more comfortable for people identified as "LGBTI." The individual asylum application begins with the form and the final decision can take months or years, depending on the case.[8] In the case of large flows, as in Venezuelan migration, the process could dispense the interview, running in fast track. While refugees wait for a final decision, their identification is a protocol of asylum request, which permits the opening of a bank account, having a legal job and accessing the public national health system and other State social programs directed to Brazilians as well. There is no financial aid or other relevant State policies in a national level regarding the integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

In addition to the mentioned practices, we can identify initiatives regarding the integration of "LGBTI refugees" in Brazil in the sheltering policies. In Sao Paulo there are some shelters directed to immigrants and asylum seekers, where immigrants identified as "LGBTI" are hardly identified. On the other hand, in Brazil´s North border those immigrants became more visible, also as a result of specific sheltering policies in the cities of Boa Vista and Manaus. Since 2018, *Operação Acolhida* [Operation Welcome], a joint effort between the federal government, UNHCR, and the Brazilian military, is responsible for hosting Venezuelan immigrants on the border between Brazil and Venezuela. The largest humanitarian operation in the country promotes their sheltering and "interiorization," that is their relocation to other regions of the country.

While in Manaus there is a shelter directed to "LGBTI refugees," in Boa Vista there are specific sheltering policies, resulting in the preferential referral of those identified as LGBTI refugees to shelters that were far from those occupied by families and single (straight) men, allegedly to avoid conflict and protect the LGBTI immigrants (França & Fontgaland, 2020; Sousa, 2021). The policies for the "LGBTI population" in the shelters are part of a broad immigrant management policy to which a normative notion of "family" is central. There are shelters only for families with children, others for families without children, and others for single men. The Indigenous populations among Venezuelan immigrants are also housed in exclusive shelters. While these classifications excluded LGBTI from the category of "family," these integration programs limit the idea of "family" to a heterosexual "nuclear family" (Facundo Navia, 2020).[9] As observed, the concern for conflicts regarding sexuality and gender identity thus implies the production of specific moral economies that are formed in the demarcation of borders between

"vulnerable" groups and potentially "dangerous" ones (França & Fontgaland, 2020; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021).

Therefore, shelters could be considered as social technologies of gender and sexuality that act on asylum processes by requiring refugees to incorporate specific gender and sexual positions of subject (De Lauretis, 1989; Foucault, 1990). In this sense, integration practices operate not only in terms of hosting an already existing population, but are themselves governmentality apparatuses — as well as of sexuality, producing categories and subjectivities (Foucault, 1990, 2009). Following this train of thought, Murray (2013) and Fassin and Salcedo (2015) discuss a certain "learning" of Western categories related to gender and sexuality in the asylum process.

Throughout my research, for instance, I have observed that the identities used by the humanitarian agents were frequently not familiar to my interlocutors, who claimed to have only learned about the category LGBTI in Brazil. At various moments during the research interlocutors questioned the researcher about identities such as "LGBTI" and about what they perceive as Brazilian conventions of gender and sexuality, while they meet other gender and sexuality categories in their migratory journey. One of the refugees in the shelter in Manaus, for example, asked if he was hetero- or bisexual. Since he had a relationship with a transexual woman resident of the shelter, he saw himself as heterosexual. On the other hand, if he lived in an "LGBTI" shelter, this perhaps meant that he should belong to one of these identities. Two Cuban women residents in the shelter, for instance, affirmed that they had never encountered the term "LGBTI." They also had a number of doubts about how sexual and gender identities functioned in Brazil: "how do the women couples function in which both are "masculine" or "feminine"? Why are there so many names for *travesti* in Brazil, what is the meaning of transexual and transgender?."

To my interlocutors, these aspects related to their sexual and gender identities were thus marked by anxieties, desires, curiosities, and transformations due to the confrontation with new categories and social conventions. Although, they did not cause the feeling of despair brought by the overall lack of opportunities, as we will see. This section described some of the discourses and practices of different social agents regarding the integration of a new population of LGBTI refugees in Brazil, focusing on their strategies of data gathering and sheltering. In the following section we deepen the critical analysis of the integration of LGBTI refugees in Brazil and its focus on gender and sexual identities, focusing especially on the precarities that constrain the daily lives of these immigrants and refugees in a country marked by alarming and persistent levels of inequality.

Processes of racialization and shared precarities

Recently, a public voice for LGBTI refugees has emerged among groups working with humanitarian issues in Brazil. This public figure is Maria, a witty and strong woman, who agreed to be interviewed on a hot afternoon in January 2020, in her apartment in a city housing project on the outskirts of São Paulo.[10] These neighborhoods are marked by the presence of African immigrants, who must confront the same poverty and lack of infrastructure as the local Brazilian populations who live on the peripheries of urban centers.

Maria had moved to Brazil seven years earlier because she wanted to be able to "openly" express her sexuality. Living "openly" meant for her, among other things, the chance to marry a woman and have children with her—which she eventually achieved in Brazil. The very same desire explains why she avoided migrating to Portugal, even though she has a family network there, and which is an allegedly more advantageous destination for immigrants both due to its economic situation and policies regarding refugee aid. However, these networks represented a disadvantage to her, since she felt a need to "avoid the sensation of being in Mozambique again," where she was monitored and disapproved of by her family. Maria began to speak publicly as both a lesbian woman and refugee through an invitation from UNHCR Brazil to launch the data platform on LGBTI asylum in São Paulo in 2018. At the occasion she was presented as a

lesbian refugee and wore traditional African garments. Maria was moved to speak about how she had reached "her limit" when she decided to leave her country behind. She said, "Brazil has discrimination," but it also has laws to "protect the LGBTI," and that it is "difficult to be LGBTI in Africa, in any African country," which is why she felt grateful for having the "doors open" in Brazil.

During our talk, the same issues regarding "living openly" came up. However, other aspects regarding integration in Brazil were also discussed, beyond the ones emphasized at the UNHCR event, in which a certain kind of narrative was expected about LGBTI asylum. From our conversation I concluded that while Brazil had opened some doors, it had also closed others. Maria needed to go back to college because her degree in information technology from an African institution was undervalued in the Brazilian labor market, which she said was due to general prejudice against Africans in Brazil. Yet, even after doing so, she had not been able to find a job in her area of expertise, and was unemployed at the time we met, earning occasional income from lectures and interviews about being a refugee.

Maria has also worked as a cleaner in hotels, and said she was a victim of racism along with other refugee workers when clients realized they were not only black but black and Africans.[11] Although the practice of racism is punishable by law in Brazil, racism is a systemic reality in the country, directed mostly at Black people, but also at people perceived as nonwhite in certain environments. In addition to this racism, African immigrants are frequently victims of discrimination and violence, not only because of their color, but also their origin.

During our conversation, Maria told me about another episode of racism she had suffered in the subway, in which she had been denied a special seat despite having crutches due to an accident. Given the widespread circulation of information and ideas between Lusophone countries in the Global South, Maria was not surprised by the incident on public transportation: "we [Mozambicans] know Brazil, we know that there is racism here." She suffered from constant pain and difficult mobility because her left foot was run over by a motorcycle in Sao Paulo. When we met, she was extremely distressed by the slowness of the Brazilian justice system in holding the driver accountable and saw the health problem as an impediment to finding proper employment, along with her sexuality and being an African refugee, which she also saw as disadvantages. Criticizing discourses on the integration of refugees, she said: "refugee, lesbian, and now with a foot problem: people speak of inclusion, but it's not like that. As soon as I arrive, they see everything and do not hire me."

Rarely remembered in discourses and actions on integration and actions on integration by humanitarian groups, processes of racialization that make it difficult for refugees to find proper employment are recurrent among refugees identified as LGBTI in São Paulo. These interlocutors have seen their education, skills, and professional experiences being undervalued in the country, which made their search for a job extremely difficult, as the case of an English teacher from Bangladesh, for instance, who made an effort to get rid of an accent that could result in prejudice from any of his students, once he was frequently identified as "Indian." Another interlocutor from Syria of Palestinian nationality complained about being perceived as "ignorant" in the country, despite his background education in Social Sciences and Religious Studies. Employment and precarious living conditions constitute my interlocutors' major concerns.

These were also the major concerns of my interlocutors in Manaus, where the first shelter for LGBTI people in Brazil was inaugurated in late 2018. The project, with capacity for at least 8 people, who were allowed to live there for 45 days, was sponsored by the European Union, with donations from the UNHCR, as well as local LGBTI organizations. The shelter should host asylum seekers identified as LGBTI, who came to Brazil fleeing from the deteriorating economic, social, and political systems in Venezuela. Among the refugees who inaugurated the shelter there were two couples of women who had already left it and were receiving financial aid for rent at the time of the interview. The couples shared a small house not far from the shelter. The women were in their 30 s and had been living in Brazil for 7 months between the cities of Boa Vista and Manaus, in the Brazilian North. One of the interlocutors, who had lived on the streets for

3 months upon arrival in Brazil, described this experience as deeply disturbing because she had: "no track of time, no watch, cellphone, and indigent." She never mentioned this situation to her family back in Venezuela. Like many other immigrants, they had moved to Brazil to send money back to their families, with whom they spoke daily, omitting the precarities they faced, mostly out of shame. Having had professional experience and stable office jobs in Venezuela, all of them were now working at traffic lights, selling water bottles: "we are four here, and none of us has been able to find a job. Nobody. Whenever we are not working, we are sending out our CVs. Nothing. Nobody. Sometimes we feel powerless. When did I ever think I would sell things on the streets? Never."

Furthermore, there was the burden of their family expectations back in Venezuela, a strong feeling of social decline, and the shame of the precarities they had to face. As one UNHCR agent in Manaus emphasized during an interview, Venezuelan refugees faced the same kinds of labor precarities as Brazilians, and access to work was their biggest challenge.[12] This was true of my interlocutors. However, in addition to the high unemployment rates in Brazil, it is important to highlight the ongoing scorn faced by immigrants: "We suffer for being immigrants. When we work on the streets, they say: 'Venezuelan? I have nothing for you.' They close the doors. It's hard work. Walking and walking and walking. I was used to working in an office. And I ended up working at a traffic light in Brazil." Living in public squares or working on the streets and traffic lights are experiences shared by Venezuelan immigrants who cross over Brazil's northern border: "we do not know the city and its sights: what we know are the traffic lights," said one of my interlocutors.

During my conversation with the couples, a profound dissatisfaction and perplexity toward their quality of life in Brazil became evident through feelings of frustration and degradation that were contrasted with "the sensationalization of the LGBTI refugee" (Giametta, 2020). At the beginning of our talk, my interlocutors reported that they had been interviewed by different media outlets at the time of the inauguration of the LGBTI shelter. They were also visited by "people from Europe," who offered a message of hope for better opportunities. Unfortunately, the opportunities did not follow the media's positive narratives attributed to the sexual and gender diversity agenda within the humanitarian realm, which only increased their feelings of frustration because of their precarious living conditions.

Although the cities of São Paulo and Manaus are 3,873 km apart, and the displacement experiences reported here were very different, the immigrants share important dynamics. Discourses and practices regarding the integration of LGBTI refugees prompt their appreciation in the humanitarian realm, while the poverty and processes of racialization they face as immigrants push them toward socially demeaning positions.

In relation to the processes of racialization, in this article I accompany the reflection made by Brah (2016) who analyzed how African-Caribbean groups, and groups from South Asia, experienced the racialization of their position of class and gender through racism aimed at "nonwhites" in Great Britain in the 1970s. Although these groups had not suffered identical racialization processes, they shared the same class position and an experience of inferiorization and subalternization in various realms, which was organized through the binary white–nonwhite. In this article, I consider that my interlocutors, be they African, Latin American, Arab, or South Asian, and despite the different forms of racism they are exposed to, experience a precarity that is racialized based on the same white—nonwhite binary that has a historic weight in how desired and undesired immigrants have been defined in Brazil.

The dynamics of nation formation in Brazil are beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to mention that the category of integration rests upon a national history in which it is not associated only to immigrants, but also to domestic Black and Indigenous populations who historically were thought of as external to the national project of Brazilian elites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[13] Subaltern Brazilian populations, deeply racialized, were destined to live at their own fate, exposed to a variety of forms of state violence. State discourses and policies, and the racial theories of the nineteenth century on which they were based, also

provided a certain language for the "integration" of immigrants who arrived in Brazil in large numbers between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until the first decades of the twentieth century, European immigrants were sought by Brazilian governments, due to their supposed ability to "whiten" the population as they would supposedly assimilate (Seyferth, 1994, 1996, 1997).

In the first half of the 20th century, a precise line separated desirable and undesirable immigrants, establishing a gradient along which white and European immigrants were among the more desirable. Immigrants that were farther from the white European standard, were less desirable according to the migratory policies of the Brazilian state. Although the idea of racial mixing was central to the historical nation-building in Brazil in the 19th and 20th centuries, and to its immigration policies, it existed "alongside persistent antiBlackness and white supremacy" (Mitchell, 2022, p. 3). At the beginning of the 21st century, when there is a significant presence of African, Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in Brazil, this dividing line is still present in the devaluation and the precarious lives of immigrants from these regions, especially when identified as nonwhite.[14]

Despite this, it does not necessarily mean that legal and economic precarity is a prerogative of nonwhite immigrants: for instance, young European immigrants in Brazil could also experience precarious living conditions depending on their migration context. However, that precarity can only be understood in face of the benefits which come from their "whiteness and Europeanness," as Tilman Heil argues in his study about Spaniard immigrants in Rio de Janeiro (Heil, 2020, p. 337). The same goes for queer immigrants from Global South in Brazil: the precarities they face cannot be understood without taking in account the processes of racialization regarding nonwhite migrants in Brazil and, no less important, how those processes are related to sexual and gender positions of subject.

Conclusion

In the peripheries of large Brazilian cities, immigrants dispute space at traffic lights with Brazilians in situations of poverty, notably those from domestic subalternized populations, such as Blacks and Indigenous. Those immigrants and refugees among them who are identified as LGBTI share with Brazilian subaltern populations the heterogeneous forms of poverty that spread at the peripheries of large cities (Das & Randeria, 2015, s4). One of the problems of the language of integration is precisely the erasure of dimensions of exploitation and subalternity lived at the heart of the national society, which tend to be hidden behind a perception of immigrants as an "external" problem (Korteweg, 2017; Schinkel, 2018; Favell, 2019). One of my arguments in this article is that LGBTI refugees share a precarious daily life with subalternized and deeply racialized Brazilian national populations, once seem as "external" to the national society.

However, the discourses and practices of integration aimed at "LGBTI refugees" are frequently limited by how they are supported in sexual and gender identities of the subjects. This hides other dimensions of inequality that act in the production of their precarious lives. In this article I sought to emphasize that it is important for critical analyses of the processes of integration of immigrants and refugees to incorporate approaches that articulate gender, sexuality, and race, among other categories of difference. I observe that one of the challenges faced in this aspect is the relative concentration of the debate about difference and integration on the processes of racialization and nation (Loch, 2014; Rytter, 2019), with outstanding exceptions related to their intersections with gender (Anthias & Pajnik, 2014; Korteweg, 2017) and still rare contributions related to sexualities (Murray, 2013; Karimi, 2021). Despite this, the articulation of these categories emerges as a theme central to the contemporary discussion about integration, which I sought to explore ethnographically based on the discourses involving the integration of "LGBTI refugees" in Brazil and the precariousness of the living conditions faced by immigrants and refugees identified this way.

My efforts in this sense consider that most of the debate about "integration" has been realized in countries of the Global North, which is also true of the discussion about "refugee status, gender, and sexualities." Analysis from Global South allows us to deepen the understanding of the intersections between the distinct social relations of power by which discourses and practices of integration are revised in different national spaces, demonstrating their contextual character concerning the articulations between gender, sexuality, and race. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the practices of integration of "LGBT refugees" that I describe here, although they are not separate from global dynamics, also do not reproduce them. As we saw, the figure of the "LGBTI refugee" encounters specific discourses and practices in Brazil, which are interconnected to broader international processes, while they reproduce particular national responses. Thus, in this paper, I call attention to how discourses of integration are constituted in Brazil in relation to imaginaries of the nation that are built upon ambiguities that mark the "sexual democracies" of the South in the international realm. Moreover, I argue that, in these "democracies," these dynamics of integration take place amid historic and persistent inequalities, which situate the precariousness lived by contemporary immigrants and refugees in relation to those experienced by subalternized domestic populations as a result of colonial power dynamics.

Declaration of interest statement

No potential competing interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. In documents related to UNHCR, the most used category in reference to these forms of requests is that of SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity). Nevertheless, the category of "LGBTI refugees" frequently appears, disputing space with the acronym SOGI, and I believe that it confers greater intelligibility to the theme, especially in countries that speak Romance languages. Given the limits of the umbrella category of "LGBTI" and the dynamic nature of the relations among practices, desires and identities, I mobilize this category "under erasure" (Hall, 2011).
2. Due to Venezuelan migrations, the number of asylum applications in Brazil increased from 10,308 in 2016 to 82,520 in 2019, the largest number since the beginning of the historic series. By the end of 2019, there were 31,966 people recognized as refugees in the country, most of whom came from Venezuela (20,935), Syria (3,768), and Congo (1,209). Source: https://www.justica.gov.br/seus-direitos/refugio/refugio-em-numeros accessed 20 July 2021.
3. Source: https://www.acnur.org/noticias/noticia/2018/11/5c01b3174/brasil-protege-a-personas-refugiadas-lgbti-segun-datos-ineditos-publicados.html access 05 Jun 21.
4. Interview conducted in Brasília, on 25 May 2016, with the coordinator of UNHCR-Brazil.
5. Interview conducted in São Paulo on 16 May 2016, with the manager of an organization hosting refugees in Brazil.
6. Of these, 52.8% are still pending, 10.8% have been denied or not considered, and 35.2% granted. Most requests were from people from countries on the African continent (82%), especially from Nigeria (32.8%). The asylum seekers were mostly "gay" and "bisexual" men (57.3%) while few were "lesbian" women (10.3%) and even fewer "trans" women (1%). Source: https://www.acnur.org/portugues/refugiolgbti/access 05 Jun 21.
7. Source: https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2017/11/22/acnur-apresenta-desafios-e-boas-praticas-para-a-integracao-de-pessoas-refugiadas-lgbti/access 05 Jun 2016.
8. The form has to be filled-in and submitted to the Federal Police in Brazil, within the national territory or in primary border zones; this first contact is often intermediated by refugee support agencies, notably by the Caritas Archdiocese, a Catholic Church related organization, which also conducts interviews considered to be complementary to the process of requesting refugee status (thus being admitted by CONARE) and intermediates the process of requesting recognition of refugee status together with CONARE – the National Committee for Refugees, of the Ministry of Justice, which issues the final decision related to the refugee.
9. In 2020, the shelters in Roraima, the main entry state for Venezuelan migration, had openings for 4,500 people. Source: https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2020/09/25/conheca-os-abrigos-que-acolhem-refugiados-e-migrantes-no-norte-do-brasil/
10. Interview conducted in São Paulo on 17 January 2020.
11. Although Mozambique and Brazil share Portuguese as their official language because both are former Portuguese colonies, the difference in accent makes African immigrants immediately recognizable.

12. Interview conducted in Manaus on 29 January 2019, with the acting head of the UNHCR office in the city.
13. The problem of "integration of black people" to Brazilian society was intensively discussed by the field of studies dedicated to understanding racial relations in Brazil, which agreed that the integration of descendents of African slaves' took place through the idea of "whitening." Though it is important to say that the racial integration of Brazilian Blacks did not exclude other discursive contexts, by which Black intellectuals imagined the Brazilian nation as multiracial, mestiza and Black, more than a white nation, as Guimarães (2004) shows. Regarding Indigenous rights, for most of the twentieth century, Brazilian national law preconized the "incorporation of forest people to national communion," in which "incorporation" or "integration" was understood as "assimilation," which would turn Indigenous people into "national citizens." That trend was reverted by constitutional law only in 1988, when it was finally acknowledged that Indigenous people had the right to keep their traditions and their land, an advance that is currently threatened, as Cunha (2018) demonstrates.
14. Regarding migration in Brazil, it is important to remember that the most recent flows are different from previous ones: from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the last quarter of the twentieth century, the country received nearly 5 million immigrants, most of them from European and Middle Eastern countries, as well as Japan. Since 2000 this pattern has changed to incorporate South-South migration flows, in numbers that it is hard to precisely calculate, but which were significant enough for researchers to identify them as a "new wave of migration" (Bógus & Fabiano, 2015).

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