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South-South migration: a study on refugees working in small and medium Brazilian enterprises

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the integration of refugees from the global South in the workplace of small and medium enterprises in the city of São Paulo, based on interpersonal relationships between Brazilian employers, refugee workers, and Brazilian workers. The literature focuses on South-South migration, refugees in Brazil, and their stereotypes in the workplace. The research was qualitative, using a case study. Semi-structured individual interviews and non-participant observation were conducted with 28 respondents: 7 refugee workers (2 Haitians, 2 Angolans, 1 Congolese, 1 Nigerian, and 1 Beninese); 7 Brazilian employers (4 owners and 3 managers in the services, commerce, and industry sectors); and 14 Brazilian co-workers. Results show managerial incentive to different forms of communication seeking to break the language barrier as well as explicit racism. The employers only began to worry about the integration of refugees when they had problems with Brazilians, such as disrespect for Halal food of Muslim refugees and the perception that refugees transmit diseases. Brazilian workers and employers stereotype refugees from African countries (including Haiti) as a homogeneous group of “black Africans,” reflecting a total lack of knowledge about their geographical and cultural diversity. This lack of knowledge strongly influences interpersonal relationships and makes it difficult for refugees to integrate into the workplace. This article contributes to the reflection on South-South migration, since the literature usually explores South-North and North-North migration.

Keywords: South-South migration. African countries. Haiti. Racism. Workplace integration.

Migração Sul-Sul: um estudo sobre refugiados trabalhando em pequenas e médias empresas brasileiras

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a integração de refugiados do Sul global no local de trabalho de pequenas e médias empresas da cidade de São Paulo, com base nas relações interpessoais entre trabalhadores refugiados e empregadores e trabalhadores brasileiros. A literatura trata da migração Sul-Sul, refugiados no Brasil e seus estereótipos no ambiente de trabalho. A pesquisa foi qualitativa e o método foi um estudo de caso. Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas individuais e observação não participante, com 28 entrevistados: 7 trabalhadores refugiados (2 haitianos, 2 angolanos, 1 congolês, 1 nigeriano e 1 beninês); 7 empregadores brasileiros (4 proprietários e 3 gerentes nos setores de serviços, comércio e indústria); e 14 colegas brasileiros trabalhadores. Os resultados mostram tanto o incentivo gerencial para diferentes formas de comunicação, buscando romper a barreira da linguagem, como racismo explícito. Os empregadores só começaram a se preocupar com a integração dos refugiados quando tinham problemas com o convívio destes com os trabalhadores brasileiros, como o desrespeito à comida Halal dos refugiados muçulmanos e a percepção destes como transmissores de doenças. Trabalhadores e empregadores brasileiros estereotipam refugiados de países africanos como um grupo homogêneo de “negros africanos”, incluindo o Haiti, refletindo falta de conhecimento sobre a diversidade geográfica e cultural dos refugiados. Este desconhecimento influencia fortemente as relações interpessoais e dificulta a integração dos refugiados no local de trabalho. Este artigo contribui para a reflexão sobre a migração Sul-Sul, rara na literatura, mais dedicada à migração Sul-Norte e Norte-Norte.

Palavras-chave: Migração Sul-Sul. Países africanos. Haiti. Racismo. Integração no local de trabalho.

Migración sur-sur: un estudio sobre refugiados trabajando en pequeñas y medianas empresas brasileñas

Resumen

Este estudio analiza la integración de los refugiados del sur global en el lugar de trabajo como pequeñas y medianas empresas en la ciudad de São Paulo, con base en las relaciones interpersonales entre empleadores y trabajadores brasileños y refugiados. La literatura trata de la migración sur-sur, de los refugiados en Brasil y sus estereotipos en el trabajo. La investigación fue cualitativa y el método, un estudio de caso. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas individuales y observación no participante con 28 encuestados: 7 trabajadores refugiados (2 haitianos, 2 angoleños, 1 congoleño, 1 nigeriano y 1 de Benin); 7 empleadores brasileños (4 propietarios y 3 gerentes en los sectores de servicios, comercio e industria); y 14 compañeros brasileños. Los resultados muestran que hubo incentivo gerencial para diferentes formas de comunicación, buscando romper la barrera del idioma, como también el racismo explicitado. Los empleadores solo comenzaron a preocuparse por la integración de los refugiados cuando estos tuvieron problemas con los brasileños, como la falta de respeto por la comida halal de los refugiados musulmanes y la percepción de estos como transmisores de enfermedades. Los trabajadores y empleadores brasileños estereotipan a los refugiados como un grupo homogéneo de “africanos negros”, incluido Haití, lo que refleja desconocimiento sobre la diversidad geográfica y cultural de estos, influyendo fuertemente en las relaciones interpersonales y dificultando la integración de los refugiados en el lugar de trabajo. Este artículo contribuye a la reflexión sobre la migración sur-sur, escasa en la literatura, más dedicada a la migración sur-norte y norte-norte.

Palabras clave: Migración sur-sur. Países africanos. Haití. Racismo. Integración en el lugar de trabajo.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of migration has been increasingly discussed in society due to the significant increase in the migratory flow that is occurring worldwide (Grau & López, 2018; Ivlevs, 2016; Kemeny & Cooke, 2017; S. Kerr, W. Kerr, Özden & Parsons, 2017; Martes, 2016; Ruediger, 2017). The migration of hundreds of thousands of people from the Middle East, fleeing war or other conflicts towards Europe and other continents and even to countries in the global south brings to light the complexity of this type of phenomenon (Parey, Ruhose, Waldinger & Netz, 2017). The Venezuelan exodus to Colombia and Brazil is another tragic example.

Migration studies are marked by discussions on the hierarchy of power between developed and (under)developing countries referred to as north-south migration (Robins, 2019; Schurer & Day, 2019). However, this research focuses on the new migratory flow, South-South, which has brought new or even old implications to the world of work and in interpersonal relationships (Ratha & Shaw, 2007). The objective of this paper is to analyse the integration of refugees from the global South in the workplace of small and medium-sized companies in the city of São Paulo based on the interpersonal relationships between Brazilian employers, refugee workers and Brazilian workers, taking into account the stereotypes socially constructed to refugees from southern countries.

The topic of refugee integration is still little explored in the specialized literature and this point to the need to advance research in different directions – among which we highlight the importance of further research on integration and social exclusion experienced by them (Moreira, 2014).

The refugee integration in the destination country is always a problematic issue due to their natural difficulty in facing cultural differences and communicating, among others factors (Dummett, 2004; Ruediger, 2017). We emphasize that this study does not intend to analyse integration based on the specificities of each country of origin of the interviewed refugees. The authors recognize that each country has its particularities regarding political, social, economic and environmental conditions, but this research refers to the South-South migratory movement from a macro point of view. Here all the interviewed refugees were forced to leave poor or in development countries to seek asylum in another developing country.

The term integration here is seen as the process experienced by subjects of foreign origin (refugees) within another society (from the sociological point of view) (Reitz, Banerjee, Phan & Thompson, 2018). This process is seen by Kuhlman (1991) as refugees becoming part of the receiving country as they can live with the natives in an acceptable way, not necessarily abandoning their culture, customs and values, but adapting behaviours both from abroad and from the native contexts. We may assume that integration is a dialectical process (Ager & Strang, 2008).

The migratory movement has intensified even more in recent years, bringing strong elements to the discussions of race relations, prejudice and racial discrimination. These elements reinforce the so called superiority affirmed by colonizing European white people over darker-skinned people, especially Africans, Asians and Indians, portraying the issue of social hierarchy, resulting in a hierarchy of power (Richeson & Sommers, 2016).

Brazil is one of the most miscegenated countries in the world (Pereira, 2012; Santos & Silva, 2017; Visentini, 2016). There is a majority of black people. According to IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2017) they account for 55% of the Brazilian population. However, the racial invisibility of black Brazilians is a fact. With the arrival of black people from different countries on the African continent seeking shelter in Brazil especially since 2010 in good numbers of refugees there is an overlap of stigmas: refugees, “Africans” (regardless of so many different cultures and countries) and blacks.

The effect of South-South migration on the economic situation of the sending and receiving countries suffers the impact of the increase in the migratory flow (Hatton & Williamson, 2008). For this reason, the importance of understanding the impact of the relationship between these two phenomena (labour relations and international migration) is emphasised once again. Our emphasis is on human mobility and integration of refugees in the Brazilian labour market, since we believe there is a significant impact (Aguayo-Téllez, Muendler & Poole, 2010; Carvalho et al., 2017; Vilela, Collares & Noronha, 2015). Certainly, the quest for work is one of the main refugee’s attempts to feel integrated into any work environment (Gericke, Burmeister, Löwe, Deller & Pundt, 2018).

South-South migration and refugees in Brazil

The migratory flow named South-South migration occurs from developing and underdeveloped countries to other developing countries. According to the latest report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2014) more than 80 million migrants who were born in the southern countries circulate also amongst other southern countries. This scenario gained space in academic discussions, and the African countries are the main responsible for much of the South-South migration.

Also according to the IOM report (2014), migrants who make up the South-South migration scenario are more likely to live illegally and undocumented, which contributes to them being trapped in lower positions in the labor market, therefore more vulnerable to exploitation at work, corroborating the perception of Ratha and Shaw (2007).

As Piper (2007) points out, those immigrants who make up the South-South migration scenario live in constant vulnerability. They are black people from undeveloped or developing countries in the global South such as Haiti and several countries from the African continent, contradicting the “ideal” type of immigration formed by European white people.

Some factors can be considered as an impetus to migration, such as: new job and/or study opportunities, new cultural opportunities, international economic imbalances, poverty and environmental degradation, natural disasters combined with the lack of peace and security, human rights violations and the different development degrees of legal and democratic institutions (Marchini, 2016; Margolis, 2013).

Forced migrations, known as refuge, driven by religious, racial, ethnic and political intolerance as well as by environmental catastrophes. It happens when the immigrant leaves his country for any of these reasons, in a non-optional way, being forced to look for another country to live in (Alfadhli & Drucy, 2017; Gerald & Arar, 2018; Godin & Dona, 2017; Marchini, 2016; Moreira, 2004; Peters, 2017). In this context, Ratha and Shaw (2007) assume that the phenomenon of South-South migration is more likely to relate to poorer refugees due to the conflicts experienced by underdeveloped countries of origin such as political and civil wars.

The history of Brazil as a country that receives refugees has intensified over the last few years. One of the main reasons for that is the benevolence of its legislation (Mialhe & Malheiro, 2016). Another factor that augmented the flow of refugees to Brazil is the increase of restrictions on entry into developed countries, thus reducing the options for reception.

Brazil is not one of the countries with the highest refugee reception rate, as shown by the UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In 2016, Germany received 722,400 new asylum applications, the highest number registered in the world. During this year the USA was the second largest country receiving asylum requests and registered 262,000 requests, the double of the number received in 2014. Italy, the third largest recipient of asylum requests, had a sharp increase and registered 123,000 new requests. While in Brazil, by the end of 2017, 10,145 refugees of different nationalities and 33,866 asylum seekers were recognized.

The UNHCR 2018 report shows how the number of asylum seekers in Brazil increased significantly from 2017 to 2018, when there were more than 80,000 asylum applications. The majority of them being from Venezuela, a different scenario in which till recently asylum seekers in Brazil were mostly Haitians and Congolese. Of the asylum seekers in 2018 in Brazil, 11,231 people were accepted refugees by the Brazilian government, the majority of them from southern countries.

Even though this number is still much lower than in other developed countries, the arrival of these refugees in Brazil was enough to impact the whole society (Mialhe & Malheiro, 2016), to the point of being the subject of national exacerbated political discussions. Brazilian government abandoned the Global Pact for Migration, which is signed by more than 160 UN member countries, which aims to make global migration flows safer and more organized (Euronews, 2019). Current Brazilian President Bolsonaro justifies abandoning the Pact due to a belief it hurts the country's sovereignty (ONU News, 2019).

What happens to refugees is a consequence of the actions or omissions of nation states in relation to providing protection to this population received in their territory, guaranteeing the rights that were at risk in the country of origin. The role of the State is very important to reduce the conditions of social vulnerability faced by the refugees. However, the government policies in Brazil, even if more generous than in other countries, are not enough; they still limit the refugee's human rights.

The pillars considered until today by the UNHCR regarding the protection of refugees are the 1951 Refugee Status Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. All of these contain rules that assure anyone of having the right to seek refuge in another country. Assuming that a refugee is anyone who suffers persecution due to his or her race, culture, religion, nationality or political opinions and understanding refuge the place of protection (Gerald & Arar, 2018; Moreira, 2004; Peters, 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2016).

Stereotypes regarding refugees from South-South migration and integration into the work environment

Since 2010, Brazil has been receiving a continuous flow of refugees from southern countries. In the beginning, most refugees were Haitians, Congolese and Senegalese. Over time, the South-South migration intensified with the arrival of Venezuelans, Colombians and Syrians (Cavalcanti, Oliveira & Tonhati, 2015). Consequently, with such an ethnic diversity in the country, private firms are under pressure to understand the new labour configurations and interpersonal relationships.

Many difficulties faced by immigrants are due to prejudice and xenophobia. Especially when it comes to emigrants from developing countries to developed countries where xenophobia remains strongly rooted (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Crush & Ramachandran, 2010; Peters, 2017; Pugh, 2017).

Another problem consists of emigrants from underdeveloped and developing countries to countries that are also underdeveloped or developing (South-South migration); prejudice can be revealed in other aspects (for example, race) (Peters, 2017; Pugh, 2017). As an example, those on the African continent, where prejudice is also linked to the skin colour. According to Rodriguez-Planas and Nollenberger (2016), immigrants from Africa suffer more barriers than the ones from other continents, due to stereotypes linked to their identities. For example, the perception that they are people with low qualifications and from “dangerous” countries.

The literature shows some challenges in the integration of South-South refugees in the work environment. These are associated with stereotypes, seen as a threat to the native labour market and to public security. Brazilians blame black refugees from South-South migration for “stealing” their jobs and for being associated with terrorism and war, “fugitives” (and therefore evildoers). They see the refugee as an economic and cultural threat (Dinesen, Klemmensen & Norgaard, 2016; Feldmeyer, Warren, Siennick & Neptune, 2014; Hellwing & Sinno, 2016).

Thus, the integration of refugees in the labour market mainly involves this economic threat, since groups of Brazilian workers and employers place immigrants in a condition of marginalized (they live on the margins of society). When this happens, a refugee finds himself outside the circle of normality, which makes it difficult for him to integrate into the work environment that starts to deteriorate by his lack of belonging, by the negative stereotypes that his image carries (Velho, 1981).

Another challenge is the language barrier. Many refugees do not speak or understand Portuguese, making it difficult to understand work activities and even their rights as refugees. The lack of access to the teaching of the Portuguese language makes it difficult for refugees to learn and consequently communicate with Brazilians, hampering their integration into the labor market (Carvalho et al., 2017).

Stereotypes about a particular social group such as refugees can be positive or negative (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, 2010). Discrimination is due to negative stereotypes, in which are nursed or nurtured differences between groups of individuals (Devine, 1986; Dovidio et al., 2010; Goffman, 1988; Krüger, 2004; Lehman, 2006). Harmful stereotypes are instruments of social exclusion (Santoro, 2014). The integration of refugees suffers from social exclusion, with the desire of the other, the native of the receiving country, to “eliminate” the refugee from a group, from a community, from society.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this article is to analyse the integration of South-South refugees into the workplace of small and medium-sized firms, based on the perceptions of Brazilian employers, co-workers and refugees. The research carried out was qualitative, since interconnections and complex relationships were studied (Dumay & Villiers, 2019).

The research was qualitative and the method was a case study, considering the group of refugees working in different work environments as the case study. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2017, p. 15), the case study research can vary widely, for example, “case studies of programs, events, persons, processes, institutions and social groups”. In this line, this study bases on social groups, since it seeks to understand the integration of the South-South group of refugees in the work environment from the perspectives of the refugees themselves, their employers and Brazilian co-workers. The case study is also indicated when it is intended to explore a complex situation through various data collection strategies such as those used in this research (semi-structured individual interviews and non-participant observation) (Delgado, 2019; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Stewart, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Semi-structured individual interviews and non-participant observation were conducted with 28 respondents: 7 refugee workers (2 Haitians, 2 Angolans, 1 Congolese, 1 Nigerian and 1 Beninese); 7 Brazilian employers (4 owners and 3 managers in the services, commerce and industry sectors); and 14 Brazilian who worked together with the refugees. It is worth mentioning that the refugees interviewed were the only ones working in the companies in which they operate.

The research subjects as well as the firms were contacted through *Missão Paz* (Peace Mission), the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Charles (Escalabrinians Catholic priests), an international community of religious that operates in 34 countries on five continents, accompanying immigrants and refugees from the most diverse cultures, beliefs and ethnicities, a reference for welcoming immigrants and refugees. The research happened in São Paulo, the largest Brazilian metropolis.

First, the researchers observed and assisted in the mediation between Brazilian employers and refugees at *Missão Paz*. This mediation takes place twice a week, when employers seek the religious institution to hire immigrants. In this occasion, the job offers are advertised in *Missão Paz* and the immigrants apply to participate in the mediation process, where the job interview takes place. After contacting the companies that hired the refugees, the researchers went to these companies to carry out the field research with the hired refugees, employers and Brazilian co-workers.

The visits to the surveyed firms took seven days, from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm, one day at each company, collecting interviews and observing the relations between refugees and Brazilians and the work activities developed by them. We transcribed the observations during the research period in the field diary, making it possible to relate them to the interviews.

Box 1 shows the profile of the companies visited, while Box 2 shows the profile of the refugees interviewed. Box 3 shows the profile of the Brazilians who were interviewed.

Box 1
Business segment and nationality of the interviewed and observed refugees

Brazilian Firm code	Business / Segment	Country of origin of the interviewed refugees	Time working for the Brazilian firm	Function in the Brazilian firm	Reason for refuge
E1	Hotel	Angola	9 months	Room maid	Religious persecution
E2	Automobile	Congo	9 months	Electrician	Risk to life
E3	Visual communication – signs	Haiti	1 year and 6 months	General assistant	Religious persecution
E4	Packaging factory	Angola	1 year and 6 months	Clerk	Civil war
E5	Ice factory	Haiti	1 year and 6 months	General assistant	Religious persecution
E6	Visual communication- graphic	Benin	8 months	General assistant	Civil war
E7	home goods store	Nigeria	8 months	Cashier	Religious persecution

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Box 2
Profile of the refugee workers interviewed

Firm	Name Code	Country	Sex	Age (years)	Education
E1	R1	Angola	F	28	Technique in nursing
E2	R2	Congo	M	34	Technical course in automobile maintenance
E3	R3	Haiti	M	36	Technical course in automobile maintenance
E4	R4	Angola	F	33	Under graduation in teaching
E5	R5	Haiti	M	22	Electronics technician
E6	R6	Benin	M	24	Agricultural technician
E7	R7	Nigeria	F	42	Under graduation in Teaching

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Box 3
Profile of Brazilian workers, managers and employers interviewed

Firm	Name Code	Age (years)	Education	Function in the Brazilian firm
E1	B1	33	Complete high school	Cooker
	B2	37	Complete high school	Safety
	Employer 1	44	Under graduated	Owner
E2	B3	25	Mechanical technician	mechanical
	B4	38	Mechanical technician	mechanical
	Employer 2	52	Mechanical technician	Manager
E3	B5	24	Under graduated	Customer service
	B6	31	Incomplete Under graduation	General helper
	Employer 3	47	Under graduated	Owner
E4	B7	19	Complete high school	Packer
	B8	26	Incomplete Under graduation	Seller
	Employer 4	48	Under graduated	Manager
E5	B9	23	Complete high school	General helper
	B10	26	Complete high school	General helper
	Employer 5	46	Complete high school	Owner
E6	B11	39	Under graduated	Supervisor
	B12	31	Incomplete Under graduation	General helper
	Employer 6	62	Under graduated	Owner
E7	B13	20	Complete high school	Seller
	B14	23	Under graduation in progress	Stockist
	Employer 7	35	Incomplete Under graduation	Manager

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

We used the content analysis to establish categories after the data collection, making it possible to corroborate some findings in the literature and bring new reflections on the theme.

The discussion of the data starts with the interviewees' reports about the stereotypes that mark refugee workers, making it difficult to integrate them. The second category of analysis is the solutions found by employers to help the integration of refugees. Finally, the last category discusses the possibilities of integration based on forms of communication.

Refugees seen as sources of different “problems” by Brazilian workers and employers

All Brazilian interviewed see refugees as a “problem” for the organizations. Brazilian employers and co-workers label the refugees as foreigners with customs different from Brazilians; those who do not understand the Portuguese language, making communication difficult; those who have questionable behaviours related to religion, mainly Muslim and voodoo.

There is a difference between how Brazilian employers and co-workers perceive this “problem”. For the co-workers the refugees become a “problem” because they do not participate in events outside the company (social network), do not have lunch with the team and accept doing any kind of service. They see the refugees as more “discreet” and “withdrawn”: “I think refugees are usually more in their own way” (B6, Brazilian worker at E3). Out of necessity, the refugees accept doing any kind of service for any salary, “disrupting the country’s economy”: “they accept everything and contribute to lowering our wages, this is complicated because there are unemployed Brazilians and they have no opportunity to find a job with so many immigrants here” (B2, Brazilian worker at E1).

In the view of the refugees, they are more “discreet” because they went through delicate situations during the crossing of the Brazilian border that left them more suspicious as in the literature (Piper, 2007; Silva, 2015). The crossing is always a landmark moment for refugees. They are the ones who, in most cases, leave their countries in a hurry and are in the hands of the “coyotes” (human traffickers) without enough money to make a peaceful crossing by legal means, being exposed to extreme conditions of vulnerability. They face traumatic circumstances such as sexual abuse, physical violence, threats, extortion, which have psychological and emotional implications. This suffering can result in the suspicions that they may have within the work environment. In addition, they realize some other obstacles that make integration even more difficult, especially with their co-workers that see them as “strange people” who want to occupy their space:

It is really bad when people look at us differently. It seems that we are animals in the zoo. We don’t want to steal anyone’s job. I just want to have an opportunity like everyone else, regardless of whether I’m Brazilian or not, black or not, whether I’m a refugee or not (R4, Angolan refugee, E4).

The speech of the Angolan refugee R4 above shows that prejudice can reveal itself in other aspects such as the racial issue, which is in line with the literature (Peters, 2017; Pugh, 2017). The flow of refugees in South-South migration is within the context of racial and historical prejudices. As this research has a larger number of refugees from African countries, they face more barriers due to stereotypes linked to their identities as perceived by Brazilians. For example, the perception that they are people of low qualification, ignoring the fact that several refugees have technical training, are teachers, nurses. In other words, without even seeking to know the life history of the refugees, without actually talking to them, the Brazilians labelled them as low qualified and even as “dangerous”. Phenomenon pointed out by literature (Rodriguez-Planas & Nollenberger, 2016). This is even more evident with the speech of the R2 refugee:

When my Brazilian colleagues learned that I was a refugee they always approached me as if I were a danger. I had the impression that they were afraid to leave me alone with some valuable things inside the company, thinking that I was going to steal it. I could never be the last person to leave the company. When I am asked to work late at least one person stays with me (R2, Congolese refugee, E2).

Brazilian employers see refugees as a “problem” because the relationship with their fellow Brazilian workers is often conflicting and generates complaints and poor performance on the teams. Employers blame the refugees for the difficult adaptation to the Brazilian culture; they see it as the motive behind these frictions. On the other hand, it became evident that Brazilian workers and employers also have difficulty in understanding another culture, mainly due to the lack of knowledge about the geographic and cultural diversity of refugees. After all, all Brazilians interviewed stereotyped refugees from African countries as a homogeneous group of “black Africans”, including even Haiti, a Central American country whose population is black and is not even on the African continent. This lack of knowledge strongly influences interpersonal relationships and makes it difficult for refugees to integrate into the workplace. This ignorance clearly shows when we see the confusion on the part of employers about “Africa” as the only explanation for so many diverse countries, cultures, religions, races and ethnicities.

During the researchers visits to the companies, among Brazilian workers and employers it was commonly observed the expressions: “he is African”, “Africans”. As if all countries in Africa were the same, had the same history, the same characteristics, showing that the Brazilians are unaware that the African continent has one of the greatest cultural, ethnic and racial diversities in the world.

Brazilian workers saw South-South refugees as a “problem” also because they are associated with diseases:

[...] once a person saw me coming out of the bathroom because I had injured my hand at work and I saw that she didn’t want to come close because I was bleeding. [...] you can see their fear because I am African. As if we were dirty, sick (R2, Congolese refugee, E2).

Being a danger to society was one of the stereotypes related to being a black refugee. When the Congolese refugee R2 talks about the fear provoked by his injury he highlights another stereotype that is linked to one of the reasons because he is seeking refuge: the epidemic of diseases such as HIV and malaria. The fear of the Brazilian approaching R2 is the fear of a person who was bleeding and could be a person at high risk to health, a “black person different from the black Brazilian”, “with African traits”, knowing that he is a refugee from Congo.

Therefore, the situations witnessed by the researchers in the companies indicate that for the refugees the more they keep away from Brazilian co-workers the more chances they will have to minimize their own image as a “problem”. However, this distance makes it even more difficult for them to integrate into the work environment.

For this reason, Brazilian workers think “the refugees are antisocial”, “reserved”, “shy”, “do not have lunch with us”, “do not frequent our social environments” (when invited). This may lead one to think that it is a conscious or unconscious choice of the refugees. Perhaps this is their strategy, to hide more about themselves to minimize the tensions, cultural shocks and personal conflicts around their identity.

The “problem” refugee needs a “solution” to be “integrated”

The survey results also show that Brazilian employers only began to worry about the integration of refugees when setbacks occurred with Brazilian workers. It was then they realized that the refugee was a “problem” because he generated some “problems” in the relationship at work that needed their attention.

For example, at E7 the Nigerian refugee R7 does not eat pork due to the Muslim religion and Halal food. Twice a week, the lunch offered by the company had only pork. R7 ended up not lunching. With the comments coming up in the company that R7 “excluded herself”, did not have lunch, the employer decided to offer two meat options for lunch. From then on, they solved “the problem”.

By the way, some refugees remembered food as an example of the employers’ lack of knowledge about cultural diversity. For Brazilian co-workers, this passed as “choosy”: “they arrive here and still choose what they want to eat; in their situation they have to eat everything” (B10, Brazilian worker, E5).

We observed another situation that drew our attention at E4. The Angolan refugee R4 (whose mother tongue is Portuguese as in Brazil) told us about a friction between her and another Brazilian worker who is no longer working in the company. This Brazilian co-worker criticized the way R4 cleaned the rooms, saying she was too slow, lazy and delayed all the necessary logistics. The two were co-workers and cleaned the same hotel floor. The Brazilian co-worker said that she tried to show R4 how she should do the service and the Angolan refugee understood but pretended that she did not understand. The manager learned of this friction between the two of them because a third Brazilian worker came to him concerned with the way the Brazilian co-worker spoke to R4. The manager solved the problem by placing the Brazilian to clean another floor of the hotel. Brazilian co-worker B6, who was not directly involved in the friction, believes that the Brazilian co-worker did not like the work of R4 because she thought the refugee had a “very strong smell” and everything the refugee did was “filthy”. This data

affirms the racism through stereotypes socially constructed as if “Africans” were dirty and their way of working “disgusting”. Still on this situation, R4 said:

Poor thing, she doesn't know what she is talking about. She was inappropriate, gross in judging my appearance. She was even more inappropriate because she proved to know nothing of History. I was a teacher for many years of history and it makes me sad [...] look how sad she thinks the countries of Africa are dirty! There are countries that are in bad situations, but we have a lot of beautiful things.

The lack of knowledge of Brazilian employers, managers and workers about the African continent was evident during the interviews and observation. This suggests that in order to begin the integration of refugees it is necessary to offer to Brazilian workers and employers opportunities to exchange cultural, geographical and historical knowledge. This could minimize the negative stereotypes that are socially constructed.

Although it was not the focus of this research, the data indicated the impact of the gender relationship on the integration of refugee women in the workplace. Brazilian employers see women refugees who are mothers as a greater “problem” than male ones. Employers complain they bring their children together to work (that happens because they have no one to look after them while they are working) and when they get their children to study in a public school these women miss work to solve problems related to their children. As the social networks of these women are small and linked to other refugee women who are in the same situation the “problem” is difficult to solve without the help of the government or employers, which is not the case in most situations.

The speeches of some employers clearly showed even stronger prejudice and stigma in relation to these refugee women than in relation to male refugees. For example, in order to work in commerce, employers prefer refugee women whom they consider “beautiful”, that is those who are not “marked” by “negro features, such as a large mouth and nose, outside the standard acceptable by society”. This research result is in line with what Goffman (1988) discusses about the construction of the social stigma that deteriorates the identity of the marginalized subject.

Communication as a gateway to integration: from good intentions to gross racism

The language undoubtedly is an essential aspect of integration. As the literature points out (Carvalho et al., 2017), the refugees' learning difficulties with the Portuguese language proved to be a barrier in communicating with Brazilians, causing an impact on their integration into the work environment, since the vast majority of Brazilians speak only Portuguese. This also happened in our research.

On a daily basis in the workplace, the difficulty in spoken communication weighed against refugees. Employers looked to hire Portuguese-speaking refugees. In the case of this research, the refugee who came from Angola, a country whose official language is Portuguese, was the only one in this condition. All the others spoke either English or a language similar to the French (the Haitian Creole). One explanation for this difficulty is due to the short time that refugees are in Brazil. As shown in Table 1 refugees are in the country from eight to 18 months. Communication is greatly hampered by the superficial contact with the Portuguese language. That is a significant barrier to the integration of refugees into the workplace.

Towards a fruitful exchange about cultural knowledge, a managerial incentive for different forms of communication is necessary, seeking to break the language barrier and consequently helping in the integration of South-South refugees. The management incentive happened even if the results were not as satisfactory as we will discuss from now on.

Stimulating communication was a way that Brazilian employers found to help with integration: “first of all, we need to understand what they say and they what we say” (E7, employer). In contrast, refugees say they often do not understand what Brazilian employers and workers say.

When there were volunteer interpreters in the surveyed firms (unusual) it was possible to observe spoken communication. However, in the vast majority of situations, without the help of interpreters in the workplace (a co-worker, for example) most of the managers and Brazilian workers in the companies we visited began to develop the following communication methods to help with integration: drawings, mimicry, gestures like applause and through tools available on the internet for instant translation.

At E3 there was a board with pictures of all employees. In the centre of the frame was the photo of the model employee featured in the month. Understood as a form of communication for integration by managers, it ended up showing racist manifestations on the part of Brazilian workers. During our visit to this company some Brazilian workers laughed: “the highlight of the month is the moc” (nickname given to the refugee, which means monkey). Brazilian workers were not even aware of the seriousness of their racist offense. When we questioned some of them about this nickname as racist they said that the refugee’s name was difficult to pronounce, that when the Brazilians called him by his real name the refugee did not understand that it was with him, because nobody knew how to pronounce his name. Employers themselves knew this racist nickname and even so used it to refer to refugee R3. Brazilian law is very strict against this crime of racism, which is nonbailable. Even so, both workers and managers continue to practice this serious crime of racism without even realizing it as such.

The communication techniques were also an instrument to make the refugees feel inferior. This is obvious in the following statements: “we try to talk to them but there is always someone making fun of us; I have already witnessed a colleague teaching the refugee to speak the ugly word shit when he did not want to do an activity at work, without the refugee knowing that it was an offense in Portuguese”.

In other words, communication is used both with good intentions and to put refugees in an even more derogatory situation. It is a way for Brazilians to feel in power in relation to refugees, reaffirming the literature on asymmetric power relations in migration (Robins, 2019; Schurer & Day, 2019). Brazilians believe they are in a position of superiority over black refugees from the global South.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering integration as the process experienced by refugees when they can live with the natives not abandoning their culture, customs and values but adapting behaviours of both the foreigner and the native, we cannot say that there is integration of the refugees from the global South in the workplace in the Brazilian companies we surveyed.

This is because refugees are seen more as a “problem”, demanding from employers solutions to minimize the impact of this “problem” than, in fact, as people whose abilities could be better used in the work environment.

There is still a need for a much more inclusive management. It is necessary to improve the support provided to refugees by management. Even the refugee qualifications aren’t well used by the companies themselves.

The Brazilian workers and employers interviewed are not prepared for this new configuration of the migratory phenomenon, since they do not know the countries of origin of the refugees. The total lack of knowledge about Africa makes negative stereotypes stand out, leading to frankly racist attitudes, deteriorating the identity of refugees. For the Brazilians interviewed, all African refugees are a threat to the job market, “fugitives”, black, poor, transmitters of diseases, have no qualifications. Not to say when they are simply called filthy, monkeys, expressions of explicit and gross racism.

As consequence, refugees end up increasingly isolating themselves, and, as such, Brazilians (the same that discriminate against them) label them as “too discreet” and unable to socialize. While for Brazilians this behaviour is a barrier to integration, for refugees it is a strategy to deal with stereotypes.

Reflecting the economic crisis that Brazil has been going through in recent years, Brazilian respondents are afraid that refugees will occupy places that would be of other unemployed Brazilians. Thus, the interpersonal relationship is still more difficult by the suspicions that Brazilians and refugees reciprocally foster.

Everything ends up becoming a barrier to integration between refugees and Brazilian workers: the language; the lack of knowledge of the culture; the political and economic situation of Brazil, in addition to the stereotypes of what it is to be black, refugee, “African” (as if the whole continent were a single country) and Haitian. These are strong limitations for the integration of refugees in the workplace.

Even if the managers of the companies used communication techniques as attempts at integration, Brazilian workers also used them as an opportunity to underestimate the refugee through prejudiced “jokes”.

The refugee integration process certainly involves greater cultural knowledge, awareness of ethnic and racial discrimination. There is a lack of greater management encouragement for actions to close ties between people from different cultures, through activities within the workplace. This could minimize intolerance due to stereotypes.

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