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Spaces of violence in the case of LGBTIQ+ immigration

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Abstract: The objective of the study is to analyze the impacts of spaces of violence in the case of LGBTIQ+ immigration. The qualitative methodology includes a set of theoretical reflections on the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects and the conjuncture of violence against the LGBTIQ+ population in Brazil, as well as semi-structured interviews with ten LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo. The analysis focuses on how spaces of violence can affect the migratory experience of these subjects. The results demonstrate that spaces of violence are mainly related to the institutional scope and the appropriation of physical and symbolic spaces in the city.

Keywords: Immigration; Refuge; LGBTIQ+; Spaces of Violence.

Espacios de violencia en el caso de la inmigración LGBTIQ+

Resumen: El objetivo del estudio es analizar los impactos de los espacios de violencia en el caso de la inmigración LGBTIQ+. La metodología cualitativa incluye un conjunto de reflexiones teóricas sobre la migración de sujetos LGBTIQ+ y la coyuntura de violencia contra la población LGBTIQ+ en Brasil, así como entrevistas semiestructuradas con diez inmigrantes y refugiadas/os LGBTIQ+ residentes en la ciudad de São Paulo. El análisis se centra en cómo los espacios de violencia pueden afectar la experiencia migratoria de estos sujetos. Los resultados demuestran que los espacios de violencia se relacionan principalmente con el ámbito institucional y la apropiación de espacios físicos y simbólicos de la ciudad.

Palabras clave: Inmigración; Refugio; LGBTIQ+; Espacios de Violencia.

Espaços de violência no caso da imigração LGBTIQ+

Resumo: O objetivo do estudo é analisar os impactos dos espaços de violência no caso da imigração LGBTIQ+. A metodologia qualitativa inclui um conjunto de reflexões teóricas sobre a migração de sujeitos LGBTIQ+ e a conjuntura da violência contra a população LGBTIQ+ no Brasil, assim como dez entrevistas semiestructuradas com imigrantes e refugiadas/os LGBTIQ+ residentes na cidade de São Paulo. A análise enfoca como os espaços de violência podem afetar a experiência migratória desses sujeitos. Os resultados demonstram que os espaços de violência estão relacionados principalmente ao âmbito institucional e à apropriação dos espaços físicos e simbólicos da cidade.

Palavras-chave: Imigração; Refúgio; LGBTIQ+; Espaços de Violência.

Introduction

When we address the issue of human mobility, it is necessary to consider the diversity of the experiences of those who migrate, overcoming a merely quantitative, demographic, or economic bias. From this perspective, it is possible to analyze its “objective” causes, material conjunctures and inequalities (Sandro MEZZADRA, 2005). Thus, we must ponder the elements of subjectivity involved in the experiences of each migrant.

In the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexual or gender minorities), the norms resulting from the hegemony of cisgenderity and heterosexuality make their experiences of displacement affected

at different levels¹. In more than 70 countries, for example, affective-sexual relationships between people of the same gender are criminalized and may even result in death penalty (as in Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen).²

As a geopolitical limit that promotes the foundation of a social space, the national territory presents an intimate relation to the marginalization, vulnerability, and precariousness of the existence of LGBTIQ+ subjects, a process that I name as *geographies of the exclusion* (Hadriel THEODORO, 2021). With this term I emphasize the concrete effects that the cisgender and heterosexual norms in a given social space have on our experiences. Their impacts on subjectivity, on the body, on desires, on sexuality, and on the possibilities of gender expression produce a scale of (cultural, political, economic, legal, academic, labor, religious etc.) exclusion. Therefore, each territory and each social space present specific levels of this exclusion, which can generate in the LGBTIQ+ subjects the will or the need to (in)migrate (THEODORO, 2021). It is worth pointing out that these impacts occur differently for each of the groups that make up the LGBTIQ+ collective (for example, a black trans person will have different experiences than a gay, white, cisgender man).

Therefore, the modes of experiencing sexual orientations and/or gender identities and expressions (SOGIE) are intimately related to territory, and the sociocultural dimension of space is a fundamental element to be considered when we deal with the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects (Nicholas DE GENOVA, 2010; Estelle KRZESLO, 2007; Lawrence LA FOUNTAIN-STOKES, 2009; Norma MOGROVEJO, 2005; Catherine NASH; Andrew GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014; Natalie OSWIN, 2008; Farhang ROUHANI, 2016; Gil VALENTINE, 2002; Ruben ZECENA, 2019). This is because not conforming to the hegemonic cisgender and/or heterosexual pattern implies being susceptible to a series of symbolic and/or physical violence. In intensely repressive sociocultural contexts, migrating represents not only the possibility of greater freedom, but also of survival (Vitor ANDRADE, 2019; Daniel NASCIMENTO, 2018; THEODORO, 2020; WESLING, 2008).³ In this sense, it is valid to understand space as the result of a set of socio-cultural relations that vary over time, so that it becomes a fundamental component of social organization itself (Milton SANTOS, 2017).

Regarding a mobility policy for LGBTIQ+ subjects, citizenship resides in the right to be mobile without it representing any kind of vulnerability or precariousness (DE GENOVA, 2010). As Tim Cresswell (2010) argues, mobility is an inherent condition of the constitution of the subject, of the fully realized (and visible) citizen participating in democracy. In this sense, once social life is increasingly lived *on the move* (NASH; GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014), social space becomes an elementary factor to the possibility of diversity and to the migratory flows of LGBTIQ+ subjects.

In the Brazilian context, there is a paradoxical scenario, which further complexifies the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects. On the one hand, there is an imaginary of sexual diversity and respect for differences, as it is evident in the stereotype of the “carnival country” (ANDRADE, 2019). Besides, Brazil is one of the few countries that accepts refugee requests based on discrimination related to SOGIE⁴: classifying LGBTIQ+ subjects as a social group, the symbolic and/or physical violence experienced in the country of origin is understood as a valid element to the asylum request (ANDRADE, 2019; NASCIMENTO, 2018). On the other hand, however, Brazil is one of the most violent countries against LGBTIQ+ people in the world⁵ – even though there have been many advances in terms of public policies and rights for the LGBTIQ+ population in the last decades (Sérgio CARRARA, 2015; Cosme DA SILVA, 2020; Valdenízia PEIXOTO, 2018).

Taking this into account, the main objective of this work is to investigate the existence and impacts of spaces of violence on the migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo⁶.

¹ The acronym LGBTIQ+ refers to a huge variety of experiences, which have their own particularities. Therefore, it can also vary according to the historical moment, place, or context of its use. In this study, I choose this acronym for two main reasons: its importance in terms of representation of a minority group and the visibility of different sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions (THEODORO, 2021). In some migration studies, it is also possible to find the term *queer diaspora* to refer to the mobility experiences of these subjects (Meg WESLING, 2008).

² Retrieved from <https://ilga.org/>

³ It is important to point out that the ability to move and to engage in certain types of movement is socially differential and unevenly distributed, which means that not every LGBTIQ+ subject is able to undertake a migratory project.

⁴ The list still includes Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, among others.

⁵ The latest report released by Grupo Gay da Bahia (GGB) informs that in 2019, there were 297 homicides of LGBTIQ+ people in Brazil. As the methodology used by GGB is based on cases that are reported in the media, the number of deaths may be even higher, since there is a great underreporting, aggravated by structural and institutional violence against the LGBTIQ+ population. Retrieved from <https://grupogaydabahia.com.br/relatorios-anuais-de-morte-de-lgbti/>. I do not intend to reinforce a reductionist view about this context, mainly because Brazil is a very large, diverse, and extremely complex country in socio-cultural terms. Moreover, even in countries with strong protective laws, there is no guarantee that cases of discrimination or violence cannot occur, that this legislation is applied, and/or that there is a fight against impunity (THEODORO, 2021).

⁶ This study is related to a doctoral research carried out between February 2017 and January 2021, funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP). It aimed precisely to analyze how the visibility or invisibility of the ontological difference concerning SOGIE impacts on the migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects living in the city of São Paulo (Brazil) and Barcelona (Spain).

Methodology

This is a qualitative study. The methodology is based (a) on a set of theoretical reflections on the subject of the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects, violence and space; and (b) on the development of an empirical stage, which consists in the accomplishment of a semi-structured interview, conducted between 2018 and 2020, with ten LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo.

In Brazil, the city of São Paulo has been the main migratory attraction pole, concentrating 37% of the total number of immigrants (IBGE, 2010) and 52% of the total number of refugees who arrive in the country (CONARE, 2017). Based on data from the 2010 IBGE Census, the population of the city of São Paulo exceeds 12 million people, 2.3% of whom are international immigrants (about 280 thousand individuals) – in the total national population, they represent only 0,34%. It is worth highlighting that these numbers do not include unregulated immigrants. The city has also some public policies aimed specifically at migrants, such as those implemented by the Center for Reference and Assistance to Immigrants (CRAI), created in 2014, linked to the Municipal Secretariat for Human Rights and Citizenship (SMDHC).

The selection criteria for research participation were that LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees who (a) identified themselves as LGBTIQ+; (b) were from countries of the Global South; and (c) were residents in the city of São Paulo. Regarding criterion (b), although South-North flows are more visible in the approach to migrations, flows towards the South of the planet are already numerically equated to South-North displacements, pointing to a redistribution of their dynamics (Catherine DE WENDEN, 2016). In addition, among the countries that have some type of penalty in relation to LGBTIQ+ subjects, most of them are also found in the Global South.

Besides that, it must be emphasized that the invisibility of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in the public space also impacted the development of the research itself, since it impairs their location, access, and approach to participation in the study. Therefore, the establishment of other selection criteria, such as age, nationality, length of stay in the country etc., could disrupt the continuity of the research and restrict the possibilities of participation of these subjects in the study.

The following table contains general information about the interviewees. To preserve anonymity, the names have been changed. The residence time refers to the moment when the interview was conducted.

Table 1. General information about the interviewees

Interviewee	Country of origin	SOGI	Age	Migratory condition	Residence time	Date of the interview
Antonia	Mozambique	Lesbian (cis woman)	34	Refugee	5 years	Apr. 2018
Carla	Colombia	Pansexual (cis woman)	44	Immigrant	15 years	May. 2018
Cesar	Bolivia	Gay (cis man)	32	Immigrant	4 years	Nov. 2018
Jorge	Argentina	Gay (cis man)	37	Immigrant	6 years	Nov. 2018
José	Peru	Gay (cis man)	23	Immigrant	4 months	Mar. 2018
Lucas	Cuba	Gay (cis man)	29	Refugee	1 year	Oct. 2018
Pedro	Colombia	Gay (cis man)	25	Immigrant	4 years	Nov. 2019
Samuel	Nigeria	Gay (cis man)	23	Refugee	3 years	Feb. 2020
Tereza	Chile	Heterosexual (trans woman)	32	Immigrant	2 years	Mar. 2020
Yago	Peru	Gay (cis man)	42	Immigrant	19 years	Nov. 2019

Source: own elaboration.

#PraTodoMundoVer (The table has six columns, containing the following information: name of the ten immigrants interviewed, country of origin, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, migratory condition, residence time in Brazil, and the date of the interview. Antonia, Mozambique, Lesbian, 34 years old, Refugee, 5 years living in Brazil, April 2018. Carla, Colombia, Pansexual, 44 years old, Immigrant, 15 years living in

Brazil, May 2018. Cesar, Bolivia, Gay, 32 years old, Immigrant, 4 years living in Brazil, November 2018. Jorge, Argentina, Gay, 37 years old, Immigrant, 6 years living in Brazil, November 2018. José, Peru, Gay, 23 years old, Immigrant, 4 months living in Brazil, March 2018. Lucas, Cuba, Gay, 29 years old, Refugee, 1 year living in Brazil, Oct. 2018. Pedro, Colombia, Gay, 25 years old, Immigrant, 4 years living in Brazil, November 2019. Samuel, Nigeria, Gay, 23 years old, Refugee, 3 years living in Brazil, February 2020. Tereza, Chile, Trans woman, 32 years old, Immigrant, 2 years living in Brazil, March 2020. Yago, Peru, Gay, 42 years old, Immigrant, 19 years living in Brazil, November 2019).

It is worth noting again that SOGIE was self-assigned by the research participants themselves. Moreover, the representation in terms of SOGIE is also a reflection of the impacts of the dynamics of (in)visibility on fieldwork, showing how they impact differently the migratory experiences of these subjects. For example, at no point during my empirical forays did I come across refugees or immigrants who identified themselves as bisexual, intersex, or queer. Therefore, the experiences of refugees and immigrants who agreed to participate in this study contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of (in)visibility in the mobility of LGBTIQ+ subjects, both from their individuality and from characteristics that, by being correlated to a certain socio-historical context, present more collective elements – corresponding to the social group they integrate.

The analysis is based on the autobiographical narratives of the interviewed subjects, mainly with regard to cases of violence reported by them, as well as their relations with the socio-geographical dimension of space and with the process of adaptation to the Brazilian socio-cultural context (particularly the city of São Paulo). In this sense, it is necessary to understand that the act of narrating is one of the foundations from which the subject gives meaning to the world, in addition to serving to signify the situations and events of our existence (Christine DELORY-MOMBERGER, 2015). In other words, the autobiographical narratives are related to the way the subject integrates, structures, and interprets the spaces and temporalities of her/his historical and social environment. Hence the relevance assumed by the narrative, given that, through a *biographical activity*, bridges are established between the individual, the social and the historical scope (Leonor ARFUCH, 2010).

The migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects

Gender is a primordial way of signifying power relations. This is because gender is a structuring element of social interactions, implying culturally shared symbols and their representation process, normative concepts of these codes interpretation (usually based on binary oppositions), the role of institutions (family, state, church, school etc.), and the establishment of subjective identities (Joan SCOTT, 2015). The main problem lies on the fact that gender is normally understood as synonymous of sexual difference, based on a binary matrix (the feminine vs. the masculine), which is reiterated by the hegemony of heterosexuality. The normalizations referent to an “original” or “primary” heterosexuality become marks of sexual and gender difference, which legitimize normative patterns of bodies, identities, and desires to the detriment of their plurality (Paul B. PRECIADO, 2008).

This ideological bias leads to the production of biopolitical ideals of femininity and masculinity, which are imposed as transcendental essences and imply gender aesthetics, normative codes of social legibility, and even psychological convictions that force the subject to assert herself/himself/themself repeatedly as a woman or a man, female or male, homosexual or heterosexual (PRECIADO, 2008; SCOTT, 2015). Thus, the transgression of these borders can lead to the precariousness of existence, since it encompasses different forms of violence such as the pathologization of “deviant” subjectivities, the stigmatization, and the coercive practices of correction (Judith BUTLER, 2011).

Regarding migration, it is necessary to understand that these norms impact both the dimension of the experience of the migrant subject and the construction and living of the social space (ANDRADE, 2019; Isadora FRANÇA, 2017; LA FOUNTAIN-STOKES, 2009; Martin MANALANSAN IV, 2006; MOGROVEJO, 2005; ROUHANI, 2016; THEODORO, 2021; VALENTINE, 2002; WESLING, 2008; ZECENA, 2019). Concerning the migrant subject, it is not rare to exist a personification of those who migrate in the figure the migrant man. Diffused in the social imaginary, it demands us to carry out what Krzeslo (2007) names *correction of the look*. This means that we should not consider the migrant subject to be *a priori* male, heterosexual, and cisgender. On the contrary, it is essential to take into account the diversity contained in contemporary migratory movements and at the same time to understand that the ways of experiencing and expressing desires, gender identities, and sexual orientations produce profound impacts on the migratory experience.

In the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects, therefore, attention must be paid to the emergence of forms of subjectivity that, for being susceptible to precariousness due to the breakdown of the hegemonic normative model, need specific rights. For Isadora França (2017), the intensification of demands for “sexual rights” on international scope and on the political agenda of local governments profoundly influences their displacement experiences. Political struggles around a positive appraisal of homosexuality in Western countries, for example, contribute to the

visibility of the issue and its entry into the field of human rights, aiding the composition of the idea of *sexual democracy* (FRANÇA, 2017; Jasbir PUAR, 2007)⁷.

However, we must acknowledge that, in several countries, there are no citizenship or legal guarantees for LGBTIQ+ subjects, who become objects of abuse, discrimination, persecution, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, torture, and murder (ANDRADE, 2019; NASCIMENTO, 2018; MOGROVEJO, 2005; WESLING, 2008). The more visible the dissent in relation to the hegemonic normative codes, the greater the risks of precariousness (THEODORO, 2021). In the interrelationship with socio-spatial dynamics, this means that certain social spaces (both in rural areas and in urban centers) may be less receptive to this visibility, representing a vulnerability to the LGBTIQ+ subjects. That is why the imaginary about the living conditions of LGBTIQ+ subjects in a given sociocultural context, encompassing questions of law, citizenship, and respectability, can emerge in this scenario as a decisive factor in the choice of the destination place and the migration project itself (THEODORO, 2020, 2021; THEODORO, Denise COGO, 2019).

These factors strongly influence the (re)configuration of symbolic and material limits and borders, outlining subjects of law or "victims", who, because of the precariousness of their life condition, can demand protection from the State. This leads to a constant redefinition of management mechanisms at local, international, and transnational level (FRANÇA, 2017). We are faced with a complex production of differences, whose ambiguities are evident in the tensions between protection, control, and criminalization of the migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects.

In this sense, we must keep in mind that subjectivities and identities do not exist in a vacuum (CRESSWELL, 2010). On the contrary, they are linked to places and spaces where social actors and groups are inserted. Therefore, since social space is always relational, it directly impacts the way we understand, express, and experience our subjectivity, our sexual desires, and our gender identity (NASH; GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014, 2014). In addition, the social space is also closely related to the violence linked to SOGIE (David BELL; Jon BINNIE, 2004; NASH; GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014; OSWIN, 2008; ROUHANI, 2016).

Regarding internal displacement (within the limit of the nation-state), migration from rural to urban areas and from small to large cities is recurrent in the case of LGBTIQ+ subjects (Andrade, 2019). In particular, large urban centers have a strong attractiveness to LGBTIQ+ subjects, since they represent a more welcoming environment to their dissident subjectivities, due to factors as greater freedom to express differences related to SOGIE, less social surveillance, relative anonymity, and the existence of support networks (ANDRADE, 2019; BELL; BINNIE, 2004; MANALANSAN IV, 2006).

In this urban context, the presence and visibility of subjects who self-identify as LGBTIQ+ also contributes to socio-spatial transformations (THEODORO, 2021), fostering the development and consolidation of *queer territorialities* (BELL; BINNIE, 2004), which are highly dynamic and formed through a network of ideas, people, and practices. Thus, the visibility of LGBTIQ+ subjects and places in the public sphere acquires a political impact with regard to city spaces. In other words, when thinking about the emergence and transformation of neighborhoods, districts or regions that are more welcoming to LGBTIQ+ subjects, we also need to keep in mind the cultural, political and power relations inscribed in their mobility in certain geographical contexts of urban spaces (BELL; BINNIE, 2004; NASH; GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014; OSWIN, 2008).

In relation to international migrations, it is necessary to pay attention to two variables. The first refers to immigrations of a voluntary nature, which may arise from varied migratory projects: study, work, family ties, cultural and socioeconomic factors etc. In this category of mobility, the immigrant is not seen strictly compelled to leave her/his/their country of origin: the migrant subject undertakes a migratory project covering objective, subjective, material, and immaterial factors, even though, indirectly, the issue of SOGIE may also be present, operating as a decisive principle for displacement.

The second variable is related to a specific category of mobility, which includes conditioning to a regulated migratory status: the refugee. In 1951, at the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the refugee is defined as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UN, 1951, p. 3). Due to its polysemy, the criterion *social group* has, over time, aggregated asylum requests from immigrants who did not fit into the other four categories, as in the case of women who suffer gender violence and, subsequently, LGBTIQ+ subjects.

⁷ It is worth emphasizing that racialization and the reinforcement of (homo)nationalisms can be a negative consequence of this process, since, depending on how gender and sexuality are triggered in international political disputes, the articulation between nation, citizenship and freedom are capable of generating and deepening borders. We can think, for example, of the split between a "West" characterized by respect for sexual and gender diversity, civility, and egalitarianism, and, on the other hand, an "East" marked by the weakness or absence of human rights in relation to the LGBTIQ+ subjects, by discrimination, prejudice, violence.

In 2002, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published "Guidelines on International Protection N. 1: Gender-Related Persecution" and "Guidelines on International Protection N. 2: Membership of a Particular Social group". In Guidelines N. 1, UNHCR (2002a) highlights the fact that gender is an important dimension in human displacement. In Guidelines N. 2, UNHCR (2002b) points out that there is no single and homogeneous criterion that can define what constitutes a "social group" and which can be considered "specific social groups". In 2007, a significant step is taken in this sense with the publication of the Yogyakarta Principles - Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, which states that "sexual orientation and gender identity are integral to every person's dignity and humanity and must not be the basis for discrimination or abuse" (THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES, 2007, p. 6).

It is also necessary to consider that the mobility of LGBTQ+ subjects impacts in different ways the (re)formulation of socio-spatial landscapes. In this sense, it may represent a resistance against spaces of violence, from the constitution of alternative spaces, especially in urban centers. This ultimately changes their territorial and political organization, being able to promote more receptive and respectful spaces for LGBTQ+ subjects – including migrants (NASH; GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014).

In this sense, the clashes involving gender and sexuality are conditioned by the effectiveness (or not) of policies to combat violence aimed at LGBTQ+ subjects. In the case of Brazil, authors such as Andrade (2017), França (2017) and Nascimento (2018) highlight a paradoxical context. First, they mention that Brazil has some rights and policies aimed at the LGBTQ+ population, such as the provision of free HIV-AIDS treatment since the 1990s; the institution, in 2008, of the Transsexualization Process in the Unified Health System (SUS); and the recognition by the Federal Supreme Court (STF), in 2011, of the stable homosexual union as a family entity. In addition, in the last decades the country also started to receive asylum requests based on SOGIE.⁸

However, as previously reported, Brazil has high rates of LGBTQ+ murders, not to mention cases of violence that are not reported or accounted for by the authorities (CARRARA, 2010, 2015; Jacson GROSS; Daniela DE CADEMARTORI, 2018). This is aggravated by the institutional violence against the LGBTQ+ population, which is inscribed in different instances: in the culture, in politics, in the educational system, in the media etc. (MENDES; DA SILVA, 2020; PEIXOTO, 2018). Therefore, the harmful consequences of violence against the LGBTQ+ population in Brazil also impact social spaces, both in their physical and symbolic dimensions (THEODORO, 2021).

Violence against LGBTQ+ people: the Brazilian case

As mentioned before, the hegemonic norms governing SOGIE are linked to social space and territory (particularly regarding the establishment of the border limits of the nation state). It is from this intersectional scope that we must understand the spaces of violence and how they affect the mobility of LGBTQ+ migrants. In the case of Brazil, these spaces cannot be dissociated from the sociocultural structure that legitimizes the discrimination against LGBTQ+ subjects.

According to Carlos Figari (2010), the prejudices, stigmas, and discriminations concerning subjectivities, bodies, and identities considered as dissidents to cisnormative and heteronormative patterns date back to the colonial period. Strongly linked to the religious dogmas, colonialism establishes a normative order that seeks to nullify, erase and punish all forms of sexual and gender diversity. For example, in the search for a pretended civility, the cultures of the indigenous peoples began to be understood as barbarism and, from this perspective, susceptible to corrections. The resulting civilizing shock generates a culture of normalizing violence that has historically been perpetuated. In 1612, for example, a Tupinambá autochthon (by the name Tibira) was accused of practicing the crime of sodomy and later sentenced to death in Maranhão (in the northeast of Brazil): "to clean up the land of so much excruciating custom, the unfortunate native was arrested with the consent of the French Capuchins and tied to a cannon, which, with the explosion, spread his body through the Bay of São Marcos. He is the first registered gay martyr in the history of Brazil" (Luiz MOTT, 1993, p. 62).

With regard particularly to LGBTQ+ subjects, there is a rather paradoxical situation. On the one hand, especially from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, LGBTQ+ movements (at first more related to gays and lesbians) began to emerge in Brazil, such as the newspaper *O lamião da esquina* (1978-1981), the group in defense of LGBTQ+ rights Somos (1978), and the Grupo Gay da Bahia (1980). This makes Brazil a prominent place in Latin America regarding the struggles for visibility, citizenship, and rights of LGBTQ+ people. The LGBTQ+ movement's visibility policies allowed the recognition of cultural specificities and the claim of these subjects as citizens (FIGARI, 2010).

⁸ In Brazil, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice and UNHCR found that, between 2010 and 2018, 369 asylum applications were registered based on SOGIE. Most of the requests occurred in the southeastern region of the country (314), with São Paulo being the state that received the most requests (286). Retrieved from https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/11eabzin2AXUDzK6_BMRmo-bAIL8rYcY/page/1KIU.

In the last two decades there has been greater visibility on the problem of violence against LGBTIQ+ people in Brazil and the implementation of laws or public policies aimed at this collective. However, these advances contrast with a cultural context that legitimizes and replicates the violence of everyday oppression, in appearance not always visible (CARRARA, 2010; GROSS; DE CADEMARTORI, 2018; MENDES; DA SILVA, 2020). This means that although there are achievements in the recognition of rights, oppressive structures are maintained. From different points, they hinder any broader emancipatory attempt. According to Peixoto (2018), the main cause of this type of violence is the strong intolerance and discrimination about sexual orientation, gender identities, gender expressions and people whose bodies defy the socially accepted standards. As we will see next, this also influences the experiences of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in Brazil.

Because of that, being or even appearing to be a LGBTIQ+ subject represents a susceptibility to various forms of violence. Brazilian society and culture are still strongly founded on a cisnormative and heteronormative regime, which, coupled with the State's failure to take effective measures to investigate and punish phobic crimes against the LGBTIQ+ population, end up reiterating the conjuncture of violence (CARRARA, 2010, 2015; GROSS; DE CADEMARTORI, 2018; MENDES; DA SILVA, 2020)⁹. Thus, in the experience of LGBTIQ+ subjects in Brazil, the relationship between the social space and the risk of violence is a reality. This risk is directly associated with the dimension of the public visibility of the difference, both individually and collectively (NASH; GORMAN-MURRAY, 2014; THEODORO, 2021).

Another point to be considered concerns the differences between urban and peripheral areas, given that Brazil is a country of continental proportions. Figari (2010) explains that in Latin American societies the coexistence of many temporalities is quite common, for example, regions with different levels of modernization and development marks. Because of this, the issue of visibility, access to services targeting the LGBTIQ+ population and the existence of LGBTIQ+ collectives also have an intrinsic relationship with the social space and affect the experiences of these subjects.

This whole conjuncture of violence directly or indirectly impacts the experience of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in the country, with implications for both the migration project and the adaptation process (THEODORO, 2021). Without disregarding the capacity of agency of these subjects, the physical and symbolic spaces of violence found in the Brazilian context can contribute to the worsening of a condition of vulnerability or precariousness of their existence.

Spaces of violence: data analysis and discussion

In order to investigate the experiences related to spaces of violence in the case of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo, the focus of this study is on their own narratives, collected through semi-structured interview. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded (with each participant's permission). After transcribing all the interviews, I carried out a verification of the cases of violence reported by the immigrants and refugees interviewed¹⁰, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Cases of violence

Interviewee	Country of origin	SOGIE	Cases of violence
Antonia	Mozambique	Lesbian (cis woman)	· Appropriation of city spaces · Institutional violence
Carla	Colombia	Pansexual (cis woman)	· Appropriation of city spaces · Institutional violence
Cesar	Bolivia	Gay (cis man)	· Discrimination in the workplace · Institutional violence · Prejudice from the local LGBTIQ+ community
Jorge	Argentina	Gay (cis man)	· Institutional violence
José	Peru	Gay (cis man)	· Appropriation of city spaces
Lucas	Cuba	Gay (cis man)	· Appropriation of city spaces · Discrimination in the labor market

⁹ We can consider that the very constitution of nation-states is based on normative regimes referring to SOGIE. In this sense, I do not disregard the existence of several forms of resistance to these regulatory regimes by LGBTIQ+ individuals and collectives, who establish an ongoing counter-hegemonic struggle on a daily basis.

¹⁰ Race was not a particularly analyzed category in this study. However, it also did not appear in the narrative of any of the interviewees as an element that impacted the dynamics of (in)visibility or the experience of violence in the city spaces.

Pedro	Colombia	Gay (cis man)	· Appropriation of city spaces
Samuel	Nigeria	Gay (cis man)	· Institutional violence
Tereza	Chile	Heterosexual (trans woman)	· Appropriation of city spaces
Yago	Peru	Gay (cis man)	· Prejudice from the local LGBTIQ+ community

Source: own elaboration.

#PraTodoMundoVer (The table has four columns, containing the following information: name of the ten immigrants interviewed, country of origin, sexual orientation and gender identity, and a summary of the cases of violence reported by them. Antonia, Mozambique, Lesbian, Appropriation of city spaces, Institutional violence. Carla, Colombia, Pansexual, Appropriation of city spaces, Institutional violence. Cesar, Bolivia, Gay, Discrimination in the workplace, Institutional violence, Prejudice from the local LGBTIQ+ community. Jorge, Argentina, Gay, Institutional violence. José, Peru, Gay, Appropriation of city spaces. Lucas, Cuba, Gay, Appropriation of city spaces, Discrimination in the labor market. Pedro, Colombia, Gay, Appropriation of city spaces. Samuel, Nigeria, Gay, Institutional violence. Tereza, Chile, Trans woman, Appropriation of city spaces. Yago, Peru, Gay, Prejudice from the local LGBTIQ+ community).

From this synthesis, I would like to highlight the two points that I consider to be major in the composition of spaces of violence in the experience of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in the city of São Paulo. The first of these concerns the *institutionalization of violence*.

In the case of the experiences of the immigrants and refugees interviewed, the main institution mentioned is the Federal Police, which is the agency responsible for the migration issue in the country (although many non-governmental organizations, such as Cáritas¹¹, are heavily involved in supporting immigrants and refugees regarding the asylum application process or the regularization of migratory status). Carla and Jorge, for example, highlight the lack of information, the excess of bureaucracy and that Federal Police officials are generally not prepared to deal with immigrants.

Such basic, fundamental services, as, for example, at the Federal Police, it is shocking that these people do not speak at least two, three languages, that they do not have officials who speak different languages. This cannot happen in a serious country that welcomes immigrants. And I've seen a lot of mistreatment as well (CARLA, 2018).

It's kind of weird that the migration process is police-led in Brazil. In addition, the mistreatment, the lack of patience, the lack of empathy, the lack of communication in the language, it all becomes a barrier for us. It is clearly a form of violence against immigrants (JORGE, 2018).

It is also important to note that the Federal Police is the agency responsible for receiving asylum requests in Brazil. In the case of LGBTIQ+ refugees, this can represent both symbolically and physically a space of violence. Antony's experience exemplifies this issue well:

When I arrived at the Federal Police, I didn't say why I left my country, because I didn't know if that person who was talking to me was homophobic or not. Then I said something else. I didn't get to the LGBT point because I was not comfortable. I cannot lie. I was not comfortable. I just went to talk about the real reason at Conare [National Committee for Refugees], because it was a woman who was there, and I felt more comfortable talking to her. Maybe if I had felt comfortable telling the truth from the beginning, I think the process would have been a lot easier (ANTONIA, 2018).

The fear of continuing to suffer from prejudice and discrimination leads Antonia to omit from the Federal Police the cause of her coming to Brazil. Furthermore, Antonia's narrative allows us to verify that this space of violence directly impacts her migratory project, affecting the process of regularizing the refugee status. In this sense, we need to consider that LGBTIQ+ refugees are usually people who, due to a history of persecution, may feel prevented from informing their LGBTIQ+ identity to those responsible for making the decision on the asylum request (ANDRADE, 2019). In addition, they come from situations in which they lacked protection, which is why they often do not trust government authorities when it comes to receiving help or dealing with issues related to SOGIE (NASCIMENTO, 2018). This is also evident in Samuel's narrative:

I didn't know how to do the procedures, because sometimes there is a lack of information. For example, I was unaware that all violence against homosexuals in Nigeria could be a reason for the asylum request. When I went to the Federal Police, nobody informed me about it. And I was also afraid to say the real reason for my coming to Brazil because I didn't know if I could trust that person who was attending me (SAMUEL, 2020).

¹¹ Cáritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo is an organization of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), an institution that brings together the bishops of the Catholic Church in the country.

From the experiences of Antonia and Samuel, we can problematize the fact that, in Brazil, the Federal Police is the institution responsible for receiving asylum requests. This is because, in the socio-cultural context of origin, police institutions may be responsible for perpetrating various forms of violence against LGBTIQ+ subjects, contributing to their decision to (e)migrate (LA FOUNTAIN-STOKES, 2009; MOGROVEJO, 2005). Therefore, the visibility of a non-hegemonic SOGIE in this institutional scope can become a barrier to the demand for international protection on the part of LGBTIQ+ subjects.

In Cesar's narrative, in turn, it is evident that even institutions that have actions aimed at supporting immigrants and refugees in the city of São Paulo, such as Cáritas and Missão Paz¹², are sometimes not prepared to deal with the specificities of the migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects:

I think the LGBT immigrant has to be more fearful, worried, than a straight immigrant or refugee, because if a straight immigrant or refugee goes to Cáritas or to Missão Paz, they help them, they attend them well. But a LGBT immigrant who is trans, transvestite, or very effeminate or very lesbian, by my understanding, will be seen as a doubly different person. So, it depends a lot on the person who will attend you there. Only if they have experience with Brazilian LGBT people, they can understand that LGBT immigrants have a differentiated experience (CESAR, 2018).

In this sense, it is important to note that the main institutions in the city of São Paulo providing shelter, support and social assistance services for immigrants and refugees are linked to religious entities (as CRAI-SEFRAS¹³, Cáritas and Missão Paz). This implies that LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees can be conditioned to institutional spaces or contexts where sexual and/or gender diversity are not commonly accepted or respected. As Carrara (2010) explains, institutional structures like these are permeated by ideologies and normative practices that, through hierarchical power relations, can reproduce discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ people.

The second point I would like to emphasize relates to the appropriation of physical and symbolic spaces in the city of São Paulo by the interview subjects. It was possible to verify that the downtown area and the region of Avenida Paulista appear as the main of these spaces. However, there is a paradox, since these same spaces are related to violence – which is deeply linked to the visibility of difference (THEODORO, 2021).

For example, in the narratives of Antonia, Carla, Cesar, José, Pedro, Samuel and Tereza, the downtown area is mentioned as a space that they frequently visit, especially because it is considered more open and receptive to LGBTIQ+ subjects. In this sense, it is important to point out that this region became an LGBTIQ+ stronghold even in the 1970s, being an important space of sociability and resistance to LGBTIQ+ subjects in the city of São Paulo (Gustavo SAGGESE, 2015). Even so, violence against LGBTIQ+ subject still occurs in this area, as is evident in Pedro's experience:

Pedro: I think that every LGBT person in [the city of] São Paulo ends up moving to the center. We recognize ourselves in the center. So, everyone who can, ends up moving there. This LGBT migratory flow to the center is very strong. The center is our place, to feel safer, more comfortable. I really like República, Praça Roosevelt and Largo do Arouche. They are the most popular places and very important for the LGBT movement.

[...]

Researcher: Did you ever suffer any kind of violence here?

Pedro: Physical violence, no. But once, I was on the street with friends, at night, in the downtown area. And then a car passed by and the men inside shouted ugly words, cursing us, mocking us. These things happen, but even so I know it's nothing compared to the attacks that other LGBT people suffer every day too (PEDRO, 2019).

This dichotomy is also verified in relation to Avenida Paulista. For José, for example, it is a space of visibility for gays and lesbians, which is reflected in a positive feeling (which is also present in the narratives of Lucas, Pedro, Samuel, Tereza and Yago):

I really like the Avenida Paulista region. Sometimes it feels like a dream. It's hard to believe that I'm here. I feel good, you know? And you see a lot of gays too. Every time I see a couple of men or women holding hands here [on Avenida Paulista], I smile. I don't know how to explain it to you, but it feels good... It may not seem like much to other people, but to me it represents a lot (JOSÉ, 2018).

¹² Philanthropic institution provides support to refugees and immigrants, administered by the Missionaries of St. Charles (Scalabrinians), affiliated with the Catholic Church. Retrieved from: <http://www.missaospaz.org/nossa-missao>.

¹³ The management of the services offered by the Reference and Assistance Center for Immigrants (CRAI), coordinated by the Municipal Secretariat for Human Rights and Citizenship (SMDHC) of the City of São Paulo, is carried out by the Franciscan Solidarity Service (SEFRAS), whose mission is "to promote actions and attitudes of solidarity with the impoverished and excluded, contributing to social transformation, in the light of the Franciscan way of living and announcing the Gospel". Retrieved from: <http://www.sefras.org.br/novo/quem-somos/missao/>.

According to Saggese (2015), from the 1970s onwards, the Avenida Paulista region began to conform as a space of LGBTIQ+ effervescence in the city of São Paulo, being physically and symbolically important in terms of visibility, sociability, and political articulation to LGBTIQ+ subjects and collectives in the city of São Paulo. Despite this, Antonia and Jorge also emphasize that it is a space that can be dangerous to LGBTIQ+ subjects, precisely because of the greater public visibility. Antonia says that she even avoids going to the Avenida Paulista region:

I'm afraid to go to the Avenida Paulista region, because I don't know who is there. I watch a lot of news on TV and I see that this is a region frequented by various types of people... And some of them are not in favor of LGBTIQ+ people. I believe that there are a lot of homophobic people there. So, I'm afraid to go to that region (ANTONIA, 2018).

Jorge exemplifies this violence as follows:

As in many other places in [the city of] São Paulo, there is still a lot of violence here in the region of Avenida Paulista. The lamp case is a great example. And like this, there are many, many others, every single day. What motivates all this violence is the intolerance and hatred that are ingrained in Brazilian culture and society (JORGE, 2018).

It is evident how the symbolic and physical space of Avenida Paulista reflects the tensions encompassed in the dynamics of violence that permeate the experience of Antonia and Jorge in the city of São Paulo. In this sense, it is worth noting the fact that Jorge mentions the “lamp case”, a homophobic attack that took place on Avenida Paulista, in 2010, when a group of five men attacked homosexuals who were walking around, one of whom used a fluorescent lamp to attack them.¹⁴ According to Luan Cassal (2012), the blow with the fluorescent lamp in broad daylight, in the middle of Avenida Paulista, is at the same time the emblem of a torture instrument and the materialization of normative technologies that aim to punish the LGBTIQ+ body-transgressor. The metaphorical potential of the lamp, therefore, reveals the cisheteronormative control regime and the consequences of violating its limits of normality, directly impacting the appropriation of public spaces by LGBTIQ+ subjects (including migrants).

In spite of that, we can understand that the possibility of the visibility of the difference in the public space of Avenida Paulista represents in itself a political potentiality that is linked to an individual and collective history of resistance of the LGBTIQ+ population (including immigrants) in the city of São Paulo. This potentiality is related to the fact that it contests both cisheteronormative borders and those referring to an ideal of nation-state (or an imagined nation) – equally founded on the pillars of cisheteronormativity (ZECENA, 2019). Thus, it is a visibility that is deeply linked to the production, contestation, and negotiation of meanings of what it is to be LGBTIQ+ and LGBTIQ+ immigrant or refugee. This demonstrates how the dynamics of (in)visibility in the migratory experience of LGBTIQ+ subjects are implicated in the (de)construction of identities and differences – which varies, as we have seen, in each space.

In summary, it is possible to state that in all dimensions related to the spaces of violence in the experience of the immigrants and refugees interviewed, the dynamics of (in)visibility becomes a crucial issue. On the one hand, the visibility or even the social legibility of a non-hegemonic SOGIE means being susceptible to different forms of vulnerability and precariousness. On the other hand, although the invisibility dimension can act as a self-preservation strategy for LGBTIQ+ subjects, it also impacts the migratory project of these subjects, as is evident in the case of Antonia and Samuel. This demonstrates the dilemmas that LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees generally face when it comes to making visible or not their SOGIE and how it relates both to the spaces frequented or appropriate by them and to the violence directed at LGBTIQ+ subjects.

Final considerations

From the theoretical reflections and the analysis of the narratives of the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees interviewed, it was demonstrated the interrelationship between SOGIE, social spaces and the dynamics of violence. As it was possible to verify, this articulation also impacts the migratory experience of LGBTIQ+ subjects living in the city of São Paulo.

Regarding the country of origin of the interviewees, the analysis did not find a difference between the experiences of those who come from Africa and those from Latin America. In this sense, we can consider that the main factor concerning the impacts of the dynamics of (in)visibility in the experiences in spaces of violence is mainly related to SOGIE. This does not mean that elements such as nationality, race and ethnicity cannot have an influence in these processes, because, as theoretically approached and verified in the analysis, the forms of oppression against LGBTIQ+ subjects usually occur in an intersectional way.

¹⁴ Among the five attackers, four were minors. According to witnesses, one of them shouted “You fags, you are boyfriends. You are together”, before delivering the blow with the fluorescent lamp, hitting the face of one of the boys, who needed medical care. The attack took place around six in the morning and was recorded by security cameras. The images of the aggression were widely broadcast in the national media.

The narratives of the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees interviewed, about a) the institutional violence, b) the need to hide SOGIE, and c) the fear of violence in certain regions of the city of São Paulo, corroborate the fact that spaces of violence affect the everyday life of these subjects, generating or aggravating a condition of vulnerability or precariousness. In this sense, it is necessary to recognize that these spaces of violence have an intersectional property, which is linked to both the migratory status and SOGIE.

In short, the analysis allows us to affirm that the physical and symbolic dimension of the spaces of violence found in the city of São Paulo by the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees interviewed is structural, being intricately linked to the context of violence against the LGBTIQ+ population in Brazil. In the case of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees, these spaces have a direct impact on the adaptation process, on immigrant services, on the appropriation of city spaces and on the exercise of citizenship itself.

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BACKGROUND

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