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Articles

Everyday practices of citizenship at an Amazonian tri-border region (Brazil, Colombia, Peru)

Prácticas cotidianas de ciudadanía en una triple frontera amazónica (Brasil, Colombia, Perú)

José Lindomar Albuquerque[a *] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4761-1899
Luiz Fábio Paiva[b] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2669-5635

[a] Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Guarulhos, Brazil, email: jose.lindomar@unifesp.br
[b] Universidade Federal do Ceará, Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Fortaleza, Brazil, email: luizfabiopaiva@gmail.com

Abstract

The article aims to understand border citizenship not as a normative model, but as an everyday experience that people talk about through their lives, struggles and survival strategies. The empirical data reported here were produced from qualitative research developed between 2014 and 2018 by the authors with the support of local researchers who, among other things, have helped to conduct field observations, interviews and focus groups on border territories of Colombia, Peru and Brazil. The fundamental outcome was to think about border citizenship at the intersection with territory, state and market, emphasizing the tactics of citizenship produced from cross-border mobilities and the quest for rights in neighboring countries, even when the authorities consider certain practices illegal. From this perspective, citizenship tactics are important social resources rooted in the everyday life of border territories.

Keywords: border, citizenship, State, territory, survival.

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* Corresponding author: José Lindomar Albuquerque. E-mail: jose.lindomar@unifesp.br

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo comprender la ciudadanía fronteriza no como un modelo normativo, sino como una experiencia cotidiana sobre la cual las personas hablan a través de sus vidas, luchas y estrategias de supervivencia. Los datos empíricos aquí reportados fueron producidos a partir de una investigación cualitativa desarrollada entre los años de 2014 y 2018 por los autores con el apoyo de investigadores locales que, entre otras cosas, han ayudado a realizar observaciones de campo, entrevistas y grupos focales en territorios de la frontera entre Colombia, Perú y Brasil. El resultado fundamental fue pensar sobre la ciudadanía fronteriza en la intersección con el territorio, Estado y mercado, haciendo hincapié en las tácticas de ciudadanía producidas desde las movilidades transfronterizas y la búsqueda de derechos

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en los países vecinos, incluso cuando ciertas prácticas son consideradas ilegales por las autoridades. Desde esta perspectiva, las tácticas de ciudadanía son recursos sociales importantes arraigados en la vida cotidiana de los territorios fronterizos.

Palabras clave: frontera, ciudadanía, Estado, territorio, supervivencia.

Introduction

Research on citizenship in international border regions reveals the limits and interconnections between different territories, laws, interventions, practices, norms and mechanisms of exclusion and differentiated inclusion of populations living in, crossing through and affected by these state borders in areas with deep connections in their ways of life.

This article discusses everyday citizenship from the perspective of local populations living in urban border territories located in the Amazon rainforest in South America. The study focuses on the Amazonian Trapezium region between Brazil, Colombia and Peru, specifically examining the urban centers of Tabatinga (Brazil), Leticia (Colombia) and the Santa Rosa settlement (Peru).

The first two cities are located on the same bank of the Amazon/Solimões River and form a single urban continuum with a "dry border" between the two territories. On the other hand, Santa Rosa is an island in the middle of the river. A main avenue connects Tabatinga and Leticia: Avenida da Amizade/Internacional. The three urban centers have river ports with precarious infrastructure, through which various people and goods circulate, both close to and far from this region.

The cities of Tabatinga and Leticia also have airports with daily flights connecting Tabatinga-Manaus (the capital of Amazonas state in Brazil) and Leticia-Bogotá (the capital of Colombia). There are no highways connecting this border zone with other parts of the respective national territories, thus, the Solimões River plays a central role in linking this border area to more distant places.

Tabatinga, Leticia and Santa Rosa are small municipalities in terms of population, with an estimated total of about 120 000 inhabitants: 54 927 inhabitants in Leticia (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, n. d.), 66 764 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022) in Tabatinga and 970 people in Santa Rosa (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2018). Part of these populations consists of indigenous peoples, such as the Tikuna, Kokama and Uitoto, among others. These cities form a cross-border urban center at the intersection of three countries in the heart of the Amazon rainforest and, like many border cities, they are shaped by the simultaneous dynamics of asymmetries, differences and complementarities.

The exercise of everyday citizenship in this border zone takes into account the procedural and relational characteristics of citizenship embedded in the paradoxical and simultaneous social dynamics of border regions. These dynamics both produce and are produced by the inequalities, differences and complementarities that shape these territories. As such, it is essential to observe the simultaneity of the processes of nationalizing and transnationalizing social practices, the symbolic interplay of recognition between identities and alterities in border relations and the multiple (im)mobilities shaped by various forms of state control and diverse strategies for crossing and accessing rights in different national territories by the local population.

To advance this central argument, we will address the methodological approach of the research, the concept of everyday border citizenship, and how it connects with territory, the state and the survival strategies of the most marginalized populations living and moving across the urban territories of an Amazonian tri-border region.

Research methodology

The findings presented here derive from qualitative research conducted by the authors with the support of local partner researchers from the Universidade do Estado do Amazonas (Tabatinga campus), the Universidade Federal do Amazonas (Benjamin Constant campus), and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Amazonia campus, Leticia). Among other activities, local researchers assisted us in conducting field observations, informal conversations, interviews and focus groups. The research was conducted between 2014 and 2018 through six research trips to the region, each lasting between 15 and 30 days.

During these fieldwork excursions, we conducted more than 50 interviews with local residents of different profiles (taxi drivers, motorcycle taxi drivers, fishermen, boatmen, journalists, merchants, students and teachers, among others) and with state agents working in these cities (civil, military and federal police, police commissioners, prison director, members of the guardianship council, city councilors, etcetera). We also held six focus groups, including three with students, two with fishermen, and one with all the city councilors of the municipal council.

The daily observations, carefully recorded in the researchers' field notebooks, focused on two main activities: *1*) the flow of everyday informal conversations between researchers and local residents at fixed locations such as bars, restaurants, nightclubs, public markets, pharmacies, cockfighting arenas, bank lines and port areas; *2*) the practice of mobile research (Büscher & Veloso, 2018) in private transport between the border cities, prompted by initial questions asked by the researchers. The travel time was used to ask about various aspects of daily life to taxi drivers, motorcycle taxi drivers, tuk-tuk drivers and boatmen, who regularly transport people and goods between the three countries.

Empirical observation activities focused on the cities of Tabatinga, Benjamin Constant, and Atalaia do Norte in Brazil, Leticia in Colombia and Santa Rosa and Islandia in Peru. Research interests in the border region included gathering information on how local residents (fishermen, merchants, motorcyclists, police officers, city councilors, students and teachers, among others) lived and reflected on the experience of living in a region affected by national and international drug trafficking, as well as by the specific dynamics between legality and illegality for multiple cross-border movements, including the urban areas of the three countries.

At the end of this process, it was possible to observe that residents' comments were not only about the issues addressed by the researchers but also introduced an important debate as to how they saw themselves as individuals who were part of and living between national political communities with different systems of rights guarantees, which has practical implications for the exercise of citizenship in a border context. This fact became central to our reflection in this article.

Everyday border citizenship

As inhabited spaces, border regions are places for multiple relationships, connections and the flow of people, things, goods, money, documents, symbols and representation. They concentrate the experiences, narratives and memories of people navigating the limits (political, legal, cultural) situated on the margins of two or more nation-states and which are relevant centers of daily experience. The main problems of these places, as observed by Velasco (2013), include tensions between perspectives considered "universal" for the guarantee of rights and the way each nation-state defines its citizenship references, practices and politics.

For this article, we consider everyday citizenship as a relational and procedural concept practiced by individuals in their daily lives, inseparable from the economic, political, legal, cultural and symbolic dimensions that shape their daily experiences (Ehrkamp & Leiter, 2003; Staeheli, 2010). Everyday citizenship is an ongoing and open-ended process, filled with tensions, tactics and claims for rights and responsibilities that individuals and collectives make in response to the laws and regulations enacted by governments at different scales (Fernandes, 2023; Holston, 2013; Isin, 2008). It is therefore relevant to observe the way each member of different national realities speaks about and practices their citizenship in a scenario of both convergence and distinction. We want to discover what it is like to be a "citizen" in border territories, with their limits, government contexts and socio-economic realities.

Citizenship is a relational, polyvalent and multi-scalar experience (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Staeheli, 2010). In a more state-centered and legal dimension, it involves the rights of citizenship (Marshall, 1963) by birth in a given territory (*jus solis*) and by family and blood ties (*jus sanguinis*), as well as the naturalization process for those who, despite being immigrants, have lived long enough in other territories to acquire this right, along with the rights of dual nationality that have expanded in recent decades (Bendix, 2019; De Carvalho, 2002; Faist, 2020). Citizenship can also be considered in a transnational dimension, especially when we look at international conventions aimed at ensuring universal rights and the common rights of citizens in the European Union or Mercosur (Balibar, 2003; Desiderio, 2018; Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Mezzadra, 2015).

However, citizenship is not limited to these institutional spheres at the national and transnational levels. Citizenship is also a daily social practice that involves the assertion of rights by members of civil society, who challenge the limits of state or regional citizenship itself. The experiences of migrants asserting their rights to mobility, employment, voting and non-discrimination demonstrate this broader understanding of citizenship (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Fernandes, 2023; Isin, 2008).

Furthermore, as the central thesis of this article, we could argue that the idea of citizenship also encompasses the set of tactics and strategies that local populations use to access rights that are denied by the national limits of legal citizenship. These practices are often seen as illegal by states, but are fundamental for the survival of these poorer populations living at the confluence of distinct national territories. Thus, in daily practice, every tri-border resident must deal with their rights within the constraints created by their respective countries' laws in their contact with other countries.

These dimensions of citizenship are not separate and cannot be understood as complete and stable experiences. Citizenship is a concept under construction and is

therefore unstable and under tension from different spheres of social life (economic, political, legal-extralegal, cultural and symbolic), distinct territorial levels (local, national, transnational, global), and antagonistic social forces (social classes, ethnic and national groups, gender differences and inequalities, etcetera) (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Staeheli, 2020). Therefore, thinking about citizenship tactics and strategies in a border territory means imagining this entire field of disputes where these border subjects are involved in a relational way.

It is important to emphasize that although state agents play an important role in establishing restrictions, discretionary permissions and exclusions of rights according to national, ethnic and gender differences, the moral codes for exercising citizenship are established by the subjects themselves, who define who deserves to be seen as a citizen and who does not.

In other words, socially, citizenship produces inequalities and differences at various levels and intersections. Therefore, citizenship is considered not as a conceptual model, but as a social experience that people talk about through their experiences, struggles and daily forms of survival (Fernandes, 2023; Holston, 2013).

The social experience of citizenship can be understood as the way the border subjects are formed as integrant agents of moral communities and relational politics (Stone, 2010; Weber, 2019). Citizenship mechanisms say a lot about how people feel towards political, legal and economic organizations, how they recognize themselves as belonging to communities, and how others recognize such people (Gardner, 2009; Moyo, 2016; Rumford, 2013). This occurs in different ways throughout a nation-state, but it is possible to affirm that it happens in a very specific way at border territories (Berg, 2000; Hatter, 2017; Lantto, 2010; Meeks, 2007; Sasunkevich, 2015), especially when such regions are developed between three national realities which share the resource management of the greatest tropical forest in the world, the Amazon.

This article examines how the experience of citizenship in border regions is part of the lives of people inhabiting territories divided and shared between Brazil, Colombia and Peru. Citizenship manifests itself in local residents' daily lives, shaped by (im)mobility and (trans)territoriality between countries, through interfaces, boundaries and margins between state and social agents, and by the dynamics of border markets and the strategies and tactics of individuals that enable gains, survival and the tacit production of knowledge related to access to resources and rights in border areas.

The social experience of the relational, ambivalent and often precarious construction of border citizenship will be developed based on three interrelated analytical dimensions: *1*) the relationship between (im)mobilities, territorialities and inequalities in border territories as conditions for thinking about the infrastructures and social dynamics that shape border citizenship; *2*) the relationship between state practices and border populations as an analytical focus to discuss the importance of thinking of the concept of the state as a relational experience of legal, political and symbolic differences, allowing for the exploration of dynamics on how border citizenship operates, paradoxically limited and propelled by the national logics of border states; *3*) the relationship between markets (both legal and illegal) and the acts and tactics of citizenship, based on certain forms of economic survival among the poorest local populations in such border markets.

Border territories

Border territories are not fixed, delimited and separate regions, as they often appear in geographical representations. These territories embody paradoxes: they are sites of flow and fixity, movement and control, local and global forces, characterized by multi- and trans-territorialities (Haesbaert, 2011, 2018) and the multiple affiliations of the subjects who inhabit these places situated between different countries. The reflection on border territories is therefore inseparable from an understanding of the (im)mobilities that enable the very existence of borders and border citizenship.

Mobility is central to the experience of citizenship in the republican inventions of modern democracies (Álvarez Enríquez, 2021; Mau, 2010). Thinking about border citizenship from the perspective of mobility (Cresswell, 2006; Freire-Medeiros & Lages, 2020; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) allows us to de-territorialize the more fixed understandings of the concept and to approach a mobile field of people's movements, state regulations and inequalities in dynamic territorialities that challenge the limits of state and national citizenship.

Everyday citizenship in this border region is present through mobilities in search of access to rights on the other side of the international boundary. All of this leads to a deeper understanding among the border residents themselves that the border territory is a field of resources, tactics, opportunities, risks, controls and rights that may or may not be realized through cross-border mobilities.

Border territories encompass a heterogeneous, differentiated and connected superposition of places, limits and flows and levels of representation. These geopolitical territories are shaped by colonial, national and global historical processes for the exploration of wealth, subduing and destroying peoples and exclusion of their rights. They are also different and neighboring national territories with laws, citizenship and identities linked to each nation-state.

At the same time, however, they are border regions with multiple connections, mobilities, crossing practices and strategies to access goods, resources, rights at the intersection between countries (Dilla Alfonso, 2015; Sohn, 2022). These territories are sites of life, memory, resistance and survival, where residents leverage economic disparities and differential access to social services and rights between neighboring countries (Lantto, 2010; Meeks, 2007).

The tri-border region between Brazil, Colombia and Peru is a historical invention of the last two centuries, the result of which was the separation of the same ecosystem into distinct national realities, indigenous ethnicities and traditional communities (Garcés, 2014; Reis, 2013; Silva, 2008; Zárate Botia, 2008). This separation has created boundaries between cultures that have communicated with each other since before the colonization process (De Oliveira, 2016), destroying and resettling a substantial part of the way the original peoples would think, live and design their lives before the creation of Peru, Brazil and Colombia as nation-states in the 19th century (Gondin, 2007).

The creation of these States involved different processes by which the native peoples of the Amazon were incorporated into national communities in distant settlements from the national political centers (Romani et al., 2014). The consequences of this process are visible and they demonstrate how this territorial distance is present in the

stories of Peruvian, Colombian and Brazilian people living in the border region. The territory therefore reflects distinct Latin American colonial histories that continue to influence how people and places across these three nations perceive one another.

The historical occupation of these border territories included complex processes of population displacement, capitalist expansion and exploration fronts in their colonial, national and regional dimensions, religious missions and several state policies of occupation and domination over the territory and its resources over time (Becker, 2016).

All of these frontier processes, which often occur simultaneously, have usually been implemented violently and have destroyed the ways of being and thinking of those being subordinated (indigenous people, black people, farmers and riverside dwellers, among others) arising from conflict situations that define the idea of the border itself (Martins, 1997; Serje, 2011).

Thus, border territories might be conceived of as a web that encompasses time (memory, history, war, grief and forgetting) and social space (places, areas of belonging, material and symbolic resources), with the relatively more steady dimension of places with the flow of people's mobility and circulation, as well as animals, goods and money symbolizing the territorial proximity between countries and the distance of political centers of the respective nation-states (Haesbaert, 2011; Kearney, 1991).

Understanding these territories means first of all being aware of the geopolitical dimension that historically constitutes these States, such as the creation of the city of Leticia, founded in 1867 by the Peruvians and then occupied by the Colombians during the 1930s (Euzébio, 2014; Aponte Motta, 2018). During the conversations and interviews undertaken during the study, this conflict turned out to be a means of talking about national feelings related to those territories.

According to Acuña Rodríguez (2016), even if the Colombians knew little or nothing about the territory under dispute, the war against Peru in 1932 aroused certain nationalist feelings throughout the Colombian territory. According to the author, this social phenomenon has led significantly to the creation of a national feeling of unity among Colombians. So, "the physical configuration of the territory represented on the national map became the medium that contributed to building the popular imagination and strengthening patriotic nationalism" (Acuña Rodríguez, 2016, p. 31).

During the field work it became clear that the recognition of Leticia and the Colombian Amazon as part of Colombia is a very important element. It is possible, however, to hear Peruvian people asserting the idea that Leticia belonged to them and that their defeat in the war led to displacement to further areas of intersection between nations, such as Caballo Cocha and Iquitos. Only a small number of Peruvians have continued living in the surroundings of Leticia in the small *centro poblado* (village) known as Santa Rosa.

The territorial and population differences between Santa Rosa and Leticia reveal the different ways in which the national governments have looked at this national border at the intersection between the countries. It is worth noting that, in 1991, the city of Leticia became the capital of the Amazonas department, occupying an important institutional position in the administrative structure of the Republic of Colombia.

By transforming itself into a city with infrastructure, services and commerce distinct from others in this border region, Leticia has become a kind of reference and commercial and tourist center in this region. There are also educational, medical and cultural services located in the Colombian city that cannot be found in other

urban centers, such as the *Museo Etnográfico del Banco de la República*. The squares and parks in Leticia are other attractions that mark a type of urban intervention without similar parameters in other cities.

On the Brazilian side, the municipality of Tabatinga is the main city in the Alto Solimões microregion, in the state of Amazonas. The urban area has a military infrastructure, with army barracks, residences for military personnel who serve in the region and a specialized hospital. On the other hand, Commercial activities take place in very precarious areas, with open sewers and practically non-existent conditions for the circulation of pedestrians. Although the location has a good public service infrastructure, the residents of Tabatinga emphasize that the city has been "mistreated", impacting people's perception of the Brazilian territory.

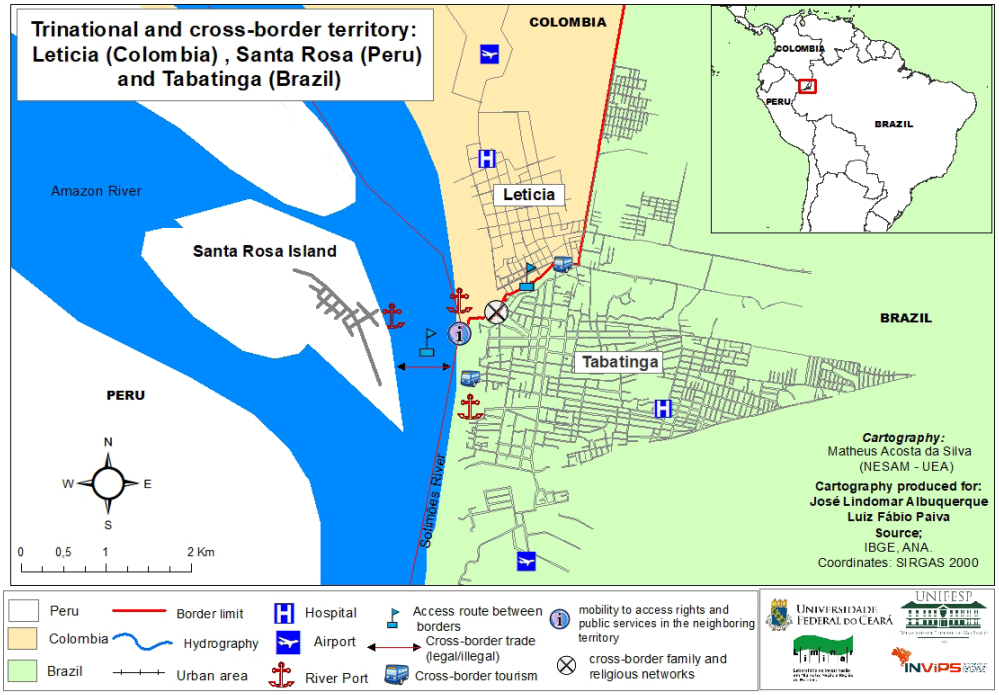
The two Brazilian and Colombian cities and the Peruvian *centro poblado* can be understood as trinational and cross-border urban territories. On the one hand, they are nationalized spaces in terms of municipal administrations, urban planning or lack thereof, and the various institutions of the respective national states installed in their territories. They are further nationalized in terms of the national languages spoken and the national currencies predominantly circulating in each territory. Indeed, these regions serve as a synecdoche (taking the part for the whole) in the everyday narratives of residents, tourists, and other passersby who refer to Tabatinga as "Brazil", Leticia as "Colombia" and Santa Rosa as "Peru".

On the other hand, these territories are deeply interconnected, complementary and interdependent, forming a cross-border urban complex (Alegría, 2000; Dilla Alfonso, 2015; Olivar, 2017). Each urban center generates diverse flows of people, goods, currencies, materials and animals, connecting with neighboring countries through mobility patterns tied to work, leisure, tourism, commerce, healthcare, education and social services (see Figure 1).

These cross-border urban territories also connect with the rural areas, indigenous territories and riverside communities in these municipalities through the various mobilities used by residents headed to the cities to receive social benefits, buy and sell various products in local markets, receive healthcare and attend public and private schools and universities, such as the campus of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Leticia, the Universidade do Estado do Amazonas and the Instituto Federal do Amazonas in Tabatinga and the Universidade Federal do Amazonas in Benjamin Constant.

In addition, there is also movement from the cities to the locations of military personnel, teachers, students, missionaries and healthcare agents, among others. News about events in these urban centers also reaches the more distant areas through the local media, especially radio. These movements create a cross-border urban space that extends beyond city limits, with rivers serving as key connectors.

Figure 1. Trinational and cross-border territory: Leticia (Colombia), Santa Rosa (Peru) and Tabatinga (Brazil)



Source: Cartography produced by Matheus Acosta da Silva (NESAM-UEA)

The primary daily movement between these territories are those related to legal and illegal commerce, nature and shopping tourism (mainly in the free trade zone of Leticia), leisure and party circuits between the locations, family and religious networks across the three countries, and mobility in search of access to rights and public services in neighboring territories. These flows originate from "fixed moorings", (Freire-Medeiros & Lages, 2020) such as relatives' houses, commercial buildings, schools, hospitals, health posts as well as "mobile moorings" like boats, canoes, motorcycles, cars, tuk-tuks and ports that shift location with the river's seasonal flooding and recession. The riverbed itself serves as a central mobile mooring that allows for multiple forms of mobility in this region of the Amazon.

The river holds an important position, primarily in the transit from Brazil and Colombia to Peru, while also serving as an integral part of this shared territory. Part of each national territory involves the river. Nevertheless, unlike land, the river involves its own movement and although river traffic is governed by international regulations, it becomes an area of daily disputes and social control issues arising from the river transportation. It is important to point out that all contact with Santa Rosa is only possible by river, requiring visitors to the Peruvian island to use water transportation.

The river's presence is a defining factor that shapes how these settlements, regardless of their characteristics, connect not only with the local territory and each other, but also with a broader network encompassing other locations such as Manaus, Iquitos, Caballo Cocha, Puerto Nariño, as well as various small towns and indigenous settlements across the three nation-states. Through the river, the tri-border overflows its multiple forms of experimentation of this Amazonian territory.

The river is also a fundamental element in how people integrate these territories and experience border citizenship. They live with annual cycles of drought and flood, which create variations in social relations within the space formed by river networks. The ports reveal diverse social dynamics: during droughts, it is possible to find leisure areas like soccer fields on the beaches formed by the ebb tide. During flooding, territories recede, the banks disappear and new social dynamics related to changes in fishing areas and passenger boarding locations at floating ports are experienced with the now flooded region. The ports move closer to the urban territories and crossings become harder due to the incredible volume of water in the Amazonas/Solimões River.

In Leticia, while experiencing significant transit between other Colombian, Brazilian and Peruvian locations, the river has also become a tourist attraction where visitors can take tours, see porpoises and visit indigenous communities and the city of Puerto Nariño. Although the port of Leticia shares a similar state of precariousness to the others in the region, there are specific differences, such as offering tourists boots to reach the boats during dry periods when the boats are farther away from the shore. In Leticia, Colombians and visitors mainly access the other regions of the country by air. The centrality of this form of transportation reflects the privileged position as citizens of the capital of a Colombian department. This has a weight in the collective imagination and in the integration of this territory with the vastness of the Colombian Amazon, as evidenced in the restaurants, stores, bars and hotels of Leticia.

The patterns of mobility, along with the differences and inequalities in border territories and how people move through them, lead us to the second section of this paper: an examination of how national states have established social relations that specifically shape the functioning of citizenship at the border.

State at the borders

Nation-states and their daily *modus operandi* constitute extremely complex political realities and have been the subject of extensive theoretical debate in the social sciences field (Bourdieu, 2014; Elias, 1993; Gilroy, 2004). The territories examined in this study are shaped by State mechanisms and residents refer to the impact of these in their lives. Rather than perceiving the State as a power institution defined by an abstract notion of a hierarchical, sovereign and exclusive administrative unit over a determined territory, this research focused on listening to how people evaluate the interference of national government on their lives, significantly affecting what they understand as citizenship and their participation in trans-border realities (Meeks, 2007).

At the border, the State operates primarily as the legal, political and symbolic experience of social control, establishing links between laws, enforcement and national territories. This is evidenced in the production of legality/illegality in the commercialization and circulation of goods, animals, objects and people between national territories. States institute both legibility mechanisms (documents, certificates, laws, registers, censuses, regulations, etcetera) and illegibility mechanisms through the practices of state agents who use discretionary power to control, allow, tolerate, negotiate and profit from the circulation of goods and people (Das & Poole, 2004; Scott, 1999).

Conversely, local residents employ various strategies to access rights and public services in neighboring cities of different national states, including document forgery,

maintaining multiple citizenships, using documents and proof of address from relatives residing in neighboring territories and other means. They may choose to claim or forgo their rights based on their family networks' experiences and trajectories, transborder ethnic group affiliations and distinct transborder characteristics.

Social scientists have already shown that people in these territories act to reinvent their possibilities of citizenship, as they create spaces, gaps, tactics and opportunities as a result of their struggles and everyday tactics (Das & Poole, 2004; De Certeau, 1998; Holston, 2013; Kearney, 1991).

The transborder mobility of people in these neighboring national territories challenges the notion of citizenship/nationality according to one's place of birth (*jus soils*) and political and social rights still nationalized and territorialized (Mau, 2010; Shachar, 2009; Spierings & Van der Velde, 2013). Examining people's movements between these national territories enables us to understand the dilemmas and tensions of border citizenship, characterized on the one hand by the plurality emerging from the convergence of borders and, on the other hand, by the singularity of the sense of belonging to a specific national context. The presence or absence of access to documents that verify citizenship and ensure social benefits across national territories reveals the complexity of this social issue (Shachar, 2009).

Pregnant Peruvian women often cross the Solimões river to have their children in Brazilian territory (Campos, 2012; Olivar et al., 2015; Dos Santos et al., 2019). The possibility of giving birth in a public hospital in Brazil and the child gaining Brazilian nationality are the main reasons for such travel. On the border, the status of Brazilian citizenship is higher compared to Peruvian citizenship, partly derived from local (Santa Rosa/Tabatinga) and national (Peru/Brazil) asymmetries.

The child being born in Brazil and having all the Brazilian documentation is seen by Peruvian parents as an immediate material advantage (free childbirth with reasonable medical infrastructure) with the possibility of better future conditions, not only in terms of social benefits to which the parents can have access, but also the better education and professional future obtained by the Brazilian child.

According to Brazilian law, having a child in Brazil also reduces the time for foreigners to apply for naturalization from four years to one. These citizenship practices are considered critical by local municipal authorities in Tabatinga. In an interview with a local city councilor, he said that Peruvians frequently migrate to the Brazilian side, forming relationships with Brazilian women solely to have a child in the country and thereby facilitate naturalization as a Brazilian citizen (Campos, 2012; Olivar et al., 2015; Dos Santos et al., 2019).

The residents of these border territories often belong to transborder family networks, initiate various nationalization processes and can obtain nationality documents from more than one border country (Campos Delgado & Odgers Ortiz, 2012). Living on the border involves navigating disjunctions between subjective national identification and objective documented nationality, that is, one might identify with a nation through family heritage and speak Spanish, yet hold Brazilian citizenship documents. During our field research, we heard a report about a land occupation in Tabatinga where one of the occupants was questioned by the local organization as to whether he was a foreigner since he was speaking Spanish. He then had to present his documents to prove that he was Brazilian.

This account allows us to reflect on the complex situation of borderland citizenship in everyday life, both in relation to the identity of these individuals—who may or may

not be recognized based on distinctions in belonging, language and legal status of citizenship—as well as the fact that the State is not limited to the legal field, but plays an important symbolic role in the tactical everyday use of citizenship documents.

Belonging to these transborder family networks does not always mean access to the most advantageous benefits across the border. "I could, but I don't want the documents from Brazil because I'm Colombian. My mother is Brazilian, but I'm Colombian", said a Colombian beggar showing signs of childhood paralysis who came to us while we were having lunch at a restaurant in Leticia. This particular case does not represent a universal pattern among Colombians, as many possess Brazilian and even Peruvian documents due to their family connections.

Mixed-nationality marriages are very common in the tri-border region. Nevertheless, national sentiment persists among Brazilians, Peruvians and Colombians, such that citizenship rights sometimes become a point of alignment and contention among them in discussions about the topic. The beggar that spoke to us concluded part of his reasoning by saying: "we like working here". The idea is that many people do not want to work in Brazil due to income transfer programs, and this also motivates Colombians and Peruvians to seek out Brazilian documentation in order to avoid working as well.

As Da Cunha (2020) explains, "documentation" encompasses networks of categories that generate distinctions in transborder relations, creating patterns of inclusion and exclusion that significantly impact the lives of tri-border residents. Da Cunha showed that documents are important for inclusion in the entire social assistance service in the region. Thus, the requirement of documents—such as ID cards, birth certificates, work permits and driver's licenses—represents an essential form of social control exercised by public officials who, in various contexts, invoke national frameworks as means of subjecting communities to the registration systems established by each country's laws (Da Cunha, 2020; Shachar, 2009; Smith & Bakker, 2008).

In general, documents serve as the material manifestation of the social recognition process for integration into other social relationships in every country forming the tri-border region. This creates a context in which members of each national community not only experience their internal citizenship, but also establish border citizenship relations through social control mechanisms that facilitate their incorporation into state systems.

Although perceived as citizens occupying a privileged position due to their access to minimum income programs, Brazilians claim they are subjected to environmental, tax and legal controls that place them at a disadvantage compared to Peruvians and Colombians. They repeatedly complain about Tabatinga being full of foreign business from neighboring countries, while they face greater difficulties.

A curious aspect about this narrative is the blame directed at one of the symbols of the Lula government (2003-2010) in Brazil, inscribed on a plaque located on the frontier between Colombia and Brazil, in which it was possible to read "Brazil, a country for all". Several times during the research, people expressed the sentiment that "Brazil belongs to everyone, but Colombia and Peru belong only to themselves". This ambiguity fuels symbolic struggles over the recognition of relative advantages and disadvantages regarding survival and rights in this transborder territory.

Survival at the borders

The Amazon tri-border region is a territory marked by profound social inequalities, the absence or inadequate implementation of public politics and border markets that mainly provide opportunities for informal work. When discussing the territory and the national interventions, residents also question their survival strategies. They refer to issues of making a living and living as citizens in a context with extreme adversities and few opportunities, many of them arising from illegal markets on the border (Sasunkevich, 2015).

Individuals crossing borders face numerous challenges that complicate their daily experiences. Thus, surviving in adversity, as stated by Hirata (2010, p. 137), means living amid daily poverty and precarious employment, navigating the complex spaces between legality and illegality, and often balancing the pursuit of better living conditions with the constant threat of mortality.

Survival in these territories involves the daily struggle to access minimum material necessities (provisional jobs, sporadic services and small-scale spaces for commerce, among others) that enable both individual and family survival. Moreover, individuals seek to access social benefits across international borders to support family maintenance (Da Cunha, 2020; Dos Santos et al., 2019).

In addition to these alternatives, they engage in cross-border economic activities, including the informal trade and movement of agricultural and technological products among the three countries. Furthermore, they may resort to extremely dangerous and marginalized forms of labor that carry severe risks, including potential imprisonment or fatal consequences, such as participating in drug trafficking as "mules" (Paiva, 2019). These survival dimensions are deeply entrenched, and the same individual may take part in all such strategies simultaneously, at different periods of their life.

During the fieldwork, people working to survive in the transportation segment stood out. They include Brazilians, Peruvians and Colombians who have invested money to purchase or lease their work tools. In Brazil, they are motorcycle taxi drivers, taxi drivers and boatmen; in Colombia, they are boatmen, tuk-tuk drivers and taxi drivers, people with life stories marked by changes that, in general, were made possible because of the development of these border cities.

This scenario enables the creation of a variety of movements due to professional appointments, recreational activities, business, sport activities, tourism, etcetera. In addition, the service sector encompasses workers in department stores, salons, markets, street vendors, restaurants and nightclubs businesses that cater to the needs of an Amazonian urban population adapting to life within the forest environment.

It is crucial to note that this service sector operates primarily in the main urban centers of the region and has a considerable economic attractiveness (Aponte Motta, 2018; Vergel-Tovar, 2008). Among the difficulties prevalent in the tri-border region, the precarious situation of young people in rural communities, including indigenous populations, stands out. Cities like Tabatinga and Leticia provide economic opportunities for survival, education and a series of new references that shape their imagination, aspirations and trajectories.

Earning money and living in the city represents an attractive possibility, yet it fundamentally conflicts with the traditional life model established by previous generations. Thus, migrating to these border cities involves more than just transitioning from a

rural to an urban lifestyle; it represents an opportunity to access and assert rights and goods. Therefore, this situation reveals the complex relations between citizens, the consumers in these border cities (García Canclini, 1997).

It is still possible to add elements from both urban and rural territories in the trans-border urbanization process and conciliate traditional labor with life in the triple border cities. This emblematic scenario could be observed in the investigation process of fishermen's activities. We encountered some who live in the city yet still use traditional fishing methods, replicating what they had learned with their parents. The fishermen we met during the field work generally incorporate new technologies, such as using motor boats to fish and freezers to store their catch.

However, the new fishing techniques and technologies have not fundamentally altered the relation these people have with the ecosystem. Therefore, they still depend on natural cycles—fish reproduction, for example—to conduct their work. The border processes of the region could cause some problems here, given that, unlike the fishermen who are Colombians, Brazilians or Peruvians, the fish do not need to obey national territorial limits.

The livelihood of the fishermen working in the international rivers is constituted by tensions between nationalities and (il)legalities in a relational space. The Brazilian fishermen frequently made accusations of Colombians and Peruvians illegally fishing in Brazilian waters. Thus, there is a portrayal of neighbors from across the border as trespassers engaged in illegal activities, with these "foreign" fishermen accused of diminishing the livelihood opportunities of their "national" counterparts. In interviews at fishermen's associations, we listened to several reports that accuse the neighboring countries' fishermen of disrespecting the law and that this even happens under the collaboration of the supervisory institutions in these countries.

In Brazil, asking for documents, sanitary standards for commercial sale, tax responsibilities and general control according to the "defeso" (the period in which fishing is not permitted due to spawning) are demands that the fishermen reported as creating difficulties in an activity that usually pays poorly. Furthermore, despite the assistance programs aimed at fishermen, it is an arduous activity, as well as being very precarious for a person's health.

Leaders of fishermen's associations report common occupational health issues among workers including back problems, herniated discs, gallbladder conditions, hearing loss, and vision impairment—all resulting from their work routines—. The lack of adequate assistance further aggravates the situation, making the diagnosis and the treatment of these diseases difficult. In addition, other difficulties demand a specific disposition for the profession and that must be carefully cultivated throughout someone's entire life, linked to fishing experience, working on the river and dealing with fish and all of the social issues that surround this activity.

The survival dynamics in the border cities also involve the management of historically illicit activities and navigating the complex ecosystem composed of forest products. The tri-border region is an area where cocaine is circulated and sold and, similar to other borders in the Amazon, it faces the intervention of social control policies justified by the idea of the "war on drugs" (Olivar et al., 2021; Paiva, 2019). The region is shaped by both cocaine production and control policies, resulting in drugs becoming a highly lucrative commodity.

In the interviews, a recurrent theme was that money is offered to people from the cities so that they can take certain amounts of drugs into other states. For example,

quantities of one, two or five kilos can earn the carrier three thousand Brazilian Reais or more, depending on the destination market. Furthermore, larger amounts can yield high returns, although this kind of action is highly risky and bears a substantive penal toll in all three countries.

The interviews made clear that there is a drug trafficking network handling quantities ranging from one to three hundred kilos of cocaine. There are also different individuals who are willing to be involved in this activity and to transport drugs to different destinations. During a visit to the Tabatinga municipality prison, the prison's director offered an overview of the drug dealing situation.

In September 2015, there were 140 prisoners and, according to the director, only one person had a connection to a well-known criminal faction as the "North Family". According to him, the other individuals were residents of a region that would occasionally accept to perform certain services for the drug dealers, including drug trafficking. When apprehended, these individuals are caught in possession of drugs and face imprisonment and prosecution under each country's respective narcotics laws. Thus, people who actually are used as drug trafficking "mules" may enter the penitentiary system as drug dealers and need to submit themselves to the internal dynamics inside prison, where they are usually controlled by collectives and criminal organizations.

Within the local drug trade networks, small quantities are sold at markets in the tri-border area. For instance, one elderly woman would purchase small amounts to resell primarily to alcohol consumers at Tabatinga nightlife venues. The income from this business cannot be classified as profitable compared to the large-scale scheme of cocaine trafficking routes. It is an activity residents acknowledge as possibly being used to buy something for themselves, rebuilding their homes or repaying debts, among other challenges in daily life. When residents are arrested, locals often express surprise, viewing them not as drug dealers but as individuals who turned to trafficking temporarily due to economic hardship.

This analysis of local inhabitants demonstrates that crime, in practice, is judged differently from the justice system's idealized notion of being "equal for everyone". The social conditions affecting the population shape their moral judgments, as they face daily practical challenges and may risk illegal activities when financial resources are needed to achieve certain goals.

During the conversations, it became evident that residents distinguish between habitual criminals and those who turned to illegal activities temporarily as a response to specific circumstances. Law enforcement officers and Brazilian military personnel involved in drug control operations also make this distinction". From their perspective, they can often identify a "mule" or someone who does not play an essential role in large-scale drug trafficking during their initial approach. Nevertheless, for them, the law must prevail and so arrests are made and judgments are taken.

These different survival situations and conditions in the border region provide an understanding the issue of border citizenship—a citizenship that is exercised precariously and unequally within the border territories' interstices, through the assistance frameworks of nation-states, and across border market networks that generally fail to provide adequate opportunities for residents of the tri-border region.

Final considerations

Border citizenship is a liminal social experience that paradoxically reinforces the exercise of citizenship at the boundaries of nation-states while creating possibilities of border-crossing practices in these national territories due to the guaranteed social rights among states and the different forms of state control (Albuquerque, 2015; Mezzadra, 2015). Therefore, this is not a citizenship produced from official border integration policies, but rather an ambivalent citizen experience enacted precariously based on asymmetric border territories, among states with unequal guarantees of social benefits and rights for poor residents, who fight to survive and access their rights in a space where three countries converge.

Residents of the tri-border region are used to talking about their citizenship as a national problem concerning other neighboring national conditions. As members of a moral and political community, they refer to the peculiarities of their territories, the different interventions by nation-states and the assertion of rights for those who are "nationals" and the control of these benefits for the neighboring "foreigners". Conversely, many inhabitants with experience of transborder life (family networks, citizenship documentation from more than one country, documents of relatives, etcetera), seek to access more advantageous rights and benefits in neighboring countries.

As other research in border areas has shown (Kearney, 1991; Mau, 2010; Moyo, 2016, Rumford, 2013), border citizenship goes beyond specific reference to the legislation of each country. Drawing from Weber's (2019) reflection on social action, border citizenship is formed by the experience of inhabitants. At the tri-border region, when talking about themselves as part of a political community, people refer to their territory, interventions by their nation-state and survival strategies, as well as their relationships with others.

Similar to Holston's (2013) finding that Brazilians discuss citizenship differently than Americans, we observed Brazilians articulating distinct notions of citizenship compared to their Colombian and Peruvian counterparts in this border region. The tri-border is therefore a place of multiple meanings, in which citizenship can only be understood from an articulated reflection about what the territory, state and survival mean, as we have proposed in this article.

It is a fact that the Amazon Forest offers countless possibilities for survival. However, nothing is simple in a region that, among other things, has undergone urbanization processes and the creation of social relationships based on the colonial and white intervention in the territory. Military forces, tax authorities, educational institutions and other public services were established while systems to protect indigenous and traditional population rights remained ineffective, failing to ensure even basic survival conditions for many residents.

Expanding citizenship to the poorer residents of these border territories would involve the possibility of these people having the physical and intellectual conditions to access the available social resources to utilize everything they need for their well-being. Undoubtedly, every resident of the triple border faces numerous challenges when

calculating what constitutes this "everything" needed for wellbeing. Despite national differences, the poor across all three countries face an enduring Amazonian paradox dating to colonial times: scarcity amid abundance, while a local, transnational economic elite accumulates capital through territorial exploitation, leaving impoverished residents to navigate daily survival challenges.

In general terms, it is possible to affirm that, in the tri-border region, people reinvent their citizenship through their actions and relationships. This aligns with the important discussion on acts of citizenship by Isin (2008), the foundation of which is based on the idea that citizenship is generally not limited to the frameworks of national borders and legislation. People within a given political community can, through their actions and relationships, construct and transform the meaning of citizenship, generating practices that create citizenship practices and experiences, although not defined by legal statutes.

These actions can create new political subjects who will interfere with social organization, produce new demands and generate other expectations capable of introducing discussions, debates and claims to be addressed by State institutions. This alters the political landscape itself, generating movements that will reverberate in power structures and, consequently, in the understanding of what is defined as citizenship experiences. As such, Isin has allowed the theory of citizenship to shift its focus from something granted by the state to a practice, an experience, as something done by political agents through their actions and relationships.

However, the theory of acts of citizenship remains primarily focuses on those demanding unrecognized or unenforced rights, representing a break from everyday habitus (Isin, 2008). It is important to consider citizenship tactics such as cross-border mobility and seeking rights in neighboring countries, even when certain practices—like using personal documents and relatives' proof of address—are deemed illegal by authorities. From this perspective, citizenship tactics are significant social resources embedded in the everyday life of border territories (Sohn, 2022).

In summary, residents of the Amazon tri-border region face governance from nation-states that generally fail to implement public policies ensuring citizens' rights in this territory, which differs significantly from other regions within their respective countries. It is necessary to negotiate all the time, using the possibilities offered by the border, such as access to other countries' documents, negotiation to use the other territories and exploration of illegal transborder schemes.

In each case, navigating relationships within this space becomes essential. While governed by specific legislation from all three countries, the region develops its own solutions through the daily construction of a border citizenship that challenges national rights frameworks. To realize these rights, the poor border residents do not always remain within national citizenship boundaries. Therefore, trespassing these borders and accessing benefits on the other side can provide better conditions in the fight for survival and maintaining dignity.

Border citizenship is, therefore, produced in the daily experiences of the individuals living in international border regions, through their multiple interfaces with the State and the market. Citizenship is realized based on the connection between flows, fixities and frictions (Freire-Medeiros & Lages, 2020) situated in territories that are simultaneously local, national and transnational. Thus, citizenship is a mobile, incomplete and often precarious experience manifesting at the margins and boundaries of nation-states (Das & Poole, 2004).

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José Lindomar Albuquerque

Brazilian. PhD in Sociology from the Universidade Federal do Ceará (2005). He is a professor of the sociology area of the social sciences course and the Master's and PhD in Social Sciences at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (Unifesp). Research lines: international borders, international migrations, cultural identities and Brazilian social thought. Recent publication: Albuquerque, J. L. C. (2018). Identidades em territórios de fronteira: os casos de Ceuta e Gibraltar na fronteira entre a África e a Europa. *Civitas, 18*(2). https://doi.org/10.15448/1984-7289.2018.2.29532

Luiz Fábio Paiva

Brazilian. PhD in Sociology from the Universidade Federal do Ceará. He is currently an associate professor of sociology at the Departamento de Ciências Sociais, the Graduate Program in Sociology and the Professional Master's Degree in Sociology at UFC. Research lines: the social effects of violence and crime in peripheral and border territories. Recent publication: Paiva, L. F. S. (2019). As dinâmicas do mercado ilegal da cocaína na tríplice fronteira entre Brasil, Colômbia e Peru. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais, 34*(99). https://doi.org/10.1590/349902/2019

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