

Imagineries About Brazil in the Media Consumption of LGBTIQ+ Immigrants and Refugees in the City of São Paulo

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This study analyzes the (de)construction of imagineries about Brazil by LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees, and begins by examining their media consumption. The methodology uses a group of theoretical reflections on the relationship among the imaginary, media, and migration, as well as semistructured interviews with 10 LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo. The results of the analysis show the plurality of uses and appropriations encompassed in their media consumption and the contrasts between the imagineries about Brazil and the reality they experience in the country.

Keywords: LGBTIQ+ immigration, media, consumption, imaginary, representation

Migration is a highly complex social movement and should be understood as a historical experience. This allows understanding of its subjective dimensions, preventing it from being reduced to a “natural” process automatically determined by economic reasons or demographics. Efforts must be directed, therefore, toward the unique characteristics of migrant subjects, as well as the social, cultural, and political factors involved in their movements.

Another important dimension that should not be ignored is that of the imaginary, although it is not considered as an opposition to the real. Boia (1998) synthesizes this concept by affirming that the imaginary mingles and often conflicts with external reality, but at its essence establishes an independent reality with its own structures and operating dynamics. In the context of human displacement, the imaginary directly or indirectly impacts any migratory project. We can think about the imaginary related to origins and destinations, nation-states, or cultural differences.

These principles are essential for understanding the specificities in the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other sexual or gender minorities). The framework established by hegemonic heterosexual and cisgender norms affects their migration experiences at different levels. In more than 70 countries, for example, affective-sexual relationships among people of the same gender are criminalized and may even result in a death penalty (as

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in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen).¹ In intensely repressive sociocultural contexts, migrating represents not only a possibility for greater freedom but also of survival (De Genova, 2010; La Fountain-Stokes, 2009; Mogrovejo, 2005; Wesling, 2008).

In Brazil, a paradoxical scenario exists that further complicates the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects. On one hand, an imaginary is found that sees Brazil as a place of sexual diversity and respect for differences, as is evident in the stereotype of the country of carnival (Andrade, 2019; Badet, 2016). On the other hand, Brazil has one of the world's highest rates of violence against LGBTIQ+ people. According to data from the Grupo Gay da Bahia, in 2019 alone more than 300 LGBTIQ+ people were murdered in Brazil,² confirming the harmful institutionalization of violence toward these subjects in all spheres of our society and culture (Carrara, 2012). Despite this reality, Brazil is one of the countries that accepts refugee requests based on sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI), as in the case of LGBTIQ+ refugees.

In this context, the main objective of this study is to analyze the (de)construction of imaginaries about Brazil by LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo.³ From their own narratives, we seek to investigate the relationship between media consumption and the scope of these imaginaries, especially about their influence on the migratory project of these subjects.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study. The methodology is based (a) on a set of theoretical reflections on imaginaries, representations, media, and migration by LGBTIQ+ subjects, and (b) on the development of empirical research that consists of semistructured interviews with 10 LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo, conducted between 2018 and 2020.

Working with the *narrative space* of subjects who are socioculturally marginalized is not a simple task for researchers. This is never a neutral space. On the contrary, it is an arena permeated by questions of ethics, language, knowledge, discursive competence, authorization, legitimacy, and power (Delory-Momberger, 2015). In fact, this was the most difficult part of the field work for this research. On one hand, the invisibility of the LGBTIQ+ refugee and immigrant subjects made the task of locating and approaching them about participation in the study more difficult. On the other hand, this difficulty was because of the interview process itself. Dealing with questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation tends to be

¹ To learn more: https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2019.pdf

² The numbers may be even higher because of the difficulty in ascertaining the real cause of death of LGBTIQ+ people in the country. Retrieved from <https://grupogaydabahia.com.br/relatorios-anuais-de-morte-de-lgbti/>

³ This study is related to doctoral research in progress since February 2017, which analyzes how the visibility or invisibility of ontological difference concerning a nonhegemonic gender identity or sexual orientation influences migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects living in the city of São Paulo (Brazil) or Barcelona (Spain). The study is funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation—FAPESP (cases 2016/24566-1 and 2018/18712-0).

costly for these subjects, especially since as LGBTIQ+ people their experiences have been permeated by situations of discrimination and violence, most of which are traumatic.

For this reason, the only criteria for the selection of participants in this study was that the LGBTIQ+ immigrant or refugee (a) live in the city of São Paulo,⁴ and (b) be from the Global South (see Table 1).⁵ Although South-North flows are more visible in migration research, migratory flows toward the South of the planet are already numerically equated to South-North displacements, pointing to a redistribution of this dynamic of mobility (de Wenden, 2016). In addition, among countries that have some type of penalty in relation to LGBTIQ+ subjects, most of them are also found in the Global South.⁶

⁴ São Paulo is the main pole of migratory attraction in Brazil, concentrating 37% of all immigrants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics; IBGE], 2010) and 52% of all refugees who arrive in the country (Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados [The National Committee for Refugees; 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). It is worth highlighting that these numbers do not include unregulated immigrants. The city also has various public policies aimed specifically at immigrants and refugees, such as those implemented by the Center for Reference and Assistance to Immigrants (CRAI), which is linked to the Municipal Secretariat for Human Rights and Citizenship and was created in 2014. For example, the city government offers psychological, social, and legal assistance, Portuguese language classes, and aid for insertion in the formal job market. Retrieved from

https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/direitos_humanos/imigrantes_e_trabalho_decente/

⁵ The establishment of other selection criteria, such as age, nationality, length of stay in the country, could disrupt the continuity of the research.

⁶ Retrieved from https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2019.pdf

Table 1. General Information About the Interviewees.

Interviewee*	Country of origin	SOGI	Age	Migratory condition	Time of residence**	Date of interview
Antônia	Mozambique	Lesbian	34	Refugee	5 years	Apr. 2018
Carla	Colombia	Pansexual	44	Immigrant	15 years	May 2018
Cesar	Bolivia	Gay	32	Immigrant	4 years	Nov. 2018
Jorge	Argentina	Gay	37	Immigrant	6 years	Nov. 2018
José	Peru	Gay	23	Immigrant	4 months	Mar. 2018
Lucas	Cuba	Gay	29	Refugee	1 year and 5 months	Oct. 2018
Pedro	Colombia	Gay	25	Immigrant	4 years	Nov. 2019
Samuel	Nigeria	Gay	23	Refugee	3 years	Mar. 2020
Teresa	Chile	Trans woman	25	Immigrant	2 years	Feb. 2020
Yago	Peru	Gay	42	Immigrant	19 years	Nov. 2019

* The names of the interviewees were changed to preserve anonymity.

** At the time of the interview.

The analysis of the interviewed subjects' narratives focused on understanding how their media consumption is involved in the (de)construction of imaginaries about Brazil. Thus, we seek to investigate how they constitute and resignify these imaginaries when planning and implementing their migratory projects.

About the Imaginaries

As previously mentioned, the understanding of contemporary migrations as a social phenomenon of a global order requires the consideration of multiple variables, including a symbolic dimension (Lorenzo, 2005). This means considering migrant subjects as *social actors* whose experiences are affected by the representations of themselves, their places of origin, cultures, etc. We thus highlight the essential role that the imaginary plays in this context. We seek to emphasize not only the action of the process of imagining the reality of things, beings, and events, but also the levels and modes of fiction that may be involved in the composition of social figures (Fortier, 2012).

For Lorenzo (2005), all social images—and their visibility in the public sphere—are complex since they have both a real and an imagined dimension. This generates variations in the apprehension of a migrant subject's experiences. In this sense, we can consider imaginaries about migrant subjects, as well

as imaginaries about their experiences of mobility. These two domains are interrelated and often interdependent.

Power relations are established from the arrangement of these imaginaries, generating divisions between individuals and societies, between identity and otherness. It is clear that reality is also socioculturally constructed by images, myths, and shared beliefs. The domain of the symbolic, where the imaginary is inscribed, influences the perceptions and actions of subjects. The effects of this process contribute to the formation of the meanings that underlie social life (Boia, 1998). In contemporary migrations this process influences the construction of migratory projects and in clashes over representations of migrant subjects, which involve different spheres, such as the institutional (the state, legal bodies, welcoming entities, and media) and the agency of the migrant subjects themselves.

It is important to emphasize that the media dimension of this process is central to the struggles over the meanings and representations that directly influence the experiences of migrant subjects. Within the sociocultural sphere, media provides support for daily life (Silverstone, 2010), and its uses and appropriations influence the (de)construction of imaginaries, the provision of (self-)representations about migrant subjects, their capacity for agency, the establishment and/or maintenance of social networks (local, national, international, and transnational), and even demands for rights and citizenship (Cogo, 2015). Thus, the media are part of these subjects' life experiences, composing multiple, interactional dynamics.

The media has become an element that profoundly influences the symbolic and representational construction of the social relations that each migrant establishes in their movements. At both the micro- and macrosocial levels, migrants move through media spaces (Cogo, 2015). It should be noted that the diffusion and popularization of ICTs, particularly the Internet, also provide migrants a greater capacity for interaction and self-representation, which is essential to their struggles for rights and citizenship (Brignol, 2015; Cogo, 2012; Cogo, Elhajji, & Bailén, 2012; Scopsi, 2009). In this sphere, asymmetries can also be established between processes of representation *of* and *by* immigrants and refugees, since access to the media can improve their ability to gain visibility and voice (Georgiou, 2018).

At the level of the imaginary, the media can also produce symbolic boundaries, which have the capacity to become social, cultural, economic, political, religious, and educational barriers. In a journalistic approach to the subject, Retis (2018) points to tendencies toward episodic coverage of migrant issues (and usually related to a negative event), to emphasizing the alleged illegality of these subjects, to exaggerating facts and a lack of contextualization. Lorenzo (2005) corroborates this understanding by emphasizing that the mobility, arrival, and settlement of immigrants and refugees is repeatedly (re)presented in a superficial manner by hegemonic discourses—which emphasize cultural differences, contributing to form a kind of *radical otherness*. One of the consequences of this, according to the author, is that representations about migrant subjects become limited. This is because discourses and practices that sustain and are nourished by imaginaries order knowledge and actions (Boia, 1998). In certain cultural, political, and economic contexts, they give meaning to the social figure of otherness in relation to migrant subjects.

When considering the experiences of migrant subjects, their media uses, appropriations, and consumptions participate in the (de)construction of imaginaries that permeate the stages of their migratory projects. Through the mediation of media, imaginaries constructed at their places of origin often become an important factor in a migrant's decision to immigrate (Fortier, 2012; Russi, 2016). In addition, although they are susceptible to certain kinds of conditioning (social, economic, political, and institutional), the media produce a transnational, space-time integration. For migrant subjects, the media are substantial to the foundation of political relations. At the individual level, these politics are associated with the (de)construction of social imaginaries and representations, the creation and maintenance of sociability networks, the elaboration of migratory projects, and with the process of adaptation to the sociocultural conjuncture of the new place of residence. Meanwhile, on a collective level, subjects create links to forms of political engagement and activism, to the struggle for rights and citizenship, and more (Brignol, 2014; Cogo, 2012; Retis, 2018).

In the case of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees, the relationship between the imaginary and the media has great relevance. The media perform a complex role in their migratory experiences that functions in a number of ways: They create dynamics that provide visibility or invisibility—individual or collective; as spaces of interaction, in the creation of dispersed geographic communities; in the establishment of socioaffective bonds; in political engagement and activism; and in the sharing of practical information about mobility processes and others (Atay, 2017; Dhoest, 2016; Szulc, 2019; Theodoro, 2020; Theodoro & Cogo, 2019). The dimension of the imaginary is implicated in these spheres and is crucial to the construction of migratory projects, to geographical movements, and to adaptation to sociocultural contexts, whether transitional or involving long-term residence.

In this sense, it is possible to consider the establishment of refugee status for LGBTIQ+ subjects as a paradigmatic example.⁷ Strongly influenced by the media, imaginaries about the living conditions of the LGBTIQ+ population in certain contexts tend to be fundamental to decisions to immigrate, particularly when deciding on the destination city or country (Andrade, 2019; Nascimento, 2018; Theodoro, 2020). We can also consider the implications of these imaginaries on international protection systems. This is because without the existence of any international legal determinations that guarantee full protection to LGBTIQ+ refugees, the acceptance to review a request for refugee status and its ultimate concession are subjugated to a subjective understanding by the judiciary of the nation-state where the solicitation was made. Nascimento (2018) highlights that in the United States, for example, it is often necessary for LGBTIQ+ refugee applicants to prove that they have (or had) a socially visible, individualized SOGI. Disregarding the criteria for a "social group," it is not enough to be LGBTIQ+; one has to appear LGBTIQ+. This is to say, one must externalize the characteristics that evidence a nonhomogeneous sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This criterion for analyzing a request for refugee status by LGBTIQ+

⁷ Solicitations for refugee status based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity began to be integrated into the "social group" category in the 1980s. Since then, some countries have begun to consider that the symbolic and/or physical violence LGBTIQ+ subjects have suffered within a particular sociocultural conjuncture can be viewed as persecution and thus justify the admission and analysis of the solicitation for refugee status. In Brazil, the first concession of refugee status to an LGBTIQ+ subject based on issues related to sexual orientation and/or gender identity occurred in 2002 (Andrade, 2019).

subjects is extremely problematic because it is guided by stereotyped imaginaries of what it is to be an LGBTIQ+ subject (Nascimento, 2018; Theodoro, 2020).

Finally, with respect to imaginaries about Brazil, Badet (2016) states that they are strongly linked to a tropicalist vision, dating back to the time of the arrival of the Portuguese and the colonial period. In this way, imaginaries from abroad about Brazil are usually anchored in the idea that it is a festive, cheerful, exotic, extremely open, and receptive country, with a people marked by sensuality and peaceful interracial coexistence. For immigrants and refugees who settle in the country, these stereotypes may conflict with the reality encountered (Brignol, 2014). The issue is even more intricate for LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees residing in Brazil, given that the imagery of diversity contrasts with the violence faced by LGBTIQ+ subjects in the country (Carrara, 2012; Gross & De Cademartori, 2018), which is intrinsically related to the vulnerability and precariousness of their existence.

Reflections on the Migration of LGBTIQ+ Subjects

To understand the specificities of migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects' it is necessary to initially consider norms that guide how we experience our bodies, desires, sexual orientations, and gender identities. This is essential for understanding differences in the migratory experiences of these subjects. As Scott (1995) affirms, gender is a primordial way of signifying power relations. This is because gender is a structuring element of social interactions and involves culturally shared symbols and their representation processes, normative concepts about interpretation of these codes (usually based on binary oppositions), the role of institutions (family, state, church, school), and the establishment of subjective identities (Scott, 1995).

The main problem lies in the fact that gender is hegemonically understood to be synonymous with sexual difference, based on a binary matrix: the feminine versus the masculine. This duality is reiterated by heterosexuality, which is considered the "normal" or "standard" sexual orientation. The resulting norms are essential for maintaining a homogeneity of bodies, desires, and identities, as if there existed, a priori, an absolute coherence among them. In the words of Preciado (2008), heterosexuality acts as a social apparatus for production of a hegemonic femininity and masculinity that operates by dividing and fragmenting bodies, producing asymmetries and hierarchies.

This ideological bias leads to the production of biopolitical ideals of femininity and masculinity. They are imposed as transcendental essences and imply gender aesthetics, normative codes of social legibility, and even psychological convictions that force subjects to repeatedly assert themselves as a woman *or* a man, female *or* male, homosexual *or* heterosexual (Preciado, 2008). Transgression of these borders creates a precarious existence because of the pathologization of deviant subjectivities, stigmatization, and coercive practices for correction (Butler, 2011). These violent impositions combine with a model of radical invisibilization and a weakening of the capacity for agency, which hinders or often deprives these subjects of opportunities for self-representation.

When we speak of migration, it is not rare to find a personification of migrants as male to be diffused in the social imaginary. This personification requires that we conduct what Estelle Krzeslo (2007)

calls a *correction of the look*. This means that we should not consider migrant subjects to be male, heterosexual, and cisgender. On the contrary, it is essential to consider the diversity contained in contemporary migratory movements and to simultaneously understand that the ways of experiencing and expressing desires, sexual orientations, and gender identities produce profound impacts on the migratory experience and are impacted by it.

In the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects, therefore, attention must be paid to the emergence of forms of subjectivity that require specific rights because they are vulnerable to precarious conditions and treatment for not fitting into the hegemonic normative model. For França (2017), the intensification of demands for “sexual rights” on an international level—and on the political agenda of local governments—profoundly influences migrant 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).⁸

Yet it is important to recognize that a number of countries have no civil or legal guarantees for LGBTIQ+ individuals, who are subject to abuse, discrimination, persecution, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, torture, and murder (La Fountain-Stokes, 2009; Mogrovejo, 2005; Wesling, 2008). The more visible the dissent in relation to hegemonic normative codes, the greater the risk of precariousness. In this scenario, the imaginary about the living conditions of LGBTIQ+ subjects in a given sociocultural context, encompassing issues of law, citizenship, and respectability, emerges as a decisive factor in the choice of destination and the migration project itself. Thus, imaginaries are critical to the significance established between a migrant subject and territories, which are no longer only geographic and political, but also territories of meaning (Russi, 2016).

These factors strongly influence the (re)configuration of (symbolic and material) limits and borders, sketching subjects of law or “victims,” who, because of the precariousness of their life conditions, demand protection from the state—which leads to a constant redefinition of administrative mechanisms at local, international, and transnational levels (França, 2017). We are faced with complex dynamics that produce difference, whose ambiguities are evident in tensions among protection, control, and criminalization of the migratory experiences of subjects with SOGI that is dissonant from the heterocisnormative hegemonic pattern.

In short, in the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects, the imaginary also plays an important role, either in the construction of the *other place* (the destination) or in the institutional policies of the states

⁸ It is worth highlighting that racialization and the reinforcement of nationalisms can be a negative consequence of this process. We can think, for example, of the split between a “West” characterized by respect for sexual and gender diversity, civility, and egalitarianism, and an “East” marked by the weakness or absence of human rights for LGTBIQ+ subjects, and by discrimination, prejudice, and violence (França, 2017; Szulc, 2019). This idea is also rooted in an imaginary about these subjects’ living conditions in different sociocultural contexts and is deeply linked to forms of “homonationalism.” In this sense, Puar (2007) stresses that the configurations of sexuality, gender, class, race, and ethnicity can realign contemporary power relations for securitization, counterterrorism, and (homo)nationalism.

addressed to them. In relation to the first category, as mentioned, the imaginary that freedom and respect for differences is found in certain sociocultural contexts can become a factor that attracts LGBTIQ+ migrant subjects (Szulc, 2019). For control policies, in some cases, for example, acceptance of requests for refugee status because of SOGI is conditioned by the subjective understanding that the legal system of the destination country has about the applicant's country of origin—which also goes beyond the symbolism coming from the imaginary. In other cases, the imaginary about what it is to be a LGBTIQ+ person also produces concrete effects in this process, and can facilitate or hinder it (Andrade, 2019; Nascimento, 2018).

In this sense, clashes involving gender and sexuality are conditioned by the effectiveness of policies to combat violence against LGBTIQ+ subjects. In the case of Brazil, authors such as Andrade (2019), França (2017), and Nascimento (2018) highlight a paradoxical context. First of all, we could mention that in recent decades the country has mainly become a place of origin of requests for refugee status based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, although it also receives requests of this nature.⁹ In addition, Brazil has some rights and policies aimed at the LGBTIQ+ population, such as: (a) the incorporation since the 1990s of HIV-AIDS prevention actions among "men who have sex with men"; (b) the institution in 2008 of the Transsexualization Process in the Single Healthcare System; and (c) the recognition by the Federal Supreme Court in 2011 of a stable homosexual union as a family entity. However, as previously reported, the country has high rates of LGBTIQ+ murders, in addition to unreported violence or that is not investigated by authorities (Carrara, 2012; Gross & De Cademartori, 2018). Therefore, the contradictions between imaginaries that Brazil is a diverse, open country with receptive people and the social reality encountered by LGBTIQ+ subjects here are unquestionable.

Imaginaries About Brazil: Data Analysis

To investigate the relationship between media consumption by the immigrants and refugees interviewed and the (de)construction of imaginaries about Brazil, we first synthesized the main media uses and appropriations mentioned in their narratives. As shown in Table 2, this categorization is based on the types of media and their implications in the experience of these subjects.¹⁰

⁹ CONARE received at least 369 requests for refugee status related to persecution because of sexual orientation and gender identity from 2010 to 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2018/11/29/brasil-protege-refugiados-lgbti-mostra-levantamento-inedito-do-acnur-e-do-ministerio-da-justica/>

¹⁰ We would like to point out that the categorization serves exclusively to better organize the analysis and facilitate understanding.

Table 2. Media Consumption by LGBTQI+ Immigrants and Refugees.

Interviewee	Country of origin	Migratory condition	Types of media involved in consumption
Antônia	Mozambique	Refugee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telenovelas: important role in the decision to immigrate to Brazil, because of the representation of homosexuality • TV: construction of imaginaries about Brazil and the city of São Paulo • Social networking websites: activism and transnational migration networks (support to other immigrants)
Carla	Colombia	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet: source of information that influenced the decision to immigrate to São Paulo; construction of imaginaries about Brazil • Social networking websites: political positions and activism
Cesar	Bolivia	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telenovelas: construction of imaginaries about Brazil; important in the creation of artistic performances like those of drag queens • TV: consumption of news programs • Internet: important in the process of insertion in the country (information about the city, job search, knowledge about rights); and in the establishment of affective bonds (family and friends) and transnational migration networks (support to other immigrants)
Jorge	Argentina	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV and Brazilian news portals: source of information; construction of a "romanticized" imaginary on Brazil
José	Peru	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet: source of information that influenced the decision to immigrate to São Paulo; important in the adaptation process • Social networking websites: participation in online community of Peruvians
Lucas	Cuba	Refugee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telenovelas: construction of imaginaries about Brazil • TV: important in the process of insertion in the country (language learning and information about local events) • Internet: establishment of affective bonds (family and friends) and transnational migration networks (support to other immigrants)
Pedro	Colombia	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet: source of information about Brazil and the country of origin

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networking websites: establishment of affective bonds (family and friends), political positions, and activism
Samuel	Nigeria	Refugee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV: helpful for learning Portuguese • Internet: source of information about Brazil and the process of soliciting refugee status; communication with family members and friends
Teresa	Chile	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telenovelas: construction of imaginaries about Brazil • TV: construction of imaginaries about Brazil; source of information • Internet: source of information; communication with family members and friends • Social media: communication with family members and friends; participation in online immigrant groups
Yago	Peru	Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telenovelas: construction of imaginaries and stereotypes about Brazil • TV: important in the process of insertion in the country (learning the language and information about local events) • Social networking websites: political positions and activism

It can be seen that media consumption is related to the (de)construction of stereotypes about Brazil in the experiences of eight of the 10 subjects interviewed (Antônia, Carla, Cesar, Jorge, José, Lucas, Teresa, and Yago).

In particular, their narratives indicate the importance of the consumption of television genres and products in this process. This consumption is associated with different media uses and appropriations. One important television product, mainly for the creation of imaginaries about Brazil, is the telenovela. Antônia, for example, points out how the Brazilian telenovela *Senhora do Destino*¹¹ was significant to her migratory project:

¹¹ Written by Aguinaldo Silva, the telenovela *Senhora do Destino* was produced by the Globo TV network. The program originally aired in Brazil at 9:00 p.m. from June 22, 2004, until March 12, 2005. Retrieved from https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senhora_do_Destino

It was one of the telenovelas I watched there in Mozambique [Senhora do destino] that also encouraged me to come to Brazil. (. . .) There was a lesbian couple [in the telenovela], but one of them was afraid to talk to her father about it, out of fear of rejection. But in the end, everything went well. This approach to the issue was very important to me, because if you are in a country where people talk about it, it is easier for you to get along with people. It is easier for you to demand respect, which is the foundation. (Antônia, personal communication, April 2018)

Even with the hegemonic value of this transnational media product, given that it is produced and broadcast by a large conglomerate (Rede Globo¹²), we should not neglect its significance in terms of reception and consumption by LGBTQI+ immigrants, or the importance that telenovelas can have as sources of information about Brazil as a migratory destination. As is evident in Antônia's case, new forms of (re)signification can be deduced from telenovela consumption. Just being able to see the existence of a female couple in a media production represented to her a fundamental element in the decision to immigrate to the city of São Paulo. As Antônia relates, visibility itself can be an advance. At another point of the interview, she corroborates this apprehension by stating that:

The [tele]novela steered me. I saw that in Brazil homosexuality is addressed, people know there are homosexuals. In Mozambique, no, it does not exist. It is [considered] a matter of the devil, a matter of spirit. So that was really important to me. I have to be in a country where that is spoken of, so I can also speak. Therefore, that mattered. (Antônia, personal communication, April 2018)

The link is clear between the reception of telenovelas and the construction of an imaginary about Brazil. This imaginary is specifically related to a representation of the living conditions and the capacity for agency of LGBTQI+ subjects. In comparison with the Mozambican sociocultural context, for Antônia it was an important element in the realization of her migratory project. In this sense, we must understand that telenovelas trigger a thematic agenda that, articulated with the central narrative of the fictional plot, establishes a relationship with broader social, cultural, and political issues (Borelli, 2001). It is a kind of "expression" of everyday experiences in the media sphere, which end up reconstructing the boundaries between the public and the private spheres (de Lopes, 2003). Homosexual relationships are an example of these dynamics.

However, for the visibility of the theme, we must consider not only the approach, but also the factor of representation. A historical analysis of the treatment given to homosexuality in telenovela from Globo between 1974 and 2005 by Peret (2005) helps us understand how this is a contradictory picture. Peret highlights the prevalence of caricatured characters (violent, effeminate, comical gay men), used in a revelation type narrative and a heterocisnormative model (when they do not seem to be homosexual). In other words, despite being historically based subjects in television dramas, homosexual characters in telenovelas perpetuate stereotypes and limitations in terms of diversity. These factors are also related to

¹² Founded in 1925, Rede Globo is currently the largest media conglomerate in Latin America. Globo began exporting telenovelas in 1976.

the (de)construction of imaginaries about LGBTIQ+ subjects in Brazil and, as we saw in the case of Antônia, can influence the migratory project of LGBTIQ+ subjects abroad.

The reports of Lucas and Cesar also confirm the effects of consumption of telenovelas in the elaboration of imaginaries about Brazil. Lucas says that on the public TV channel in Cuba, only two novelas are broadcast daily, one Cuban and one Brazilian:

That's why we know all the Brazilian actors, and you know many places in Brazil because of the telenovelas. This is why every Cuban dreams of seeing carnival, the avenues, you know? That is why every Cuban dreams of traveling to Brazil. (Lucas, personal communication, October 2018)

Cesar, in turn, states: "The knowledge of Brazil I had was samba, Bahia, Xuxa,¹³ Pelé,¹⁴ and the telenovelas *Xica da Silva*,¹⁵ *Hilda Furacão*,¹⁶ *Laços de Família*,¹⁷ *O Clone*.¹⁸ And that's it. (. . .) Through the telenovelas, we learn about the culture of this country [Brazil], about the traditions" (Cesar, personal communication, November 2018).

As Roberta de Andrade (2014) explained, the communicative potential of Brazilian telenovelas is fueled by the fact that their language and narratives present different facets of our social reality, composing a true web of meanings. This corroborates the understanding that telenovelas are one of the most representative communicational phenomena in Brazilian media culture. Precisely because the novelas articulate the archaic and the contemporary in anachronistic narratives, the (de)construction of the imaginaries they produce and their history is strongly marked by the dialectic nationality-mediatization (Borelli, 2001; de Lopes, 2003). In addition, one of the main characteristics of Brazilian telenovelas is that they address social and political themes, going beyond the domain of mere entertainment. In this sense, it

¹³ Maria da Graça Meneghel (03/27/1963), commonly known as Xuxa, "is a Brazilian television host, film actress, singer, model, and businesswoman. Her various shows have been broadcast worldwide in Portuguese, English, and Spanish." Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xuxa>

¹⁴ Edson Arantes do Nascimento (10/23/1940), known as Pelé, "is a retired Brazilian professional footballer who played as a forward." He is widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelé>

¹⁵ Written by Adamo Angel in collaboration with José Carvalho, the telenovela *Xica da Silva* was produced and originally exhibited by the Rede Manchete Network from September 17, 1996, until August 11, 1997. Retrieved from [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xica_da_Silva_\(telenovela\)](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xica_da_Silva_(telenovela))

¹⁶ The miniseries *Hilda Furacão* was written by Glória Perez and was produced and originally aired by the Globo Group from May 27 to July 23, 1998. Retrieved from [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilda_Furacão_\(minissérie\)](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilda_Furacão_(minissérie))

¹⁷ Written by Manoel Carlos, the telenovela *Laços de Família* was produced and originally exhibited by the Globo Group at 8:00 p.m. from June 5, 2000, to February 3, 2001. Retrieved from [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laços_de_Família_\(telenovela\)](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laços_de_Família_(telenovela))

¹⁸ Written by Glória Perez, the telenovela *O Clone* was produced and originally exhibited by the Globo Group at 8:00 p.m. from October 1, 2001, until June 14, 2002. Retrieved from https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_Clone

should be noted that Brazilian telenovelas are a media product with important export scope and revenues. Thus, these nationally (televised) narratives have become part of a globalized cultural panorama, helping to compose a set of imageries and representations about Brazil abroad.

The Internet is the second most important media in terms of the (de)construction of imaginaries about Brazil. In the experiences of the immigrants and refugees we interviewed, the Internet is presented as a digital communication space of great value in their migratory projects. It was possible to verify that it is used: (a) to search for information about Brazil and the city of São Paulo; (b) as a source of information on procedures necessary for regularization in the country or about rights; (c) to establish or maintain transnational social networks, such as communication with family members, friends, and compatriots; (d) to support third-party migration projects; and (e) as a tool in various forms of activism, as in the organization of events related to the theme.¹⁹ In addition, social networking websites are communicational tools that are also important to the migrants' social relationships and migratory projects.

Many of these uses and appropriations are directly related to the imaginaries about Brazil and the city of São Paulo. When Carla (personal communication, May 2018) decided to emigrate, for example, she researched possible destinations on the Internet:

I wanted to leave the United States, but I did not know where in Latin America [I would go]. I thought of Argentina, Mexico . . . I was not ready to go back to Colombia. (. . .) I got on the Internet, typed "city, work, cosmopolitan, nightlife, and enter."

The result, she said, was the city of São Paulo, highlighting classic images of the São Paulo Museum of Art and Avenida Paulista, which also influenced her process of choosing a destination. José, in turn, when questioned about how he decided to immigrate to Brazil, affirms he had searched on Google.com: "I researched Avenida Paulista, Parque [park] Ibirapuera, Rio, Bahia" (José, personal communication, March 2018). These searches also turned to the subject of LGBTIQ+ issues: "Then I learned that it was freer, more liberal. (. . .) In the cultural sense, in the case of gay people, you are much freer than in my country" (José, personal communication, March 2018).

Several studies about the uses and appropriations of ICTs by migrants and refugees have highlighted the presence of the Internet in different spheres of their mobility trajectories, as in: the planning and implementation of migration projects; the dynamics of installation and socialization in the new contexts of transit and residence; processes of judicial regularization; interactions with family members and friends; the exercise of international maternity; wiring funds to countries of origin; the creation of and participation in digital inclusion projects; and in actions to mobilize on behalf of rights and citizenship (Alencar, 2017; Brignol, 2015; Cogo, 2011; Cogo, Elhajji, & Bailén, 2012; Georgiou, 2018; Retis, 2018; Ruiz-Aranguren & Cantalapiedra, 2018; Scopsi, 2009). In informational and communicational environments that are marked by multiple intercessions on the Internet, it is also possible to verify their relationship to the (de)construction

¹⁹ As examples of events that have been organized for or aimed at LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in the city of São Paulo, we can cite "Sarau Troca & Ação," the "Roda de Conversa Refugiados LGBTIQA+" at the 3rd Internacional Conference [SSEX-BBOX] and the 2nd Meeting of Lesbian and Bisexual Women of São Paulo.

of imaginaries on the part of migrant subjects and communities (Cogo, 2012; Lorenzo, 2005; Retis & Tsagarousianou, 2019; Russi, 2016).

When referring to the specific experience of LGBTIQ+ migrant subjects, digital media are important in several aspects of their daily lives. The Internet holds a central position since it is directly linked to the desire to migrate; the facilitation of or support for a migratory project; the creation of connections that can strengthen an overall feeling of belonging; and to activism (Atay, 2017; Dhoest, 2016; Szulc, 2019). The Internet is also associated with the (de)construction of imaginaries found in every step of the process of their geographical displacement (Theodoro & Cogo, 2019). The experiences of Carla and José exemplify precisely this interrelation among the Internet, the imaginary, and the LGBTIQ+ migratory experience. In Carla's case, the imaginary triggered by online searches is one of a cosmopolitan city that is related to the cultural aspects of global citizenship. In the case of José, his searches turned specifically to questions associated with living conditions for gays in the city. This is an interesting aspect of his experience to highlight, since although his initial motivation for coming to the country was tourism, he decided not to return to Peru and continued to reside in the city of São Paulo.

Thus, for all the characteristics involved in the construction of imaginaries about Brazil signaled by the immigrants and refugees interviewed, we see that many of them are based on stereotypes, such as a respect for sexual diversity; a welcoming and happy people; racial democracy; samba; football; carnival; and media celebrities (such as Xuxa and Pelé). In agreement with the previous theoretical reflections, these imaginaries constructed before their arrival corroborate the idea of a festive country that is free of conflicts and has an open-minded people. We understand that this is a process deeply linked to a media culture that exports these symbolic products, which construct hegemonic representations about Brazil and help compose imaginaries about the country abroad (Badet, 2016; Brignol, 2014).

In this sense, the breakdown of imaginaries about Brazil as a destination country was also explicitly mentioned, based on the migratory experiences of the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees interviewed after their arrival in the country. Teresa, for example, said:

Many Brazilian telenovelas are broadcast in Chile. So, I had an idea of what Brazil was like. Of course, it is not the same when you live here, because what is on TV is one thing and when you arrive, reality is quite different. (Teresa, personal communication, February 2020)

In the case of Antônia, there is a shock between an imaginary Brazil portrayed on telenovelas and the reality of violence found. "When I arrived here, one of the things I feared was violence . . . On telenovelas there was that perception of a peaceful country" (Antônia, personal communication, April 2018).

Lucas corroborates this apprehension of the contrast between the imaginary constructed based on a televised product and the reality found in his arrival in the city of São Paulo. He affirmed:

I came here with an image of a super-clean, super-friendly city, of very welcoming people, like in my country. On telenovelas you see that, you know? Loving, friendly people. (. . .) When I arrived, for example, I saw people living in the streets, I cried, because that's not seen in my country. That shocked me a lot. (Lucas, personal communication, October 2018)

In Yago's experience, the deconstruction of the imaginary about Brazil is also related to the issue of discrimination based on sexual orientation:

I had the idea that it was a country free from prejudices, which it is not. I think that it is very contradictory. Brazil seems to be a country of liberty, free from prejudices, especially compared to the rest of Latin America. But deep down it's not, but it's covered up. In Peru, if you are gay, people are going to let you know right to your face that they don't approve, that they don't like it. Here [in Brazil] a person will do this, but in a hidden way. (Yago, personal communication, November 2019)

Jorge's narrative also makes this issue clear when discussing the violence faced by LGBTIQ+ people in Brazil, calling attention to some of the consequences of the structural and systemic violence suffered:

When we are in a foreign country, we have a romanticized vision of Brazil. Because in Argentina, since it is so close, there is always access to cultural goods, music, poetry, carnival, the Globo broadcasting network, where this is all broadcast, and even Xuxa. She had a program down there in Argentina that was on the air for 10 years. So, in one way or another, in our imaginary you find yourself creating a romanticized vision. And when I arrived, it was a shock. A cultural shock. You find yourself coming up with lots of intrinsic questions, of a social nature, that stay hidden or that you have to try not to talk about. Living here you have to deal with it. It's part of the population, the society. And even as an immigrant, you are part of this daily life and you have to deal with these issues. (. . .) For example, the violence and intolerance towards the LGBTI community. Argentina, in one way or another, took a great stride forward in terms of marriage equality, and society was able to digest these changes in social evolution. It is only here [in Brazil] that there is so much discrimination, so much killing. And what motivates these killings is exactly the hate that is present in daily life. (Jorge, personal communication, November 2018)

Jorge's daily experiences in Brazil led to a resignification of his feelings about the imagined Brazil. Therefore, it is possible to verify the conflict between the imaginary about Brazil—that is still constructed in the country of origin—and the impact of the social reality experienced, including the dimension of sexuality in the case of the LGBTIQ+ subjects. As explained by Carrara (2012), experiences with violence like those reported by Jorge demonstrate the extent and depth of the prejudice and discrimination against this population in Brazil.

Final Considerations

Given that imaginaries are linked to the domain of culture, the values to which they provide structure are always shared, and directly influence social representations. In this sense, the media is fundamental to the integration or exclusion of social groups, in terms of their representation in public space (Brignol, 2014; Georgiou, 2018; Lorenzo, 2005). As we have discussed throughout this study, in the case of migrations, both imaginaries and representations have direct influence on migrant experiences and on their adaptations to the sociocultural context of the destination society.

From the analysis performed, we ascertained how media consumption is closely associated with the constitution of communicative structures that form the basis of the migratory experience of the migrant subjects who we interviewed. We were also able to verify the complexity involved in the (de)construction of imaginaries about Brazil and the city of São Paulo for LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of São Paulo, and how these imaginaries permeate the planning and implementation of the migratory project.

The multiplicity of media uses and appropriations in the (de)construction of these imaginaries shows the different symbolic layers encompassed in this process. Television and the Internet make prominent contributions to the image of Brazil abroad. Televised products, especially telenovelas, are particularly important. As exported media products, Brazilian telenovelas are a symbol of the country. As evidenced in the case of Antônia, the imaginaries they help to create include representations about the living conditions of LGBTIQ+ subjects in Brazil and were an extremely important factor in the decision to immigrate.

In the case of the Internet, we were able to verify that its uses and appropriations by the subjects interviewed often involved searches for information about Brazil. This information also carries a symbolic charge strongly linked to imaginaries about the country and the city of São Paulo—from tourist spots to abstract dimensions, such as “a cosmopolitan city” (Carla) and “a greater freedom for gays” (José).

The analysis also allowed us to verify that these imaginaries constructed through media consumption conflict with reality. Through their daily experiences in Brazil, the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees interviewed resignify these imaginaries. We can thus problematize the contradictions arising from a hegemonic imaginary of Brazil (that portrays it as a racial democracy, highlighted by carnival, sexual diversity, and more) and the experience of these subjects residing in the city of São Paulo.

The construction of imaginaries about Brazil and the city of São Paulo by LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees is closely related to media consumption. These imaginaries influence the construction of the migratory project and the decision to immigrate. The deconstruction of these imaginaries is caused by the experience of these subjects in the country—that is, by their daily life.

From the perspective of communication studies, the conclusions of the research lead us to recognize that media consumption has a central role in the constitution of the transnational experience and migratory projects of LGBTIQ+ subjects. In addition, the shift in the imaginaries about Brazil reported by those interviewed also guides us to relativize the weight of the mediation by the communication media and

to recognize the importance of nonmediated interactions (face-to-face and interpersonal interactions) in the constitution of the experiences of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in the local context.

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