Spatiality and control of bodies: Boa Vista and the Venezuelan human mobility

Espacialidade e controle dos corpos: Boa Vista e a mobilidade humana venezuelana

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Abstract

*Th*is article discusses the socio-spatial transformations undergone by the city of Boa Vista after the significant arrival of Venezuelan migrants from 2015 onwards. We use the documentary methodology to present the increase in the number of Venezuelans in the city, and the bibliographic methodology to reflect on the policies of control of these bodies by the "welcoming" State. In addition, we employ the dialectical hermeneutic method to discuss power relations based on Bauman's and Foucault's theories. Using Henri Lefebvre's perspective, we present the urban space as a place where daily social relations function and we question spatial changes. The aim is to demonstrate that the State determines the level of interaction between residents, reinforcing the systemic prejudice/xenophobic practice based on the control of "unwelcome" bodies.

Keywords: migration; mobility; humanitarian law; militarization; *Operação Acolhida* (Welcome Operation).

Resumo

O presente artigo discorre sobre as transformações socioespaciais na cidade de Boa Vista-Roraima após a chegada significativa de migrantes venezuelanos a partir de 2015. A metodologia documental é utilizada para expor o aumento de pessoas venezuelanas na cidade e a bibliográfica, para refletir sobre as políticas de controle desses corpos pelo Estado "acolhedor". Utiliza-se o método hermenêutico-dialético para discutir as relações de poder, alicerçando-se nas teorias de Bauman e Foucault. Apresenta-se o espaço urbano, sob a ótica de Lefebvre, como local de funcionamento das relações sociais cotidianas, questionando as mudanças espaciais. O objetivo é demonstrar como o Estado determina o nível de interação entre os residentes, reforçando a prática preconceituosa/xenofóbica sistêmica a partir do controle dos corpos "indesejáveis".

Palavras-chave: migração; mobilidade; direito humanitário; militarização; Operação Acolhida.

Introduction

From 2015 to 2024, Venezuelan international migration has emerged as a prominent global concern, particularly in South America, which serves as both the origin and destination for many of these individuals. Consequently, the displacement has led to the development of a range of state actions in both transit and destination areas, which impact various spheres of authority, including local municipalities. This article aims to examine the influx of refugees and migrants into the city of Boa Vista, where the Brazilian government has implemented various measures under Operation Welcome. The article aims to assess the impact of these measures on local urban development, specifically focusing on the regulation of migrant populations by different institutions.

Venezuelan mobility since 2015

Since 2015, the deteriorating economic and social crisis in Venezuela has resulted in a significant surge in the migration of Venezuelans to neighboring countries. The most recent report from the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (R4V), published in November 2023, indicates that there are approximately 7,722,579 million Venezuelans residing outside of their homeland (R4V, 2023a). According to the international community, this population is part of a complex movement that includes both migration and refuge. The choice between these two regularization options has implications for regulatory frameworks and the dynamics of protection that should

be granted to these individuals. However, in this particular scenario, both options result in similar treatment due to the fact that they are Venezuelans. This extensive and intricate migration, occurring within a span of fewer than ten years, has already emerged as the most significant mass departure in recent Latin American history. Additionally, it stands as one of the most substantial instances of urban mobility, primarily involving transitions between cities (UNHCR, 2020).

Brazil, while not being the primary recipient country, hosts approximately 510,100 migrants and refugees from Venezuela (R4V, 2023a). Colombia and Peru have hosted the largest number of Venezuelan migrants compared to any other country. Specifically, Colombia has received more than 2.88 million migrants, while Peru has received 1.5 million migrants (R4V, 2023a). According to data from January 2017 to February 2024, Brazil has recognized the refugee status of over 132,600 Venezuelans. Additionally, there are 12,800 Venezuelans who have applied for refugee status and are currently awaiting evaluation. Furthermore, 471,200 Venezuelans have been granted a residence permit in the country (OBMIGRA; IOM, 2024). Although the institute provides international protection, particularly in terms of non-refoulement, there is no differentiation in the treatment of individuals with residence permits, refugee applications, or those who have already been recognized as refugees within the operation's framework.

The data also discloses the number of individuals from Venezuela who have transited through Brazilian territory, amounting to 1,059,778 entries and 501,474 exits. Therefore, the significant influx of people necessitates the implementation of urban planning strategies

for reception and regulation, particularly in Boa Vista-Roraima. This is as a result of the city's rising demand to act as a transit hub and a location for long-term habitation, which exceeds historical levels, according to Rodrigues (2006).[1]

The Welcoming Operation

Considering the economic situation in the state of Roraima, which is a border state and serves as the primary entry point for Venezuelan migrants, the Brazilian government has taken over the responsibility of providing humanitarian aid in order to address the significant influx of migrants resulting from the crisis in Venezuela. Therefore, to efficiently manage the influx of a significant number of individuals into the country, Operation Welcome was established in April 2018 (Brasil, 2018b; Jarochinski Silva and Albuquerque, 2021).

According to Jarochinski Silva (2022, p. 48), Operation Welcome consists of three primary components: border planning (to facilitate the orderly entry of refugees and immigrants), reception (providing emergency shelter to individuals identified by the Operation as vulnerable), and internalization (the voluntary relocation of Venezuelans to Brazilian municipalities outside of Roraima state).

During the reception stage, which occurs in the border town of Pacaraima and the capital Boa Vista, there is a well-organized infrastructure in place to receive, identify, conduct health inspections, administer vaccinations, process migration paperwork, and screen all individuals arriving from the neighboring country. Following the initial action, individuals in precarious circumstances who express interest may request access to a reception service at one of the emergency shelters provided by the operation. Additionally, assistance is provided for transfers to other Brazilian states for individuals who meet specific criteria related to the destination. This support is part of the internalization process (Jarochinski Silva and Albuquerque, 2021; Brasil, 2023b).

The Brazilian state is primarily responsible for overseeing this extensive humanitarian task force. In addition to numerous governmental institutions, it collaborates with intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations (UN), including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), among others. It also partners with over a hundred civil society organizations (Brasil, 2023a).

This significant humanitarian endeavor in Brazil and the Americas commenced through the collaboration of various stakeholders. There are numerous agreements, development terms, and collaboration terms between these different entities, with the goal of promoting policies and actions for emergency assistance and welcoming individuals in vulnerable situations due to the migration from Venezuela (Brazil, 2018b). Operation Welcome is a military initiative that is described as humanitarian because it focuses on welcoming vulnerable immigrants. It is also considered joint because it involves the navy, air force, and army. Additionally, it is inter-institutional because it involves different actors. The main goal of Operation Welcome is to reconcile interests and coordinate efforts among these military sectors (Oliveira, 2018, p. 6).

The beginning of sheltering in Boa Vista

Before the federalization of humanitarian assistance in 2018, Pacaraima and Boa Vista had already experienced a substantial influx of Venezuelan migrants since 2015. Due to their extreme vulnerability and lack of alternatives, these migrants resorted to living on the streets, occupying public spaces like squares, bus stations, and sidewalks in both cities. Meanwhile, the local population started to express doubts about the movement, accusing it of "inadequate security," "uncleanliness," and "destruction" of the city. Local newspapers began to report on the situation of the immigrants, criticizing and questioning the actions of public authorities (Ramos, 2017).

The introduction of the federal response plan marks an initial stride towards relocating individuals from the streets, commencing with the establishment of emergency shelters. Emergency shelters are transient measures and should not be regarded as permanent solutions. Temporary and emergency measures are employed in dire circumstances to maintain local public order and mitigate human suffering. These measures ensure that the affected population's fundamental human rights are upheld by offering protection and essential aid. However, simultaneously, they also function to oversee and control the potential actions of these migrants in the unfamiliar region.

Consequently, the visual environment of Boa Vista exhibited the modification of certain areas and the establishment of new ones, explicitly intended for emergency housing.[2] However, it is clear that significant efforts to confine migrants in regulated environments, such as emergency shelters and purpose-built spaces like the Reception and Support Post (PRA),[3] went hand in hand with the discourse of "welcoming."

These structures, while providing shelter, can be categorized as exclusionary, as their purpose is to relocate individuals from public areas, particularly Simon Bolivar Square. This square now has restricted entry for the public due to the installation of fences and gates (Figure 1).

Instances such as this demonstrate that the objective is not solely to offer housing, but to regulate the utilization of alternative areas by this migrant community. The visual appeal of Plaza Simón Bolívar amplifies the contradiction present in the terms employed in the welcoming speech. The monument with the inscription "Bienvenidos a Boa Vista" (Welcome to Boa Vista) was enhanced and made more prominent in the square following its renovation. This is also evident in the strain felt by the self-proclaimed spontaneous occupations, which are abandoned areas that have been taken over to provide housing for this migrant population. While efforts have been made to address these areas, the primary goal is to relocate these individuals, arguing that these spaces are not suitable. However, during these negotiation processes, there has been a lack of recognition of the optimal utilization of these areas, which, for various reasons, have become established as spaces unsuitable for migrants.

Gradually, the visual environment of Boa Vista exposed the implementation of hygienist policies and the extensive measures taken to confine migrant individuals within regulated areas, ensuring controlled interactions with the rest of society. These institutions, known

Figure 1 – Photo of the redesigned square that reopened
in January 2019 after being closed for around 10 months

Source: Barbosa (2019).

for their hierarchical and controlling nature, strictly enforce designated entry hours. In this context, the state demonstrates its concept of hospitality by creating a necessary separation between the host and the guest, specifically between Brazilians and Venezuelans. The "public space" actually turns out to be a space of discriminatory practices, where certain individuals are categorized as "undesirables" (Vasconcelos, 2021, p. 141) or as those who might be discarded (Bauman, 2005).

The aim of gaining control and supposedly generating protection for the nationals who previously lived in the city is evidenced by the very words of the military contingent involved in the action at the time:

> One of the most important tasks carried out by Acolhida on *behalf of Roraima's society* is the reduction of spontaneous occupations, in practice, *invasions of public and private property by Venezuelans* in a state of extreme social vulnerability [...]. (Daróz; Celestino, 2022, p. 65, emphasis added)

Another agent involved in the operation highlighted the existence of pressure to remove these people from the space:

> [...] The *pressure to get that group off the streets* is so great that you spend your initial energy and resources organizing their arrival, getting them vaccinated, getting them off the streets of Pacaraima or Boa Vista, out of the squares, separating indigenous people from non-indigenous people, and so on. (Kannan, 2022, p. 47, emphasis added)

These speeches, which clearly prioritize security, are associated with actions that are intended to be categorized as welcoming, highlighting the conflicting goals pursued by the responsible authorities.

It is crucial to consider the magnitude of individuals impacted by these measures. The data is regularly updated, and as of the latest snapshot on April 6, 2024, the figures indicate that there are 7031 individuals living in highly vulnerable conditions in the city of Boa Vista alone. Among

them, 5,662 are residing in emergency shelters under Operation Welcome (UNHCR, 2024), 866 are living in the Reception and Screening Post, 1108 are residing in spontaneous occupations, and 503 individuals are living on the streets, persisting despite efforts to address these circumstances (IOM, 2024).

Control over migrant bodies

According to Peixoto (2019, p. 143), the notion that the ancient world was stationary and the present world is mobile is deceptive. The author argues that the dominant side of this binary relationship changes periodically. They assert that the rise of the nation-state and the concept of sovereignty, which is connected to the regulation of population movement, led to the perception of international mobility as a concern by the late 19th century. Despite the intense globalization that fosters closer connections between people, places, and cultures driven by market interests, prejudice against migrants persists across various political and social perspectives.

Government officials frequently perceive migration as a formidable obstacle, actively seeking strategies to impede the departure of migrants from their countries of origin. Regrettably, this approach demonstrates a deficiency in comprehending migration as an inherent aspect of human progress. Migration occurs when individuals react to environmental, economic, and political circumstances in potential destination areas (Castles, 2010, p. 14). Thus, we observe a dynamic society that is consistently prompted to transcend boundaries and consistently educated to perceive migration with challenge and hostility.

The way in which Brazil has welcomed Venezuelan migrants exposes inconsistencies between oppressive actions and security measures that justify mistreating those who are seeking shelter. In the social interactions of Operação Acolhida, there are various aspects, interests, conflicts, and connections. These interactions expose the contradictory nature of a dual commitment to both providing hospitality and maintaining order. This raises concerns about the legitimacy of certain interests.

> This dubious position of state participation in humanitarian actions aimed at the Venezuelan migrant population, sometimes presenting themselves as mechanisms for defending human rights, sometimes reinforcing mechanisms for controlling and restricting human mobility, has been observed in other research on Venezuelan migration in different countries, such as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay, Mexico and Spain (Louidor, 2018; Koechlin, 2018; Ramirez et al., 2018; Stefoni and Silva, 2018; Suárez and Trejer, 2018; Dekocker, 2018). This does not mean that this model of humanitarian response is the prerogative only of Venezuelan migrants, given the specific motivation for their displacement; on the contrary, as we will see, it is a recurring practice in different contexts around the world (Hirst, 2017). What distinguishes them are the justifications and forms of intervention. (Ibid., p. 55)

So, it is clear that the political and administrative oversight of foreigners entering the country serves many purposes, such as the legal goal of collecting data to come up with the best way to help them, as well as effectively controlling their actions and setting limits for these newcomers.

However, a closer examination of our environment reveals that this regulation is primarily focused on individuals who are considered undesirable due to their economic vulnerabilities, making them appear unnecessary (Bauman, 2005). The regulation of immigration has resulted in the emergence of a new social hierarchy known as the "hierarchy of mobility," according to Bauman (2012), amid the conflicting forces of globalization and nationalism.

The level of access to mobility is contingent upon one's social standing. While some individuals have unrestricted movement from one location to another, others face limitations on their mobility. The presence of stringent immigration control systems, residency regulations, and policies aimed at preventing any migration has led to increased obstacles to accessing urban spaces. These measures are intended to maintain order but have resulted in a more pronounced division between different spheres of society (Bauman, 2012, p. 80).

Thus, migrant individuals, perceived as inferior, are rendered undesirable, and deliberate border policies are implemented to exert control over them. Constraining their mobility within the city, impeding their assimilation into the local community, and curtailing their sense of belonging and access to public spaces as members of society. This strategy is deliberately designed to create challenges for individuals living in the country, isolating them from social interactions and making them increasingly vulnerable to manipulation.

To achieve this, vulnerable Venezuelan migrants are subjected to a treatment that aims to domesticate their customs and regulate their way of life. This treatment includes imposing rules for sleeping, eating, and going out. It operates through a microphysics of power, which does not view power as ownership but as a strategic tool that produces effects through dispositions, techniques, maneuvers, and operations (Foucault, 1987, p. 30).

Brazil's militarized reception policy aimed to domesticate migrant bodies by forcefully separating them from the local population, using the discourse of migratory control and humanitarian support. Continuing to comprehend this reality as a matter of national security and implementing measures accordingly. Justifying urban segregation, they treated them with suspicion in order to ensure good care and improved access to essential services. This further reinforced the segregation and xenophobia within the local society, ultimately resulting in in the most effective form of "domestication," confining them to a single controllable space. A clear illustration of this was that, over an extended period, the operation itself took responsibility for the healthcare of these migrants, with the rationale that this would not place additional strain on the local healthcare system. This choice, which has a technological justification, emphasizes the segregation patterns that are particularly obvious in shelter projects.

Preserving the interdependence of these migrants enables their manipulation. This power dynamic is constructed through the establishment of discriminatory and unequal rules and "logics," which result in the social exclusion of certain individuals and influence the limitations placed on their movement. They accomplish this in a manner that naturally justifies the dynamics of control, concealing it as assistance. By employing discreet and noiseless instruments, they render the body less politicized and more conducive to productivity. The disciplinary rationale is

evident in the securitizing approach[4] towards providing assistance to Venezuelan migrants, which involves offering them emergency shelter while simultaneously implementing a multitude of regulations (pertaining to sleeping, eating, bathing, entering, and exiting) and maintaining continuous surveillance.

> The historical moment of the disciplines refers to the emergence of a practice focused on enhancing the capabilities of the human body while also establishing a connection that simultaneously increases obedience and usefulness. Therefore, a strategy of using force is established, which involves manipulating the physical aspects of the body, such as its movements, gestures, and actions. (Ibid., p. 164)

Hence, for institutions to uphold their authority and overall framework, they must acquire legitimacy by explicitly grounding themselves in the principles of nature and reason. By providing its members with a collection of analogies, it enables them to examine the world and validate the inherent logic and reason behind the established roles. This enables the institution to preserve a consistent and recognizable structure over a period of time (Douglas, 1998, p. 131). Put simply, the state prioritizes consolidating its power rather than genuinely upholding the human rights that it has agreed to uphold according to international standards.

Once institutions successfully establish standards and concepts that align with their guidelines, their authority becomes increasingly unquestioned. Individuals are controlled and disciplined based on this framework of thinking, similar to Foucault's concept of docile bodies.

The human body undergoes a process of examination, disassembly, and reassembly within a powerful mechanism. A concept known as "political anatomy," also referred to as the "mechanics of power," is emerging. It includes tactics for exerting control over other people's behavior in order to ensure compliance with your wishes as well as to mold their actions to meet your requirements by using particular techniques, quickness, and efficiency that you determine. Discipline therefore results in compliant and well-trained bodies, commonly referred to as "docile" bodies. Discipline increases the body's strength (in economic terms of usefulness) and decreases it (in political terms of obedience). (Ibid., p. 164)

Institutions are increasingly becoming holders of the truth, which even permits the State of Exception to control these bodies (Agamben, 2000). This makes it possible to control decision-making.

> A comforting but false idea about institutional thinking has recently gained some acceptance. This is the concept that institutions only carry out routine, low-level, day-to-day thinking. Andrew Schotter, who so aptly described institutions as thinking machines, believes that minor decisions are routed through institutional processing, while the individual's mind is left free to ponder important and difficult questions (Schotter, 1981, p. 149). There is no reason to believe in such a benevolent exemption. The opposite is more likely to prevail. The individual tends to leave the important decisions to his institutions while occupying himself with the tactics and details. (Douglas, 1998, p. 130)

Therefore, when individuals delegate complex and crucial decisions to institutions, they subject themselves to a power dynamic that can be manipulative. This reinforces the existing oppressive system and results in a loss of personal autonomy, making individuals compliant and conforming to the norms of reception and migration governance.

Similarly, we can employ Foucault's (1987) notion of biopower to analyze the Brazilian reaction. As an exercise of power that guarantees the functioning of a certain form of life in its physiological sense, i.e., the choice of a certain body to survive, to the detriment of others, biopower is evident when we think about the logic that the Brazilian state operates with migrants, especially the most vulnerable ones from Venezuela.

By implementing targeted policies that favor particular individuals, specifically those who may not contribute significantly to the economy but are valuable for their labor, these individuals are confined to specific geographic areas with stricter regulations, resulting in their increased influence and power. Within these regulated environments, individuals are subjected to various forms of control (such as strict meal times and restricted access). Additionally, members of organizing committees wield a form of regulatory authority over their fellow countrymen. These circumstances create a difficult context and encourage people to embrace the internalization axis, which *Operação Acolhida* itself facilitates. This axis offers a more hopeful path, even if it means accepting underemployment in remote and unstable conditions far from their place of origin.

But the body is also directly immersed in a political field; power relations have an immediate impact on it; they invest it, mark it, direct it, torture it, subject it to work, force it to perform ceremonies, and demand signs from it. There are a lot of complicated and two-way connections between the political use of the body and its economic use. The body is mostly invested in power and dominance relationships when it comes to production, but it can only be a force of work if it is trapped in a system of subjection, where necessity is also a carefully planned, used, and organized political tool. The body is only a useful force if it is both a productive body and a submissive body. (Ibid., p. 29)

Consequently, as individuals become more submissive and easily influenced, they also become more prone to accepting their marginalized position in the society they belong to. These circumstances can result in individuals becoming stuck in low-wage employment, experiencing labor abuse, or being denied access to opportunities, ultimately compelling them to migrate to other nations.

Background to the formation of the city of Boa Vista

For Lefebvre, space and time are not facts of "nature" or "culture" but are dialectically relational, being product-producer-re-producer and

as a product, through interaction or feedback, space intervenes in production itself: organization of productive work, transport, flows of raw materials and

energy, product distribution networks [...]. The notion of space encompasses the cognitive and cultural aspects, as well as the social and historical dimensions. (Lefebvre, 2006, pp. 5-6)

Examining the development of Boa Vista city through the lens of Lefebvrian processes of discovery, production, and creation, we can focus on the process of discovery. In 1775, the Portuguese territory became aware of the need for defense and established the São Joaquim fort at the confluence of the upper Branco River with the Tacutu River. This marked the first occupation of the area and led to the mobilization of a military contingent and their families in the region. Over time, military establishments were established and solidified, ultimately reaching their consolidation in the 1970s.

Within this deliberate defensive strategy, there is a political endeavor to enhance the urban features of the region, achieved through the establishment of the Federal Territory of Rio Branco in 1943.[5] This territory served as the site for the implementation of a successful urban planning project, which was awarded to engineer Darcy Aleixo Derenusson through a competition. This project was in line with the development of new cities in Brazil, such as Belo Horizonte and Goiânia. These cities were planned with a focus on modernization through urbanization, which included the construction of wide roads for cars, sanitation systems, and electricity distribution. Carla Moraes and Gregório Gomes Filho (2000, p. 147-149) highlight these infrastructure improvements.

Derenusson's project for the city of Boa Vista adheres to the principles of the international modernist school, incorporating elements of the garden city model and emphasizing the automobile as the primary

means of transportation within this new urban area. The act of Creating the landscape and monumentality in the project can be understood as a process of construction, as described by Lefevbre (2006). In her book "O Urbanismo" (Urbanism), Françoise Choay (1979, p. 219-228) examines the urbanistic movements that aimed to address and structure human settlements in cities of the 20th century. She specifically discusses Ebenezer Howard's Urbanism for garden cities. Choay outlines the key features shared by Boa Vista's urban project, including its circular layout, a prominent tree-lined boulevard/plaza that extends from the center of the circle, a central ring that houses public buildings, recreational areas, and cultural facilities, wide concentric avenues that mark the boundaries of the project, and connecting avenues that intersect all the rings and lead to the center. Additionally, there are peripheral industrial facilities.

> [...] the implementation of an urban plan for the city based on the principles of sanitation, beautification, and circulation, so much in vogue in Brazil in the first half of the 20th century, as part of a development policy for the newly created Federal Territories. The conception of the Boa Vista Plan was no different from the Belo Horizonte Plan, in that it reserved a privileged area for the construction of monumental public administration buildings, taking advantage of straight lines, wide avenues, and perspectives converging towards the center. (Moraes; Gomes Filho, 2009, pp. 148 and 156)

In response to the need for organization, the new project emphasized the concept that the most desirable areas in the city, specifically those in line with the Garden City project,

would be allocated to government entities. This arrangement, which still persists today, further solidifies the existence of multiple institutional zones within privileged locations.

The preference for state entities was evident in the choice of prime residential locations for individuals belonging to the state elite. These locations were centrally situated, providing convenient access to services and urban infrastructure. On the other hand, the less privileged individuals were relegated to the outskirts of the city, which were excluded from the initial urban development plan. Consequently, these areas lacked essential amenities such as sanitation and public lighting, a situation that persists to prthis day FurthermThe 6th Construction Engineering Battalion (6th BEC), which occupied a sizable portion of land in the Mecejana neighborhood, was the main driving force behind this expansion.xpansion (Silva, 2009).

In the 1970s, the peripheral region of the city experienced significant growth. This expansion was primarily driven by the establishment of the 6th Construction Engineering Battalion (6th BEC), this military structure which occupied a large area of land in the Mecejana neighborhood. Over time, this neighborhood has become a central area in the city, as it has grown and spread. Consequently, the title of "periphery" has been shifted to more distant neighborhoods that still lack basic infrastructure such as sanitation and electricity supply. In the same decade, there was significant growth in the Aparecida, São Pedro, São Francisco, In addition, Diamond and gold mining in conjunction with military occupation served to further fuel the emergence of new urban designs and tensions the central area of the city of Boa Vista increased.

In addition, the emergence of new urban designs and tensions was further fueled by diamond and gold mining, in conjunction with military occupation. Mining in Roraima has been ongoing since the late 1930s, but it peaked in the late 1980s. This expansion primarily occurred during the transition from federal territory to statehood, resulting in increased conflicts between indigenous populations and miners. The arrival of prospectors in Roraima had a significant impact on the layout of the capital city, primarily due to the actions of government authorities. The prospector monument, located at the center of the square from which the main streets radiate, stands as a testament to the authorities' approval (Oliveira, 2010).

Regarding the migration patterns that contributed to the establishment of Boa Vista, it has historically attracted a substantial number of internal migrants, primarily from the Northern and Northeastern regions of Brazil, particularly from the states of Maranhão and Pará (Rodrigues; Vasconcelos, 2012).

Ramalho (2012, p. 47) states that according to the records of Hamilton Rice's 1924 expedition, the population of Boa Vista consisted of Portuguese, Brazilians, "mestizos, Indians, and blacks, with a small number coming from the Cooperative Republic of Guyana", which was a British colony at the time as it gained independence only in 1966.

The population of Boa Vista has accepted and adapted to these migratory processes, and it is noteworthy that there is also an international aspect involved. Border migration is the most prominent among these phenomena, as the state of Roraima serves as both a transit point and a final destination for these migrants. This daily movement takes place in both the border towns and in Boa

Vista, primarily because it is the largest city in close proximity to the border regions of Brazil, Venezuela, and Guyana. The movement of people and goods across the borders of Brazil and Venezuela, as well as between Brazil and Guyana, is consistently occurring (Rodrigues; Vasconcelos, 2012).

According Rodrigues and Vasconcelos (ibid.), Boa Vista has experienced multiple migratory movements from diverse origins and with different motivations throughout its history. It is evident that, although these dynamics are part of our daily lives, they receive limited attention in urban planning and legislative discussions.

The role of mobility in urban growth and city development has never been a political force that empowers citizens to actively participate and exercise their rights. Instead, it has been treated as a controlled "object.". According to Becker (2006), this way of operating is connected to a larger social and political plan. It involves different strategies to control specific regions, which aligns with Henri Lefebvre's idea of the state creating and controlling space. According to the author, after the construction of the territory, the concrete foundation of the state, the state starts to produce a political space, its own space, in order to exercise social control through norms, laws, and hierarchies (Becker, 2006, p. 26).

In order to accomplish this, the state establishes a complex system of dual control over the territory, encompassing both technical and political aspects and consisting of diverse types of connections and networks. This intricate framework was specifically created to effectively track and manage the movement and quantity of populations while also prioritizing the interests of those in power. It relies heavily on urban areas as its main operational hub for executing its initiatives (Becker, 2006).

Pedro Staevie (2012) states that in the 1990s, in Boa Vista, around 85% of residents in the western zone were migrants who lived in government-donated areas. This was part of a deliberate strategy to create electoral corrals. These residents made up about 80% of the city's total population. Additionally, Staevie points out that irregular occupations were common in the municipality and frequently supported by political leaders who had a personal stake in them (ibid., p. 153).

Boa Vista has become more prominent in recent years due to the increased intensity of international human mobility, as the arrival of Venezuelans in Brazil almost always involves passing through the city. That is why the majority of the reception, welcoming, and migratory governance structures are located in urban areas. However, as previously mentioned, this mobility is unique in that it constantly seeks control. As part of its daily operations, the organization carries out a project that focuses on strengthening border control and integration. This project also involves the implementation of a well-established international practice since the 1990s, which is the regulation of applications for international protection. This regulation aims to discourage non-citizens from leaving their home countries or seeking refuge in other countries (Zuzarte, 2023).

In Zuzarte's remarks, the countries that were specifically identified as developing implemented precautionary measures to impede both entry into their territories and

the assimilation of individuals who successfully crossed their borders. Emergency camps have been established in countries of origin and transit, such as Latin America in relation to the United States and Canada, to provide protection to displaced populations. The primary objective is to confine these populations within these camps, discouraging them from attempting to reach the aforementioned countries.

The actions implemented in Boa Vista gained attention for their management of international migration and its consequences. These actions involved the construction of shelters that met international standards and received funding from northern nations. As a result, Zuzarte (2023) points out that methods like building refugee camps or, in the case of Boa Vista, the so-called shelters, were attempts to control migration under the guise of "help," used as barriers to arriving at the borders of the North Atlantic countries, which were the majority's preferred destination. The author observed that the presence and movement of these individuals became regulated and accepted, deviating from the previous approach of assimilating the newcomers into the host country.

One wonders if these mindsets influence the Brazilian reaction, which takes pride in complying with international norms and being recognized for best practices. From an urban perspective, the flood of Venezuelan migrants has had a considerable influence on Boa Vista. Since 2015, almost one million people have entered Brazil by crossing the state of Roraima's boundaries, notably through the Pacaraima frontier (STI, 2024). Because of the large number of Venezuelan refugees, notably after 2017, Boa Vista has seen tremendous transformation. People began to congregate in public squares and flowerbeds because there was no other suitable area to handle this crowd at the time. *Operação Acolhida* developed shelters to remove individuals from the streets, benefiting around 45,000 people[6] (Jarochinski Silva, 2022). Emergency shelters and reception and support facilities, while placed within the city, are purposefully located away from the most desired locations but yet within the metropolitan boundaries due to their major impact on urban dynamics.

Aside from the emergency shelters established by *Operação Acolhida*, there are several public and private areas, referred to as *Ocupações Espontâneas* (Spontaneous Occupations), that exist due to the government's incapacity to offer refuge to all individuals in need.

We must acknowledge the significance of providing shelter to these individuals, who are in a superior state compared to being homeless, as they not only have a roof over their heads but also receive support for some of their necessities, particularly food. The subject of contention is the framework of the paradigm, which relies on the concept of a disciplinary institution exerting control over individuals.

The humanitarian response in northern Brazil exhibits a combination of both approaches. In addition to the control mechanisms implemented at the border, Operation has devised a strategy of interiorization. One of the objectives of this strategy is to ensure the long-term viability of the shelter system and to distribute the migrant population to other states. This is done to prevent tensions at the border and in nearby regions, as well as to meet the labor demands of certain economic sectors.

The publicity is that interiorization aims to integrate this migrant population into other parts of Brazil, giving them new opportunities to rebuild their lives through job openings, family reunification, social reunions, and even institutional support. The relationship between internalization and sheltering is notorious, as the Acolhida operators themselves reveal:

> The second mistake is not treating temporary shelter as temporary. So what happens? We intentionally don't set a maximum time to stay in the shelter. Why? If it necessitates an immense amount of time and effort to remove the individual from the street, he will remain there for three months before returning to the streets. So we have to invest in internalization. There are more people arriving. Is building more shelters the solution? No, it's not. (Kanaan, 2022, p. 47)

The passage indicates that the political objective was to alleviate the strain on public areas and services that were no longer able to accommodate the population. This is not about disregarding the merits of the measures adopted, as in the case of analyzing shelters. Instead, it is about critically examining the selection of specific models and considering their potential consequences. The goal is to enhance these models, not perpetuate neglect towards this population.

> Concurrently with this approach to internalization, we observe deliberate temporary measures, such as temporary shelters, within the framework established to "welcome" immigrants. Operação Acolhida, despite its unstable structures and its original intention of providing temporary accommodation, has now entered its sixth year with no foreseeable conclusion. The ephemeral nature of these emergency shelter places hinders their integration into the urban development of Boa Vista, resulting in a lack of coverage by public urban strategies.

Changes in the city and Operation Welcome

The fact that shelters continue to be seen as temporary makes it more difficult for these spaces to be included in actions to promote public services, such as public transport, education, and health. According to the Moverse program's survey (UN Women, UNFPA, and ACNUR, 2022) about 35.6% of those residing in shelters were attending school or nursery schools at the time of the survey. This highlights the challenges of including this population in mandatory policies, which are often hindered by factors such as the average length of stay in emergency shelters, which was 7 months according to the initial survey.

Emergency shelters serve the crucial role of giving migrant populations entering Brazil in precarious socioeconomic situations a roof over their heads and serving as locations where organizations with access to them can offer food and take action, but there is no denying that they also serve as effective environments for controlling these migrants and separating them from other groups.
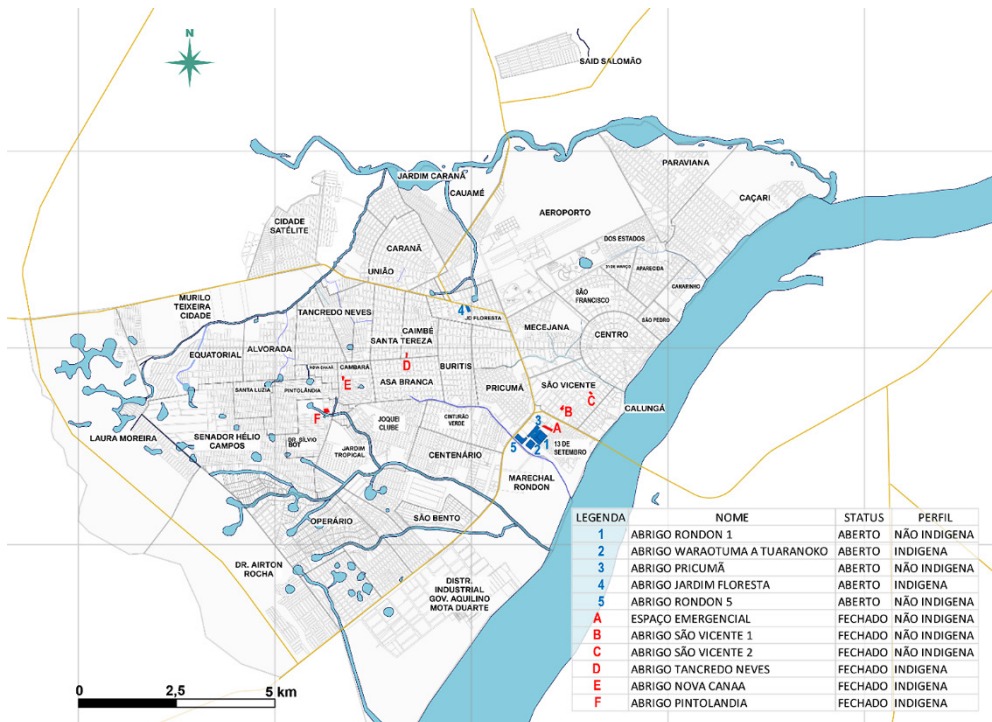
In some cases, it is necessary to problematize certain situations, such as some episodes of greater disciplining of these

sheltered migrants that have come to light, in order to assess whether this is not the situation described by Zuzarte (2023, p. 19), in which "by placing themselves outside the planned order, these individuals have become targets of punitive and disciplinary responses in order to reinsert them into the appropriate spaces for their existence outside their place of origin".

When this migrant population uses the city of Boa Vista's public spaces, local power claims ownership of them on the grounds that their presence excludes the area's long-established local population and demonstrates that the migrant population as a whole does not consider themselves to be a part of the space. In the case of Simon Bolivar Square, they were removed under the justification of refurbishing the square, but they were placed in spaces suitable for their existence, separate and outside the field of more effective coexistence, without being offered coexistence again in adequate conditions in this square, since today there is practically no circulation of people in its area.

Figure 2 – Map of Boa Vista-RR
with the shelters of Operation Welcome from 2015 to 2022

LEGENDA	NOME	STATUS	PERFIL
1	ABRIGO RONDON 1	ABERTO	NÃO INDIGENA
2	ABRIGO WARAOTUMA A TUARANOKO	ABERTO	INDIGENA
3	ABRIGO PRICUMÃ	ABERTO	NÃO INDIGENA
4	ABRIGO JARDIM FLORESTA	ABERTO	INDIGENA
5	ABRIGO RONDON 5	ABERTO	NÃO INDIGENA
A	ESPAÇO EMERGENCIAL	FECHADO	NÃO INDIGENA
B	ABRIGO SÃO VICENTE 1	FECHADO	NÃO INDIGENA
C	ABRIGO SÃO VICENTE 2	FECHADO	NÃO INDIGENA
D	ABRIGO TANCREDO NEVES	FECHADO	INDIGENA
E	ABRIGO NOVA CANAA	FECHADO	INDIGENA
F	ABRIGO PINTOLANDIA	FECHADO	INDIGENA

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Understanding that the dispute over public spaces is not an exclusive issue for refugees or migrants but one that crosses contemporary cities around the world, in the specific case of Boa Vista, squares are key elements in the city's dynamics, historically being spaces of pride and social enjoyment. With the onset of more numerous international migrants, the dispute over this space has taken on new contours and is recurring in the media and in dialogues with the local population, the most emblematic case being Simón Bolívar Square.

This square, located at the junction of highways and avenues linking Manaus, Venezuela, and Guyana, with welcome signs in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, has concentrated a large part of the newly arrived population, reaching more than a thousand people in 2018 (Costa, 2018).

Figure 3 – Tents where Venezuelan migrants stayed,
in Plaza Simón Bolívar

Source: Brazilian Army/publicity.

As a result, the occurrence of migration has caused significant alterations in the layout and aesthetics of public areas, exposing certain political choices that promote division. Clearly, even small changes, such as adding siding to a building, have noticeable spatial effects that are connected to gentrification. These changes symbolically support the use of government power to control the movement of people from areas that are supposed to be accessible to the public.

The square enclosure intervention, initially promoted as a revitalization effort, effectively concealed the predicament of these migrants, overshadowing this situation for the remaining inhabitants of Boa Vista. Nevertheless, it was found that concealing the problem visually was a more pragmatic approach than directly addressing the vulnerability of this specific population. The initial action taken was to limit access, while the adoption of steps to gradually reduce the vulnerabilities of the group was carried out. Later on, these actions were assigned to the federal government, emphasizing a heated and dynamic conversation between different levels of government. All levels of government, including the union, states, and municipalities, should collectively shoulder the obligation of providing care for this population within the framework of Brazil's federal organization.

In response to the identified issue, a remedy was enacted by assigning a distinct value to the environment. The valuation served as a barrier, preventing the residents from returning to that location. In essence, the state, despite professing to emphasize the well-being of the public, in reality infringes against the right to the city and the freedom of movement.

The implementation of restrictions and ongoing monitoring, which mandate the individuals authorized to enter and the specific timeframes in which they are granted access,.

This is also part of the reason for opting for the emergency shelter model, which also serves as "spatial segregation devices that demarcate the position of non-belonging of those they shelter" (Zuzarte, 2023, p. 26). Emergency shelters, such as the refugee camps studied by Agier (2017), are spaces that operate in an exceptional regime, thus "making it possible to discard, delay, or suspend any recognition of a political equality between their occupants and ordinary citizens" (Agier, 2017, n.p.), thus fulfilling a humanitarian role while reinforcing the inequality of their occupants with the population already residing in that space. In these moments, disciplined bodies are covertly violated. When people live in segregation, they become even more vulnerable, accept what the institutions permit, and actively support local discrimination.

Closing remarks

The presentation covered the historical development of Operation Welcome and the subsequent spatial transformations in the city of Boa Vista, with a particular focus on Simon Bolivar Square, starting in 2015. As an illustration of the spatial changes resulting from the influx of Venezuelan migrants, the deliberate arrangement of emergency shelters showcased the government's strategic control over the "undesirable" migrant population, effectively banning them from some areas inside the city.

Considering Lefebvre's (1991, p. 31) statement that every society produces a space, it's own space, it is evident that the city of Boa Vista exemplifies hybridity. This city can be described as a humanitarian and cross-border transit space that is simultaneously militarized.

The urban planning in question is characterized by a strict and inflexible approach, with the armed forces playing a prominent role. They occupy significant portions of the city, symbolizing authority, regulation, and organization. However, this also allows for the establishment of a designated region for humanitarian efforts. Nevertheless, even within this inflexibility, it is in the domain where ordinary existence occurs that expressions and adaptations emerge and reshape the urban environment. Thus, the city undergoes a process of adaptation by various means, including the appropriation of murals and graffiti, even if it goes against legislation. This is evident in the incorporation of the Spanish language in public signage. This institutionalizes the acknowledgment of the necessity to communicate with this particular demographic and recognize their presence and belonging within the urban environment.

Nevertheless, despite this acknowledgment, efforts to regulate and manipulate individuals persist in both the urban environment of Boa Vista and the temporary shelter areas of the humanitarian response. These measures aim to segregate and restrict the integration of marginalized individuals into the broader society of Boa Vista. This dynamic of exclusion and control of inclusion is also observed in other Brazilian cities, affecting various groups. These populations persist in facing marginalization due to police supervision and being excluded from citizenship (Zuzarte, 2023). In the instance of Boa Vista, refugees and migrants face marginalization, which goes against the inclusive nature of the governmental initiatives designed for this population.

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Notes

(1) The data from the 2022 Census is still being detailed, but 80,000 Venezuelans have been reported living in Roraima, the vast majority in its capital, Boa Vista. According to a report by the UNHCR (2021), 12% of the population of the state of Roraima is made up of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. With an updated approximation of the figures from the 2022 Census (IBGE, 2022), it is estimated that this figure would be close to 76,000 people.

(2) Operation Welcome provides emergency shelters that give safe sleeping areas, along with food, essential hygiene products, and specialized treatment. These shelters strive to maintain local public order and alleviate human suffering by ensuring the impacted population's basic human rights.

(3) The PRA, established by *Operação Acolhida*, offers lodging and sustenance to refugees and migrants who are excluded from official shelters (IOM Brazil, 2022).

(4) In our opinion, not all the action taken can be classified as securitizing, since control is not exercised in the sense of creating massive barriers and impediments to entry.

(5) Later the Federal Territory of Roraima (1962) and finally the State of Roraima (1988).

(6) The present statistics for 2023 could not be identified, although it is projected to be greater. The data presented is the cumulative sum up to 2022, as documented in the literature.

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