

BORDERS OF CITIZENSHIP AND THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF AFRICAN MIGRANTS' IN THE CITY OF SÃO PAULO, SOUTHEAST OF BRAZIL

*Fronteras da Cidadania e o cotidiano de migrantes africanos
na cidade de São Paulo, sudeste do Brasil*

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Abstract. This paper proposes the notion of the “Borders of Citizenship” to emphasize people and mobility infrastructures (Jung, Buhr, 2021) that mediate citizenship through many places, actors, and social codes of and beyond the State. Thus, based on the concept of relational citizenship (Staheli et al., 2012), I present an Ethnography carried out from 2019 to 2022 in a Cultural Center, founded by African migrants in the city of São Paulo. More specifically, I draw attention to the center’s creation through Mamadou’s trajectory, the owner of the center, to highlight how mobility infrastructures play a decisive role in mediating migrant’s everyday life through many places, actors, and scales expanding their “sustainability of life”, materially and immaterially. I argue that these ordinary spaces are not politically inconsequential for the city or for the migrants. Rather, it shows how mobility and the city are entangled among many mediations that go beyond State, presenting local protagonists, (in)formal networks, and a sense of belonging that constantly reshapes Citizenship.

Keywords: citizenship; international migration, borders, Brazil, African migration.

Resumo. Este artigo propõe a noção de *Fronteras da Cidadania* para enfatizar infraestruturas de mobilidade que mediam a cidadania por meio de muitos lugares, atores e códigos sociais do e além do Estado. Baseado no conceito de “cidadania relacional”, eu apresento uma etnografia realizada entre 2019 e 2022 em um Centro Cultural criado por migrantes africanos na cidade de São Paulo. Mais especificamente, destaco à criação do Centro para analisar como as infraestruturas de mobilidade desempenham um papel decisivo na mediação da vida cotidiana dos migrantes, expandindo a sustentabilidade de vida material e imaterialmente. Portanto, eu argumento que esses lugares cotidianos não são inconsequentes politicamente nem para a cidade, nem para os migrantes. Ao contrário, mostram como a mobilidade e a cidade estão entrelaçados entre muitas mediações além do Estado, apresentando protagonistas locais, redes (in)formais e um senso de pertencimento que constantemente redesenha os parâmetros da Cidadania.

Palavras-chave: cidadania; migração internacional, fronteiras, Brasil, migração africana.

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Introduction

Citizenship has been widely discussed in migration studies. The main lineage of critical studies points to the inherent division between insiders and outsiders, at expenses to migrants, emphasizing citizenship as a tool for migration control, assimilation, based on ethnic and race exclusion. On the other hand, some scholars have been pointing out that citizenship has some potential for inclusion via political transformation. Under this point of view, claiming rights could be very significant to marginalized people obtain political participation in society. Among many other approaches, a convergence argument is that citizenship is constantly reshaped under social tension. In this paper, I highlight this attribute through the notion of “Borders of Citizenship”, which focuses on places and people whose everyday life is experienced under a constant tension between universal principles of rights and inequalities.

Usually, these are places and people considered as distortions or obstacles of full citizenship, reinforcing arguments of “lack”, especially lack of the presence of State, justifying interventions that aim to “rectify”, “clean”, “civilize”, “educate”. However, based on Isin (2002) reflection of citizenship as a “difference machine”, expanding itself through the division between “norm-deviant”, “norm-exception” (Chatterjee, 2011), it can be said that the concept has not been framed as resource of equality. Rather, it is an ongoing process of bordering (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, Cassidy, 2019) and hierarchization based on differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and so on.

Following migrants’ trajectories in the city of São Paulo, southeast of Brazil, and more specifically Mamadou’s story¹, I argue that to their “sustainability of life” (Magliano, Arrieta, 2021) these migrants practice citizenship through a wide range of scales, people, and infrastructures (Meeus, Arnaut, Heur, 2019; Jung, Buhr, 2021) of and beyond State. So, public institutions, informal labor market, the home, churches, social projects, dwelling occupation, NGOs, and crime mediate the tension between the formal idea of citizenship and inequalities, resulting in a “complex geography of citizenship” (Ehrkamp, Jacobsen, 2015) that makes the limits of legal/illegal; regular/irregular; order/disorder; permanent/temporary; place of origin/place of destination more uncertain.

As theoretical approach, I join the literature on everyday geographies and relational citizenship, which emphasizes the interplay between, on the one hand, law, social programs, State projects, and belonging to the nation, on the other hand, social norms, codes, and practices on a local and transnational scale, generating tensions, distortions, and struggles that are materialized in space.

¹ Mamadou is a 39-year-old migrant from Guinea Conakry that lives in Brazil since 2012. His life story will be detailed in the following pages of this paper. Also, all the names are unreal and all the information inserted in the paper it was authorized from Mamadou to be published.

(Ehrkamp, Leitner, 2003; Staeheli et al., 2012; Ehrkamp, Jacobsen, 2015; Peck, Hammet, 2022).

So, I argue that: i) migrants' everyday lives are under a constant border crossing through many scales, places, and mediators, which move between being protagonist, and being marginalized. However, instead of claiming rights expecting big political transformations, these "social non-movements" (Bayat, 2009) operate silently and guided through multiple meanings of what should be a life worth of living. ii) to focus on these bordering processes, allows to shed light into the relational and porous constitution of the borders of citizenship, revealing tensions, social norms, strategies, imaginaries, that, besides quiet, are also constituting and ordering space production.

Method: the politics of the margins

We are interested in what categories of governmentality usually erase or try to turn into a homogeneous process to make population control feasible (Favell, 2022). For this, the paper emphasizes the "quiet encroachment of ordinary" (Bayat, 2009) to do both deconstruct State control narratives over migration and underline difference as a powerful tool to rethink alternative ways of space production through marginalized practices. Rather than focus exclusively on official data, we aim to make the peripheral central, considering that different ontologies of existence might rise (Papadopoulos, Tsianos, 2013). The paper shows migrants' trajectories, their negotiations with multiple social codes, places of tensions, daily constraints. In doing so, these ordinary actions provide important information about how urban space is organized, and how migration operates (Telles, 2010).

The collected data were grounded on an ethnography approach carried out from 2019 to 2022 in a Cultural Center created by African migrants. From 2019 to March 2020, I visited it, at least once a week, in different moments: during the week, when there was not cultural activities, in days of celebration of some important date, and in cultural events fostered for general audience. From March 2020 to 2021, the visits became rarer due to the pandemic. However, I kept in contact with Mamadou (owner of the place) and helped, with other colleagues, in extreme situations that occurred in the Cultural Center during this period. In 2022, the cultural events in the Cultural Center were not regular; but occasionally, I visited the place and kept constant contact with Mamadou until the current days of 2023. In addition, I realized 7 interviews with migrants during this period², visited weekly other places in the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos, and had many

² I did two semi-structured interviews with Mamadou in 2019 and 2020 (in Portuguese). Another interview with François in 2019 (in Spanish, once he was raised in Argentina before moving to Brazil). The other interviews were in the neighborhood with migrants that had no relation to the Cultural Center.

informal conversations with lawyers, social assistances, psychologists, priests, and volunteers that work with migration bureaucracies.

Despite having this conception of Cultural Center, the place also plays the role of temporary or permanent housing for migrants with different backgrounds, mostly coming from African countries; informal daycare for children's sons of African migrants who work downtown but live in the neighborhood; leisure and party space for some migrants in the city. At the Cultural Center, I was a collaborator in different activities and situations such as musical activities, disclosure events, translation of texts or announcements to Portuguese, the mediator of contacts to solve urgencies and problems in the house.

Since the last quarter of the 1800s, the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos has been a place constituted by mobility. Firstly, by the end of the 1800s, there was a significant number of Italians, and, at the beginning of the 1900s, many Japanese people lived in the tenements that are still standing today. From the 1950s and 1960s onwards, the internal migrations of millions of Brazilians, mostly from the Northeast, spread into some parts of the country resulting in rapid urbanization of some cities in Brazil. São Paulo was the main of them and the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos was one of the neighborhoods of arrival and settled.

Finally, from the 1980s onwards, international migration returned to be very important in the city with many people coming from border countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Colombia, Peru, Argentina. At the beginning of the 2010s, the migration scenario has changed dramatically in Brazil, in São Paulo, and in the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos as well. From approximately 430,000 migrants in 2010 (IBGE, 2010), the migration figures grew to 1.2 million in 2017 (Obmigra, 2018). The city of São Paulo is now the destination of 360,000 of them (Atlas of Macrometropole Paulista, 2020), close to the total number of migrants in Brazil until 2010. Thus, migrants coming from Haiti and many African countries such as Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, and people from Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Philippines, and so on, became a very important component of Brazil's population.

The specificity of the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos is not a long and internalized history; but, as a place constructed through the constellation of relations that come together at a particular space. Its connections go beyond the official "physical limits" to be interconnected with other parts of the city, the country, or the world. A place made up of many territorial affiliations (Appadurai, 1996), including transnational ties. It is also a place connected to the "global regime of migration" (Hess, 2012; Hess, Kasporeck, 2017; Domenech, 2020) that aims to bring migrants to the "possible and safest" countries for migration, not the desirable ones. The neighborhood is also a place of momentaneous pause in migrant mobility before moving forward to other locations of the city, elsewhere in Brazil, or the world.

In sum, the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos is entangled in different and multiscale processes of placing (Massey, 2005).

Therefore, considering these complexities, I aim to understand how is the trajectory of migrants in the neighborhood. Which actors and infrastructures do they negotiate with, in everyday life? What forms of insertion in the city go beyond public policies? What limitations do migrants have about claiming rights in the face of the city's precariousness? What practices and mediations help migrants to establish "sustainability of life"?

Concept of Citizenship and the production of Borders

The concept of citizenship has been widely discussed from different perspectives in contemporary political theory and political geography literature. Traditionally, citizenship is understood through the affiliation to a political entity, connecting individuals to a State. The criteria for this membership include legal sets defining who and how individuals will be affiliated as well as what to do with those who will not have access to that membership. Likewise, for those considered citizens, there will be a series of rights and duties to be organized and guaranteed by the bureaucratic apparatus of the State and which, following Marshall (1964), could be divided into civil, social, and political rights. From this point of view, citizenship is centered on a procedural (legal) perspective that privileges the Nation-State as the way of acquiring and promoting citizenship.

On the other hand, several scholars have inquired over different perspectives about the limits and uncertainties of this idea of citizenship. Some studies argue in favor of transnational and international scale as influencing citizenship (Soysal, 1994; Ong, 1999). Others demonstrate the crucial role of urban struggles for the "right to the city" in the transformation and practice of citizenship (Holston, Appadurai, 1999; Holston, 2008; Staeheli, 2003; Leitner, Ehrkamp 2006; Perissinotti, 2016), and the articulation of citizenship with socio-cultural spaces (Painter, Philo 1995). Some approaches analyze citizenship from a feminist point of view emphasizing women's political position in the social field, arguing in favor of other places where practices of citizenship occur, especially the home (Lister, 2003; Secor, 2004; Magliano, Arrieta, 2021). Others emphasize racial inequalities as part of the universal idea of citizenship, not something to be solved through the concept (Santos, 1996; De Genova, 2005; Cacho, 2012; Beltrán, 2020; Hawthorne, 2022). Some put questions about the economic predominance over rights, distorting the concept of a citizen into the one of consumer (Santos, 1987; Peck, Hammet, 2022). And some scholars highlight the different forms of belonging at the local and transnational scale (Appadurai, 1997; Ehrkamp, Nagel, 2012, 2014). From this point of view, the inequalities of marginalized groups are inseparable from what is understood as citizenship, especially considering the unequal distribution of rights and many ways of belonging.

For the paper, I will consider only a few points that critical scholars have in common: i) citizenship is not a passive criterion of belonging. Rather, it is constructed as a social practice *in* and *beyond* State institutions, enabling other scales and places of action; ii) distribution of rights accompanies the hierarchization of differences, promoting ambiguous experiences between having and living the rights, including the possibility of their violation and withdrawal; iii) citizenship is not made up of advances centered on the logic of constant improvement, but it is a process of comings and goings, advances, and setbacks. Taking these points as the core of the concept, I argue that citizenship is a constant process of bordering between inclusion and marginalization. Thus, the construction of citizenship is an inseparable element of the tension between norm-deviation, rights-inequality, and belonging-exclusion, based on the distribution of inequalities in “power geometries” (Massey, 1999). Therefore, citizenship is not a political process accepted passively, but an operation of border expansion that, when meeting differences, (re)produce these tensions at different scales and places, demarcating in space this conflict.

Living *on the border* also implies *being the border* (Khosravi, 2010), carrying the border in the body (Gilmartin, Arponen, 2019), going through experiences that other people normally do not need to go through (Cacho, 2012). Being “conduct” to certain places, being prevented from circulating through others, taking improvised life forms as a method, even if this method is not necessarily chosen (Simone, 2019). Moving between under-employment, temporary or informal jobs, and having to negotiate everyday life through various mediators of poverty management in political field. It is living constantly with provisionality, having rights conceived as provisional, and with the always imminent possibility of going through setbacks in life (Chatterjee, 2004; Cacho, 2012). Living in places and having the body read in such a way that it becomes a potential target of civilizational incursions, correction, disposal through “governmentality” in the name of development, civilization, progress, revitalization, security, restructuring.

From the point of view of migration, more specifically, the border plays an even more preponderant role. The border is associated with what Sayad (1998) conceptualizes as “State Thought”, which means a political imaginary centered on immobility, the exclusivity of resources to nationals, or, at most, on the acceptance or benevolence of nationals concerning their classic deviants: migrants. “State Thought” does not only comprise the institutional body of a State; but, it is diffused and shared in everyday life to naturalize the figure of the migrant as if it were a temporary, provisional, somebody who will return one day for being out of place. The ones whose presence is only tolerated, a foreign body that clashes with the material and symbolic imaginaries of the “nation”.

The border, then, begins to proliferate (Mezzadra, 2015) and operate both as a territorial demarcation of one (inside/outside, us/them), as well as a *social*

relationship that demarcates the political position of “migrants” across their daily lives (Mezzadra, 2015). As Walters (2011) argues, there is a specific microphysics of power through the border that internalizes and externalizes itself to certain places and bodies, saturating everyday life through representations read through color, gender, accent, clothing, associating it with the characteristics of where it comes from, places commonly understood as inferior in social hierarchy.

Thus, looking closely to migrants’ daily lives through the idea of relational citizenship allows us to comprehend, as stated by Espiritu (2003) and Mezzadra, and Neilson (2012, 2013), that the issue is not exactly the forms of exclusion, being outside or not entering the public sphere in which the rules of the political field are redefined. Rather, it is necessary to consider that these subjects and places are also part of the political field, even if they are imagined as outside of it. Included, albeit in a lower position, marginalized from an existential, material, geographical point of view, therefore, a “differential inclusion”.

It is from this point of view that I propose the idea of “Borders of Citizenship”: the spatial materialization of tensions promoted by the border expansion of citizenship values and the inequalities, constantly redefining deviants and exceptions. These multiscale borders have multiple connection channels and are routinely negotiated by those considered deviant and exceptions to the norms, trying to keep materially or immaterially their “sustainability of life” (Magliano, Arrieta, 2021). In this sense, there is no place in which the norm has not been sufficiently applied, since what constituted a “norm” is a process that feeds on hierarchization. The norm, therefore, is an effect of the encounter. Thus, unlike the dichotomic representation, always at the expense of deviants, what is established is the constant proliferation of “borders of tension” between the universal principles of politics and the inequalities of social field (Feltran, 2011).

Everyday life in and as borders

The first time I met Mamadou was in a two-day workshop at a cultural center in São Paulo. At the event, his musical group briefly told us the history of Guinea, and, for the most part, featured dances and rhythms from many West African countries. After a conversation at the end of the course, Mamadou told me that he lived in the Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos. I quickly told him about my research and asked if I could follow the activities of what he called the “Cultural Center”. He accepted and we scheduled a day to talk at his place.

Mamadou usually introduces himself as Ambassador, a title given to all those who was part of his country’s official “Ballet” and who graduated from one among many cultural centers of dance and percussion in the country. Below, I report and analyze fragments of two in-depth interviews I conducted with him in 2019 and 2020. For this paper, I will pay attention exclusively to the process of Mamadou’s

arrival at the house, his negotiations, articulations, bonds, fears he went through, and the slow process that transformed the house into a place of multiple functions, called “Cultural Center”.

The journey to get a house made for Mamadou began after he divorced from his Brazilian wife, a relationship that began in his home country and culminated into the migration to Brazil. After the divorce, Mamadou said he was having difficulties finding a house and continuing with his work as an artist. His dream of creating his own Cultural Center was increasingly distant. In the interview, he says that Monica, a friend of his ex-wife, offered a house whose owners had died, and which had been occupied by “*dangerous people*”³ and that, in addition, it had many bills to be paid, the result of debts accumulated over the years. Monica also warned him that to stay in the neighborhood he would need to be strong because it would not be easy. The agreement was: if he managed to get people out of there, he could keep the house and, in this way, he could finally return to the idea of creating his own Cultural Center. Having decided on the terms, then, Mamadou went to the house with Monica. Arriving at the place, it was up to them to advise the “*Owner of the house*” that Mamadou would now stay there and that she had 6 months to look for another place. According to Mamadou, this was the owner of the house who claimed to be the “*mother*” of the boys who occupied the house. He states that the young men in the place did not agree with his presence. Even sleeping was an issue, because the door did not close, and people could enter. So, he slept only when the house was empty.

The time I slept was the time they went out, right? (Question: And you weren't scared?) I was really scared! (Question: Did you not think about giving up the house?) Wow, I almost gave up! Because people knew I was responsible and I was afraid that people would kill me, something like that.

They (the boys who lived in the house) provoked me a lot here, a lot. I had to clean the bathroom and they pooped and didn't flush, right? They came here, drank outside, and vomited inside. All this was a provocation and all the time there was a problem that I had to solve, but what I could do, I did it, I didn't say anything...

And then little by little, they all went to prison...not me who called the police...it was their problem. Many went to prison...a lot of police came here to pick up people in front of me. Once I was here and the police arrived...two or three cars...all armed came in here. I was really scared. The guy (wanted) was in the backyard. And he got arrested. So, the police asked who are you? I said: I own this place. The police said: We came to pick up someone who is here. Shut up, right? It's not your problem so just be quiet. I said, Okay.

The foreseen plan in the beginning and the deadline given to the “*owner of the house*” of six months was extended. It had been a year and a half since Mamadou had been in the house without much hope that things would get better. The difficulties he had to face were much bigger than expected at the beginning. Being “*the owner of the house*”, having the “*right*” and the papers, did not mean

³ The excerpts highlighted in italics are expressions and words said by Mamadou.

much until then, other than the fear of being killed, as he said. The idea of home as a refuge and as a private sphere did not exist. The house was part of the public relations linked to the grammar of violence, the police invaded the house, and there was crime in the neighborhood and the city as well. At that point of the interview, Mamadou spoke little about art and culture. The rhythm of life was not that of his projects, and the future was so uncertain that even death was a real possibility.

After one year and a half, Mamadou decided to give an “ultimatum” to the owner of the house, a fact that he told as the last attempt, as he could no longer bear to live under those conditions. He then said:

...I called the person who was here because there was no water, there was nothing. I called her and said: Here will be a Cultural Center, please. If you'll excuse me, I would like to reform the house. She said: Okay, but right now we don't have a home, we don't have a job, we don't have anything to do. You can wait? I have a piece of land to sell. If I sell this, I'll go elsewhere. I said, Okay, but I won't wait for that, because I need to reform the house here. So, she told me one day that she got a boyfriend...hahaha...I don't know the city...I said: Thank God...hahaha.

When she told me this, I started calling my family back in my country, my mother, to make sacrifices for me, to protect me. I sent money and asked “Mom, do this for me”. I sent money “Mom, call the older people”. Because we have this culture. If you have something, fear, something, people “pray for you”. They will call the people from the village, my mom prepares a lot of food, people eat, like 10 or 15 people. And people say, “God protects Mamadou. Don't let his enemies succeed. God protects his wife. Protects his project”. This is a blessing that all people do, eat... So, I think that also helped because everyone left the house without a fight. It was God, the sacrifice I made.

The moment of Mamadou's demand for the house resumes the claim for his right to be the “de facto owner”, to assert the power of the “documents” as something legitimate. During this period, many of the boys had already left the house and the power of the “owner of the house” seems to have been read by Mamadou as weakened in this tenuous balance of power relations. It was not the imagined six months. Instead, eighteen months later; but, the house was finally his place. In his narrative, he showed what was observed by other studies on everyday practices and political claims. As Conlon (2011) and Magliano and Arrieta (2021) argue, waiting and moving, knowing how to retreat, identify setbacks and the time to move forward again is a constituent part of the “sustainability of life”, strategies of those who live in the periphery and on the margins. Negotiations are more complex, made through many social codes, carried out at a different pace, and waiting is a fundamental part of the process. More than once, Mamadou said that he did not want to fight because he knew it would not be good for him. Indeed, not fighting required a slow time cost, and comings and goings, a waiting process (Cárdenas, Miranda, 2022; Miranda, 2023), and small advances that, little by little, made him, in fact, the owner of the house.

Furthermore, a transnational symbolic horizon was part of the scenario of the struggle for the house. The uncertain material situation seemed to demand reinforcement from another place and from the religious field, from his faith. Mamadou rearticulated the country of origin references to his context and evoked the mother as a reference to specific ethics of care, which interconnected divinity, rites, people of his country, and which transnationally mediated the passage between “as if he were the owner of the house”, to be, in fact, the “owner of the house”. The Rights, the documents were also asserted through the immaterial and transnational. The house would have been conquered jointly by many actors that involved participants in the “sacrifice” made in his country. From that moment on, this link was no longer undone and there it would not be just a house, but a Cultural Center, a place designed as a link between the two places. From that moment on, the words and actors present in Mamadou’s narrative begin to change. People from the field of violence are no longer present. Other actors and words begin to emerge: “reform”; “clean”; “Marc”; “Dabó” (both artists); “make culture”.

Being “the owner of the house in law and fact”, placed Mamadou in a different position compared to other migrants and to a migratory network that was to be consolidated. He became the protagonist and owner of a powerful resource in the city: a space for living and leisure. He could now receive people, could move forward in his project to build a Cultural Center that would carry multiple meanings: a place of arrival, place of celebration, place of temporary or permanent residence, meeting place for networking in the city. Being a protagonist even placed Mamadou as a mediator of situations and tensions that other migrants went through. It started to play an important role in the “sustainability of life” of others. How he tells:

He (Marc, a migrant) used to live there (pointed towards the neighborhood) and I was here. Then, one day he called me and said: “I don’t have money to pay rent and the owner is here”. I said, “So, you and the owner come here to my house so we can talk.” They came here and the owner said that he had not paid the rent for two months. So, she told him to get out of her house or she was going to put all his things on the street. I said: “Okay, this is how I’m going to do it, I’ll pay you half and later we’ll pay the rest”. And she said no. She really wanted the guy to leave, right? So, I told Marc: You can stay here. The cultural activities have already begun here a little bit.

So, we started working together, he was an instrument maker... and we needed another artist to start performing. One day I talked to Dabó (another percussionist who lived in São Paulo). So, I called him, and he came here, and we started working. And he said that where he was living wasn’t very good either. It was very small and there wasn’t even space to put the Jambé (instrument) hahaha...so I said: “Come here...this is a project, it’s my dream, we’re fighting to open a Cultural Center here, for us to make culture”. Then it was Monifa (another artist). She was working very far away, in the country part of São Paulo, and heard my name too...hehehe...she and Bomani. (Question: And how did they find out about you?) People comment, right? Ah...he’s working now, he has a Cultural Center, he’s an artist. (And did you already know each other?) No... We didn’t know each other. We only met in São Paulo. Later when I was there, Monifa knocked on the door and entered. The migrants from our country who referred me. I was sitting

here...she came walking very tired...hehehe...and she said: "Are you an artist? I'm also an artist, but it's very difficult. I work with hair too, but I live far away and where I live, we're not good there, me and Bomani. Bomani is also an artist and just arrived a month ago. He doesn't speak Portuguese; he doesn't know anything, and he didn't like where he is".

In addition to the role played as a Cultural Center, the house gradually became a "mobility infrastructure" (Jung, Buhr, 2021), that is, a place produced by migratory mobility, but which also serves as a support to sustain other mobile forms of life. As argued (Meeus, Arnaut, Heur, 2019; Jung, Buhr, 2021), instead of serving a specific purpose only, mobility infrastructures are constantly undergoing processes of change depending on the practices of migrants. Mamadou's house served as an arrival and permanence support for some migrants, but also as an infrastructure for temporary stay or for moments of pause in migration, for migrants to move on months later. When counting how many people have passed through the house, Mamadou says that he has already had Haitians, Bolivians and with those he has kept in contact, especially fellow from African countries, he knows that:

François went to the United States. Jafari went to Santa Catarina. Eno is now also going to Santa Catarina to work...because there are 3 friends who work there to kill chickens, something like that. It is a company that hires many people who are here in São Paulo. Marc went to Brasília, is dating there too. It's... who else... I think that's it. Ayo, you don't know him, do you? He also married a Brazilian.

This is a crucial point for several reasons: first, because it disputes the definitions of time in migration, generally governed by the time of State regulations through temporary or permanent visas, renewals, ordinances, response to refugee requests, passports. What Mamadou's narrative presents is that being temporary, permanent, wanting to stay or leave are also related to life projects, future perspectives, migration goals, getting a job in another city or country, being able to work as an artist, getting married, among others. Consequently, this complex definition of time, based on daily life, also goes beyond that commonly associated with citizenship, a sedentary category of permanence, lasting bonds, and with the leading role of the State.

Second, migrants not only pass-through cities, as if the place only served as empty spatial support to keep moving or choose to stay. Mamadou's trajectory shows that the local scale profoundly impacts the ways of negotiating existence. There may be a need to live with threats, to know how to be silent, to wait, and then move forward. Use the resources offered by migratory networks, informal housing. Instead of living and practicing citizenship in the place or city, you live *with the place* and *with the city*. On the other hand, the trajectories of migrants constantly reshape the forms and practices that resonate with spatial connotations in the urban space, unveil places where life stories pass, where they met, what is the configuration of networks and what infrastructures they are connected to,

that is, an everyday geography that becomes a constituent part of the city. Thus, not only do migrants imprint their practices, ideas, and values on the city, but also the city and its processes start to make up the migrants' choices, projects, fears, precariousness and hope.

Third, these practices are not politically inconsequential either for the city or for the migrant. Through these articulations, migration also becomes a unifying element of subjects, opens to negotiations with certain actors, starts building networks through (in)formal markets of housing, care, leisure that produce multi-scale links and meanings of belonging. In addition, the migrants' own political subjectivity continues to re-form constantly. Knowing when, why and how to resort to certain actors at certain times and, above all, considering in this network of influence many other mediations that go beyond the State inform us about engagements that are inseparable from their mobility experiences. Having rights sometimes guarantees a series of possibilities for the usufruct of the urban structure: school, health, formal work. Other times, they are experienced as "the right to have rights", but in practice, it becomes viable in informal networks, in verbal agreements, in neighborhood negotiations, donations. In this process, new political protagonists, leaders, and mediators assume prominent and legitimate roles in their action circles.

When asked:

(Question: When you got the house, did you think your life in São Paulo got better? Did it give you new hope?) Wow, yes, this house here, that I got here, I'm very happy, because it's a neighborhood where I saw my people, I feel like I was at home in my country, because of my countries' food I eat all the time here...hehehe...Monifa prepares it. It's like in my country itself. We speak the language. So now I don't think about returning after I got here. Things started to change. Here is another life. Another environment and after feeling it I thought it wasn't general. I was good.

That day (the independency day of Guinea celebrated at the Cultural Center) was the first time it was celebrated here. I was very happy. It marked my life a lot. The community representative said: Why do we have our parties elsewhere, why make elsewhere if we have this place here? So, he mobilized. And he said: "We are going to come here to have the party". So, he called me and said, "Mamadou, you don't have to pay anything. The food, the money the association has, you just have to open the space and we'll do it." I said, "Wow, my God." I've already started to clean things up, organize, and make everything.

Being able to be the owner of the house has not only strengthened Mamadou, but also a group of people, their daily transnational experience in the neighborhood and the city. Thus, their "sustainability of life" expanded materially and immaterially through the creations of alternative ways of living (Magliano, Arrieta, 2021). Consequently, the meaning of formal citizenship (or even politics) is challenged through practices that occur in many different places, and under their own motivations, logics (Papadopoulos, Tsianos, 2013), holding multiple sense of belonging (Ehrkamp, Leitner, 2003).

Mamadou says that he found these possibilities in Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos, there: *“I saw my people”*; *“I feel like I was in my country here at home”*; *“the food I eat all the time here”*; *“We speak the language”*; *“...in Vila Santa Maria⁴ there were no people who spoke the language”*; *“Now I don’t think about returning after I got here; community of my country”*. With the emergence of these conditions, the vocabulary of the narrative changes and becomes transnational. He is feeling better in the house and does not think about returning from the moment he *“saw his people”*. The return was not part of his life plan for now, and he even recurrently states that all the migrants there would like to leave Brazil after a while, to go to the United States and Europe, but he did not think about it. *“It was calm”*. Guinea now constituted Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos and Jardim Pereta Vasconcelos was part of Guinea, a relationship established through everyday life, in unlikely places, through sociability that were at once so simple, but so complex, through the *“Borders of Citizenship”*.

Conclusion

The paper intends to contribute to the broad field of studies on the relationship between migration, citizenship, and urban space. I argue that paying attention to the marginalized trajectories of migrants *in* and as borders of citizenship can reveal:

i) the very constitution of the notion of citizenship not as an ideal type that will carry inevitable distortions when applied, but a product of encounters and hierarchization of differences itself. When observed by the other side of the border, we could see that far from presenting itself as a solution for the correction of inequalities in the social field, the notion of citizenship is distorted, whether from the point of view of belonging to a State or for the living of rights. This does not mean that the State and its regulations are not part of migrants’ everyday life. What I argue is that these assumptions are very far from acting alone in ordering the social world. A series of norms, codes, knowledge, beliefs, organizations, and collectives, are part of the migrants’ everyday life and have different weights depending on their immediate needs and objectives. This is not to say that rights are unimportant. Rights are important; the process of claiming rights obviously potentially provides political gains and advances for some invisible actors, especially in neighborhoods, peripheries, cities, towns. However, to look at what is invisible in this process, which does not fit into the State and formal lens of politics, interrogate the meanings of taking for granted a political horizon whose operations seem to go no further than the transformation of who *“is not”* into *“as if were”* (Feltran, 2011), or turn a *“more unequal”* into a *“less, but still, unequal”* (Cacho, 2012).

⁴ The previous neighborhood where Mamadou lived.

ii) how this (and so many others) trajectory shows existences that are not associated with being just a problem that needs a solution as classical approaches to citizenship may argue. Living and being a border implies negotiating with multiple sides, moving through many uncertain and unstable codes, negotiating existence between many places, practices, and formal and informal actors. It also means to live in a way that dichotomies blurry up and different forms of belonging (local and transnational) through the establishment of neighborhood bonds are built. Such a border is rarely a place where things are decided “forever” and definitively. Provisionality, setbacks, surprises, can quickly reorganize fragile balances and redefine new momentary (un)certainities. Thus, the trajectories along these borders are marked by actions that do not necessarily carry organized forms of resistance, but which are very significant and profoundly transform places.

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