

BEYOND INTEGRATION: THE ROLE OF PHILIA IN THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Para além da integração: o papel da philia na experiência migratória de professores de línguas no Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract. After pointing out mainstream migrant integration's conceptual issues, we use communication theory to argue that researching migrants' positive discourse about their trajectories depends on analyzing their establishment of philia in the host country. Then, we present a qualitative study with five migrants who work as teachers at a language school in Rio de Janeiro. We explore their experiences according to three categories: connection to Brazilian people, connection to Brazil, and identity convergence to Brazil. This paper concludes that although interviewees cite some indicators used to measure integration in mainstream academia (e.g., language and employment) in their discourses about the country, the specific meanings of these factors are understood only by linking them to participants' intersubjective exchanges and philia in Brazil.

Keywords: integration; philia; migration experience; communication.

Resumo. Após apontar problemas conceituais na forma convencional de pesquisar integração de migrantes, usamos teoria da comunicação para defender que investigar o discurso positivo de migrantes sobre suas trajetórias depende de analisar seu estabelecimento de philia no país de acolhimento. Em seguida, apresentamos um estudo qualitativo realizado com cinco migrantes que trabalham como professores numa escola de idiomas no Rio de Janeiro. Exploramos suas experiências segundo três categorias: conexão com brasileiros, conexão com a brasilidade, e convergência identitária para o Brasil. Este artigo conclui que, embora os entrevistados citem alguns dos mesmos indicadores usados para mensurar a integração em trabalhos convencionais da academia (língua e emprego, por exemplo) em seus discursos sobre o país, os significados específicos desses fatores são entendidos apenas ao relacioná-los às trocas intersubjetivas e à philia dos participantes no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: integração; philia; experiência migratória; comunicação.

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Introduction

The arrival of foreigners in modern nation-states, especially those in vulnerable situations, may cause tension. The individuals want to participate in that social space. At the same time, the national bureaucracies aim to protect their national sovereignty and the values understood as immanent in nation-states. As posits Appadurai (2019), language, religion, territory, blood, and land are the usual principles of states' foundational narratives of a person's belonging to them.

Ethnic minorities from host nation-states' perspective, migrants supposedly threaten the receiving society's assumed ethnic and moral coherence, which are established inherently on a specific ethnos, idealized as both immobile and singular (Appadurai, 2019, p. 560). For these reasons, conditions are imposed on migrants and require them to "reterritorialize within a new civic order" (*ibidem*, p. 559). This reterritorialization has been typically called integration, which is considered a central criterion for evaluating public policies related to migration (Favell, 2001).

The concept of migrant integration is central to migration studies. It has been widely problematized in the literature under its conceptual (Favell, 2019; Sayad, 1994; Ager, Strang, 2008), legal (Ganty, 2019), and social (Schinkel, 2018; Schweitzer, 2017) implications. Nevertheless, researchers, nation-states, and organizations take the concept for granted as the way to understand to what extent migration endeavor is positive for migrants and receiving societies.

This work aims to understand migration "against the grain" (Schinkel, 2018). That means in opposition to the "practice of doing research" with the idea of integration, and contrary to the "imagination of the social" that emerges from it (Schinkel, 2018, p. 7). When describing migration experience here, we move away from the discussion regarding states' integration agendas to explore subjective processes.

Someone's assumptions about the incomes of their experience as migrants are complex and might not be related to the – social, economic, juridic, etc. – factors integrative models usually analyze and evaluate (Spreafico, 2009). After pointing out migrant integration's conceptual flaws, this paper will answer the following research questions: To what extent can we evaluate the success¹ of a migration project by analyzing migrants' positive discourses and narratives about their trajectories? What are the parameters to do so?

Our paper investigates the micro-level of identity convergence to the receiving society and the role of philia and intersubjective binding in this process. The study took place from July to December 2018 in a language school in Rio

¹ According to Cambridge Dictionary's definition: "the achieving of the results wanted or hoped for". Available at: <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/success>>.

de Janeiro, Brazil, where the teachers are migrants, most of them refugees or humanitarian visa holders.

The interviews with the teachers and the analysis of the material under the principles of communication theory indicate that participants describe positive parts of their migration project as a positive experience due to the possibility of establishing intersubjective bonding with the receiving society.

In the next section, we review the idea of integration, its background, conceptual issues, and the social imagination it implies. Then, we present the fieldwork, its context, and the theoretical-methodological guidelines that underpinned our study. After that, we identify how the participants established intersubjective bonds and *philia* with Brazil, dividing the analysis in three categories. Brazilian people, connections to *brazility*², and identity convergence to Brazil. Finally, we conclude that, although in their discourses about the country participants cite indicators used to analyze integration in mainstream academia, linking them to interviewees' *philia* and intersubjective exchanges is central to understanding its specific meanings in their lives.

Integration: background, conceptual issues, and social imagination

Integration, as proposed by Émile Durkheim in the late 19th century, was a functionalist way of explaining the adequacy of the human *a priori* non-social – influenced by Hobbes – to the collective life (Poker, 1999, p. 46). It was a manner of educating people to live in society and keep what the sociologist considered the traditional and cohesive national values and behaviors in France. The concept comes from an organicist sociological tradition that conceived society as an integrated body where its parts internally adjust to a whole (Schinkel, 2018, p. 2). In his writings, Durkheim did not mention migrants.

The Chicago School developed the theoretical basis to apply integration to international migration in the United States during the first decades of the 1900s. The classical assimilationist perspective for studying migration described foreigners' participation in society as natural and irreversible. For these sociologists, it was also an individual process of emancipation from their ethnic communities (Safi, 2011).

In the French context, sociologists began to use the word integration for migrants in the 1950s (Safi, 2011, p. 150) as an alternative to assimilation. Some researchers argue that integration parasitically inherited the meaning of concomitant terms like assimilation or adaptation, that are linked (especially in France) to a colonial, racist past and describe the same process of identity change

² From the Portuguese "*brasilidade*". In this work, we call *brazility* characteristics the interviewees describe as unique in Brazilian culture.

expected from a migrant, in that the foreigner renounces completely or partially the cultural values acquired in the country of origin (Sayad, 1994; Safi, 2011).

Such micro-sociological ideas influenced and still influence, to a lesser extent, scientific research on migration, and have produced a discourse that idealizes the integration of migrants into host societies as if they acquired the average characteristics of the “natural” inhabitants of these places (Safi, 2011, p. 150).

Although the number of works contextualizing time, space, and intersectionality of migrant experience has been growing during the last decades, migration is represented in the media and the public debate as a problem, a threat, and a cause of insecurity (Rea, Tripier, 2008, p. 3). The objective “problem” is that migrants have specific needs related to their adaptation to a different social reality. Nonetheless, the ways of assisting them must be inclusive, without the imposition of normative expectations regarding their participation in society.

Nowadays, there is no generally accepted theory or concept to define ethnicity, race, citizenship, or nationality, and the sociology of race and ethnicity has become fragmented by different approaches such as feminist, post-Marxist, and anti-racist (Favell, 2001, p. 12). Regardless of that, integration is the hegemonic way of researching migrants’ participation in social life.

Integration is “the settlement of immigrants, their acculturation and (...) acquisition of a social, economic and political position in the settlement state” (Rea, Tripier, 2008, p. 5). A process that is always ongoing and two-sided, part of an effort of the migrant and the host society (Phillimore, 2011). Integration is also a search for the “overlapping moral consensus” that people with conflicting ethical and cultural beliefs “could agree to as the principles for regulating their social and political integration” (Favell, 2001, p. 17).

Migrant integration has been researched from different perspectives in Brazil. Silva *et al.* (2021) studied the relationship between arts and the facilitation of migrant and refugee integration. Simões and Tavares (2019), in turn, analyze how learning Portuguese has made possible the Venezuelans’ integration into northern Brazil. Leão and Demant (2016) present two case studies to link migrant social movements to social integration. Pinto *et al.* (2017) investigate the panorama of what they call the cultural integration of refugees in Brazil.

Applying integration to international migration poses conceptual problems. First, due to the sociological implications of integration as a functionalist Durkheimian concept. Favell (2019, p. 3) suggests that it is meaningless to say that “this or that immigrant is more integrated” because integration is a property of a social system, not an individual. In the classic Durkheimian frame, the smallest possible integration variant is a system of two individuals interacting in society (Favell, 2019).

In the same vein, Schinkel (2018, p. 3) points out a neoliberal turn in the uses of the term “from a system state to a state of being”. Conventional integration research assumes that migrants can be integrated into society in various degrees, based on the neoliberal, individualistic premise that the society consists of “individual members to whom any ‘misfit’ between the two [individual and society] can be one-sidedly attributed” (*ibidem*). For the author, integration lacks theoretical elaboration and, for that reason, its uses in common sense, politics, and academia frequently mix (Schinkel, 2018).

Besides its conceptual flaws, integration is a broad concept. The same word has dozens of definitions, and it is used for employment, education, health, law, social bonds, language, and culture, as well as for other factors involved in the life of a migrant (Ager, Strang, 2008). Its broad usage makes it hard to understand what researchers mean when considering migrants as “integrated” or not.

The idea of integration is also applied selectively. There is discrimination when considering who needs integration and who does not. White expats or lifestyle migrants, for example, are usually privileged people who do not need integration because they represent Western values. In Lundström’s (2018) work, she studies how Swedish lifestyle migrants create international communities at the Spanish Sun Coast, clustering mainly north-western Europeans in their interpersonal relations. She argues that this happens because they profit from an “institutional whiteness” that makes it possible for them to self-segregate in Spain. They do not have to conquer nor prove their belonging to the host society.

For Laacher (1991), the main ontological question regarding integration is that many people believe in the existence of an exact knowledge of migrants’ intentions to integrate and in their integrative capacity to do so. Furthermore, those who believe in integration do not have to see it and do not know how to define “integrated migrant” objectively (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, “the slightest act and gesture, the slightest form of symbolic expression, becomes an infallible source of information on the degree and willingness of integration” (Laacher, 1991, p. 56), as if it was empirical proof that integration is evident.

To conclude this section, we emphasize that integrative models and approaches for studying society are gradually substituted by works focused on people in the transnational, globalized world and the emergence of identities originated in psychological, informational, and physical spaces beyond nation-states’ limits (Wieviorka, 2008).

Moreover, scientific production is increasingly grounded on open systems in that concepts are related to circumstances, not essences (Deleuze, 2017, 45-46). The integrative paradigm, in its principle of national methodology, is not sufficient to cover the reality of migrants in contemporary societies, which are

characterized by multiple belongings and the growing importance of information and communication technologies in day-to-day life.

The path to overcoming the theoretical problems posed by migrant integration as a paradigm is, rather than creating models to describe well-succeeded integration journeys, developing critical perspectives beyond nationalistic politics (Favell, 2021, p. 54). That is our goal here.

Context and theoretical-methodological approach

Since the 2010s, there is in Brazil a new migration wave mainly characterized by the reception of humanitarian migrants. An inflection point was the 2010 earthquake in Haiti when Brazil granted Humanitarian visas to Haitians (Wejsa, Lesser, 2018). Since then, the country has also received mainly Syrians, Cubans, and Angolans, besides a high number of Venezuelans, that enter Brazil mostly through its northern border in Roraima and take part in *Operação Acolhida*, a voluntary relocation program funded by the Brazilian Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR).

From 2010 to 2021, more than 298,000 people lodged asylum applications in Brazil; 59% of the claimers were Venezuelans, 13,3% were Haitians, and 4,1% were Cubans (Cavalcanti *et al.*, 2022, p. 43-45). Around 57,000 people had their condition recognized in the same period (*ibidem*). Regarding migrants in the Brazilian formal labor market, more than 187,000 were in the country in 2021, and most of them are from Venezuela (28,6%), Haiti (27,8%), and Paraguay (5,2%) (Cavalcanti *et al.*, 2022, p. 94).

Xenophobia cases also took place in Brazil recently, such as the lynching and assassination of the Congolese Moïse Kabagambe in Rio de Janeiro in 2022, due to a work quarrel, or the anti-Venezuelan rhetoric promoted by candidates in cities near the Brazil-Venezuela border during the national elections in the same year. These events and the racism toward non-white migrants in the country are related to slavery and the eugenic Brazilian migration policies during the 19th and the 20th century, which had as a goal attracting Europeans and other groups – Japanese and Lebanese, for instance – to whiten its population, that at that time consisted mainly of black slaves and their descendants (Lesser, 2015). This process deeply marked Brazilian national identity.

The strategies to collect data for this paper were participant observation in that one of the authors was a student in a French course offered by the language school, besides in-depth interviews with the migrant teachers. During the observation, his position varied from a participant as an observer to a complete participant due to his different types of interaction in the fieldwork. There were moments when he participated in the classes and moments of transit in the common areas of the school's facilities to observe day-to-day situations.

We mobilized other techniques of ethnographic inspiration to collect information about teachers, students, and employees. For example, writing a field journal, organizing detailed factsheets about people and places, and taking pictures. The methodological approach had four parts: observation, *rapprochement*, conversation, and data interpretation.

The first step was narrowing the research question and choosing the language school as the field to conduct the work. In addition to being a place that compromises to receive, integrate, and give value to participants' cultures, the possibility of enrolling in a language course and creating a routine of visiting their facilities was an advantage.

During the *rapprochement*, we negotiated our participation in the fieldwork by enrolling in the French course, meeting teachers and students, and contacting the language school to volunteer to perform communication work. The *rapprochement* is also central to building a trustworthy relationship with the people who engage in the fieldwork.

The conversation took place after the course started, then we could establish communication with the teachers and choose some of them to interview. The technique used to choose the interviewees was purpose sampling, according to the diversity of participants in terms of origin and gender and their apparent willingness to participate in the study.

We conducted five semi-structured interviews with migrant teachers for this work. The participants are four men from Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Venezuela, and Morocco, besides a woman from Syria. The difference in the proportion between genders is due to the universe of teachers in the language school where the work took place. Of 14 teachers at the time of the study, 12 were men. The participants were assigned fictional names to protect their privacy. The qualitative method used for the interviews was the life story (Bertaux, 2003), a narrative form of discursive production in that interviewees present their lived experiences.

Data interpretation, the last step of our methodology, is the analysis of all data collected during the fieldwork. It involves building constructions of participants' constructions of reality to understand what their discursive production, decisions, and actions can tell us about social groups and societies (Marsh, Furlong, 2002) in a broader sense.

Regarding our theoretical approach, communication theory underpins the analysis of teachers' rapport with Brazil. For that reason, it is necessary to define what we mean by communication. Communication is a process beyond mere information transmission, denoting an "organization of real exchanges", the action of "placing differences in common" (Sodré, 2019, p. 148). Communicating precedes individual willing of interaction and reflects a human predisposition

to sociability, in other words, “the structural imperative (...) uniting opposites” (Sodré, 2019, p. 155).

In that sense, we can compare the communicative act to translation. Its meaning is in what happens when one part is “narrating” and the other “guessing” (Sodré, 2019, p. 156). The “narrator” communicates, and the meaning of this process lies in the act of counter-translating, “guessing” what was communicated and presupposing a shared core of meaning between the individuals involved (ib.).

However, if contact with the difference is inherent to communication, how to differentiate intercultural from intracultural communication and investigate the communicative processes involved in migration? Borrowing from Schröder (2010), intracultural and intercultural communication is a matter of proximity, depending on the degree of alterity experienced among the participants in communication. So, there is no difference *per se* between both terms.

Intercultural communication happens when participants interpret that they communicate with someone they feel is from a different cultural system of orientation (Schröder, 2010). Then, communicative action margins a different symbolic context. It is not the communication itself that constitutes intercultural communication but the “divergent interpretations made through contextualization clues in correspondence with the participants’ respective theories of the world”, and “the way to deal with the problems that result from these discrepancies” (Schröder, 2010, p. 47).

To make clear the perceived otherness in intercultural communication in our paper, we can give two examples. The Syrian Maya, when describing her position as a foreigner, differentiates what she calls “Latin culture” which includes Brazil, from the Arabic background, her own. Carlos, Venezuelan, in turn, affirms he is Latin like the Brazilians but from a different kind. They feel different degrees of intercultural alterity in Brazil.

Concerning the process of socialization and intercultural communication, when participating in the social group they are planning on entering, migrants read and interpret social patterns, behaviors, and history of the host society, having as an initial reference their own cultural “grids” (Schütz, 2010). The foreigner is, *par excellence*, the individual who feels in the host society as an outsider, relativizing values, history, and symbols naturalized by the locals (Schütz, 2010).

When a migrant arrives in a host society, having a positive experience is related to developing *philia* and intersubjective binding. In Classic Greece, *philia* was a kind of love – it can be, to a certain extent, related to the current idea of friendship – above the formal importance of the democracy established in the polis and implied a community feeling and political unity above work division (Paiva, Sodré, 2018).

Philia encompasses the common tie, tracing a circle of coexistence and meaning between people, as much sharing as cohabitation (Sodré, 2019). We will explore in the next section the types of binding the participants have with Brazil, as well as their meaning for their social experience in the country and respective migration projects.

In that respect, intersubjective binding is not only a way of bonding between individuals. It also means establishing links with the common, the immanent “collective heart” of the society and reassuring bonds with the collectivity (Sodré, 2019). In this work, interviewees connected to Brazilians and the “brazility” represent this phenomenon.

The Brazilian people: “the way people treat each other (...) marks me”

Interviewees describe their philia towards Brazil mainly through intersubjective bonding with the Brazilian people. When telling positive points of their migration experience in the country, during the interviews, participants emphasize that they believe Brazilians are easygoing, sympathetic, and supportive people.

For Maya, Syrian, it is very positive that Brazil is different from some European countries, and it does not confine asylum claimers in refugee camps. For that reason, since she arrived, Maya was free to meet people from the local population. “That is why I speak the language [Portuguese] now. (...) I studied (...) [it] for one month and a half”, she recalls. After that period, the Syrian could practice it with Brazilians, who, according to her, were very receptive. Moreover, Maya declares that people did not treat her as a foreigner: “You are already Brazilian. They do not care”. Then, she completes: “I feel very well with the Brazilians”.

In addition to that, she compares her friendships in Syria to the current ones in Rio de Janeiro. “I [can] express [myself] very well. I do not think I have to avoid saying something because I am afraid of (...) [their] reactions”, Maya says. She explains that although her friends there were open-minded if compared to average Syrians, it was not always easy to communicate some of her ideas without conflict. According to Maya, her Brazilian friends are more open and easygoing.

Youssef, Moroccan teacher, connects to Brazilians especially through experience exchanges with his students. “I work here (...), [I] have a top salary”, but the most important thing is inspiring his students when “you tell (...) your story, tell (...) ‘I came here, I did not know anyone, only the hostel that would receive me, (...) but now I speak Portuguese’”. “It means that you can learn the French you are studying”, he explains.

Christian, Congolese, affirms that “the way people treat each other” in Brazil marks his experience in the country positively. After being asked what he meant by that, the French teacher affirms that people are welcoming, describing a specific situation to illustrate that. “It often happens to us, foreigners, to get lost in the street (...). At the beginning [of his time in Brazil], (...) people used to say (...) a simple [neighborhood] name (...) but (...) it was hard to memorize it”, Christian remembers. “Asking a Brazilian for information, they have a very fond way to respond, some (...) even take you to the place you want to go”, he adds.

For Carlos, Venezuelan Spanish teacher, there is something different about Brazilians in comparison to Venezuelans. “(...) There is not this (...) affection of Brazilians, of supporting you, getting together, wanting to know [how you are]”, he describes. “The person wants to be by your side, even if you cannot help [them in return]”, completes Carlos.

The interviewees also emphasize a contradictory aspect of Brazilians. By the time of the fieldwork, there was a public debate about the 2018 federal elections going on in the country. At that moment, many extreme-right politicians became famous in Brazil. Even if the teachers describe positive points regarding Brazilians, they do not understand how supposedly easygoing, receptive, and open people vote for reactionary candidates who are publicly proud of their prejudices.

“I met some nice people who say they will vote for him”, tells Youssef, referring to the far-right former president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, elected in 2018. “It is contradictory because they say ‘welcome’, they are your friends, they help you”, while “voting for someone who says you [he is an Arab] are a terrorist from Hamas”, he adds. When still a Federal Deputy, Bolsonaro also said in 2015 that refugees like Youssef are the “scum of the world”³, when commenting on the influx of humanitarian migrants to Brazil.

The situation above seems to reflect what the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (2014, p. 176) supports about Brazilians’ social conviviality. In spite of the fact that foreigners often see Brazilians as generous and hospitable, these virtues express rather “an extremely rich and overflowing emotional background” than civility or good manners (id.). We ought not to forget that we are talking about a society formed by colonialism and slavery, and still with socioeconomic consequences of these processes.

Connections to brazility: football and food

In addition to their relation to Brazilian people, participants described aspects of culture – which we call *brazilities* here – that connect them to the common in the country. We divide these unique features narrated into two

³ Available at: <<https://exame.com/brasil/bolsonaro-chama-refugiados-de-escuria-do-mundo/>>.

sub-categories. Firstly, football and the relationship with the Brazilian national team. Then, Brazilian food. The former aspect seems to reflect the mediatic imaginary reinforced by the communication flows of information (Appadurai, 2019) about Brazil received abroad, specifically the cliché about being a football country. The latter is one of the usual affection factors in intercultural relations.

The Haitian teacher Emmanuel reminds us that his first contact with Brazil dates to the time spent in the Brazil-Haiti Center at Port-au-Prince. In this cultural center, he learned Portuguese, watched Brazilian movies, and danced the samba. Nevertheless, his predominant link to Brazil is football. According to Emmanuel, there is a reproduction of the rivalry between Brazil and Argentina in football among Haitian football fans, with some supporting the former and others the latter. “It is stronger in Haiti than here” in Brazil, says the teacher, explaining that as they share the same country and spaces, the rivalry emerges more easily than between Argentinians and Brazilians.

“I already tried not to like the Brazilian national football team, but I could not”, said Emmanuel. He stated he often feels upset with extra-pitch issues. Mainly the corruption in the International Association Football Federation (FIFA) and Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF). However, his passion for the sport is above all that.

Maya, Syrian, does not mention football as one of her factors of intersubjective bonding to Brazil but describes it as one of the main things in her imagination about its community and one of her first points of contact with it. She recalls that Syrians like football very much and “everybody supports Brazil in the Olympics because the Syrian team does not play” in this competition.

The other connection to brazility participants mention is food. Eating goes far beyond satisfying biological needs and encompasses social, cultural, and ritualistic aspects of human life (Montanari, 2006; Souza, 2018). For migrants, food has the potential to mediate their cultural experience in the host society and, besides changing feeding habits, makes possible the emergence of new types of affection and life experiences (Souza, 2018).

The Congolese teacher Christian tells us that eating *baião de dois* – dish from northeastern Brazil, a homogeneous mixture of rice, beans, scallion, and parsley – and barbecue frequently became one of the central parts of his adaptation and attachment to the country. One of the “simple things” he describes as representative of this process, and that he defines as part of the “Brazilian culture”. Christian links that to becoming Brazilian, a subject we will develop in the next section.

“I feel more or less Brazilian now”. Participation and identity convergence to Brazil

Participants describe identity convergence to Brazil after they moved to the country. Interviewees also narrate how they understand the process of gradually becoming part of its society. To analyze their discourses, it is necessary to stress that in communication and intersubjective contact, people do not control their identity and subjectivity entirely, “each one loses himself (...) in relation to the openness to the Other” (Sodré, 2019, p. 163).

In this paper, it means that although interviewees describe they observe changes in the way they feel about their proximity to Brazil or to a Brazilian identity that is gradually forming, this socialization process is linked to the small changes that happen during migration, everyday life discrete changes in culture and habits, details that within time become durable (Sayad, 1994).

Therefore, we understand identity as formulated in the post-structuralist theses (e.g., Deleuze, 2017). Instead of an immutable and rigid being, the “malleable and plastic category of ‘subjectivity’” grasps psychological and social dynamics that are mutable, variable, fluid, and processual (ElHajji, 2023, p. 120). These characteristics represent the contemporary way of life and the specific migrants’ transience and deterritorialization as well (*ibidem*).

In that sense, the Congolese Christian declares that the longer he stays in Brazil, the deeper the process of “losing the African reflexes, getting the Brazilian” ones, and acquiring a “Brazilian instinct”. By the time of the interview, he had ten years in the country, was married, and had a Brazilian son. The teacher declares that, over time, he feels more Brazilian and internalizes mainstream manners.

The Syrian Mayan describes an analogous situation. When summing up her life in Brazil, she states that the connection to people she found in her new home is what “was lacking” in her life before migrating. The affection, the binding she has established in the country, makes Maya declare: “I feel more or less Brazilian now”. Becoming Brazilian here means bounding to the common through her relationship with other people in this social space.

Naturally, participating in a host society as a migrant is not a linear and smooth process. After two years in Brazil, the Moroccan Youssef contrasts his experience in Rio de Janeiro with tourism. Tourists visit famous attractions and, in his words, “think they see Brazil as a whole”. The teacher explains that, as a resident, you have good and bad experiences, presenting a day when he was robbed as an example that he goes through situations Brazilians also go. Youssef affirms he has been learning to act as a Brazilian so people “will not see you as a foreigner”. The Moroccan evokes the memory above as a metaphor for his life in Rio de Janeiro in a broader sense: “you are not a tourist anymore (...) you are living your life” [there].

Adapting as a migrant is also an unfinished path. Carlos, Venezuelan, observes that, in Brazil, he is always discovering something new, in addition to things “I would not do like this” or did not know people did in a certain way in the country. For him, there will always be situations where he will have to “see and learn” how to act, a process “I think it will not end”, and “I think I will never finish”. Carlos’ ideas corroborate Biehl and Locke’s (2017) perspective on incompleteness.

People are unstable assemblages of structural, organic, and social forces that “at once shape and are shaped by their milieus” (Biehl, Locke, 2017, p. 8). We cannot define if and when the process of migrant adaptation ends. Carlos and the other participants’ life stories have new facts constantly emerging from them. That makes their trajectories in motion and intrinsically incomplete.

In addition to being subject to abrupt changes, bifurcations, and the “granularities of the ongoing” (Biehl, Locke, 2017, p. 4), people are affected by the uncertainty about the future and the fact that they live alongside and through material forces (Biehl, 2020) only partially controllable. In that regard, when asked if he wishes to stay in Brazil, Carlos answers “yes!” and completes, chuckling, “I also had the intention of staying in my country”.

Final considerations: subjectivity as a key research path

This paper contributes to exploring new possibilities of linking migration studies to communication theory. Here we pointed out migrant integration’s conceptual limits and relativized the way mainstream works describe it as the path to value the migrant experience. As an alternative to that, we presented how individual positive experiences in a host society are related to binding and philia.

During our analysis became clear that participants’ discourses about Brazil might be contradictory and porous, englobing, for the same aspects of their lives in the country, positive and negative points. An example in our work is when teachers say Brazilians’ electoral behavior does not match their interpersonal features.

Taking the previous paragraphs into account, we can affirm that although interviewees refer to integration indicators (e.g., economic, language, social) in their description of positive points of migration experience, these factors have, for them, specific meanings that are understood only through the analysis of their bonding and intersubjective exchanges in Brazil. The individual, subjective element of connection to people and the Brazilian common cannot be dissociated from these indicators and vice-versa.

Two examples illustrate this. The Syrian Maya learned Portuguese in Brazil and met people, worked in the country, and so on. Nevertheless, would learning

the language be so positive in her experience if she did not meet Brazilians and become friends with some of them? Taking Youssef's case can also be elucidative. The Moroccan says he is happy with his work and has a good salary there. To what extent would he be satisfied as a language teacher if he did not have intersubjective exchanges with his students?

Thus, evaluating the success of a migration project depends on contextualizing affection in specific aspects of migrant life. We acknowledge, of course, that their level of satisfaction is not static and can vary according to changes in the general living conditions, binding to the host society, and self-awareness throughout life. Moreover, the individual perception of the migration endeavor is subjective, and different trajectories' outcomes might not be directly comparable.

The endeavor of analyzing integration critically throughout this article does not mean we do not recognize how indispensable collecting data about migrants is to academia and public policies at local, regional, and even global levels. What is not reasonable is taking for granted a cause-consequence relation between data considered positive by scholars and politicians and the impact of these data on the micro migration experience.

Future contributions to the topic of this paper can focus on the links between intercultural communication, integrative discourses, and their application in research. For example, explore to what extent and how philia, bonding, and intersubjective exchanges affect usual integration factors and vice-versa.

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