Stories of Migration: Exploring the Links Between Emotions and Technologies in the Narratives of Venezuelan Refugees in Brazil

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INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in the field of migration have led to a growing interest in the emotional aspect of migrants’ life trajectories (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). Emotions can affect how newcomers experience adaptation in a new place, as well as the formation and maintenance of social interactions in home and host societies. Similarly, the migration process itself entails changes and transformations in migrants’ emotional life as people engage in (re)negotiations of self and others in different reference
places (Svašek, 2010). Despite the growing relevance of the emotional factor in migration research, consideration of emotions has been consistently undermined and questioned for its legitimacy and scientific nature, with rationalistic socioeconomic approaches often being used to analyze migrants’ mobility and integration processes (McKay, 2007).

With the advancement of new communication technologies, negotiations of emotional lives are no longer confined to physical proximity, but they are increasingly practiced and displayed across a variety of situations, contexts and over time. Specifically, focusing on forced migration processes, relevant studies have demonstrated the importance of digital media for refugees’ practices of doing family in protracted displacement (Leurs, 2014; Twigt, 2018) and settlement contexts (Awad & Tossell, 2019). At the same time, research by Saskia Witteborn (2015) revealed the ways in which the affective experiences of asylum seekers in Germany are embedded in and structure their communicative practices that involve digital technologies. This chapter presents a study that aims to add to current understandings of the role of emotions in forced migration processes by exploring the emotional experiences of refugees as both constituted through and shaping technological use, while considering social, cultural, political and economic factors shaping this process. Through qualitative analysis of migration stories written by Venezuelan refugees,1 we hope to generate important insights into the interactions between emotions and digital media and their consequences for the migratory trajectories of refugees in under-explored contexts of forced displacement in the Global South.

CONCEPTUALIZING EMOTION IN MIGRATION RESEARCH

Emotions have become central in the study of migrants’ experiences. The everyday importance of emotions can be found in several aspects of migrants’ relationship with family across distance, their ethnic relations with members of host societies and communities of origin, as well as the transnational connections migrants establish with their homelands (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). Although a generally accepted definition of emotion is lacking, there appears to be some agreement among scholars that emotions are socially and culturally constructed through “an

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1 This chapter uses the term ‘refugees’ for analytical purposes. It is not intended to label the Venezuelans in the stories as a “type” of person, since we understand that the category of “refugee” is particularly problematic (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).
experience of involvement” that is manifested on both intra-personal (psychic and corporeal) and interpersonal levels (social and inter-corporeal) (Barbalet, 2002, p. 1), simultaneously. In Ahmed’s Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004, p. 25), the author argues that emotions represent more than psychological conditions, meaning that they are deeply linked to “social and cultural practices.” This definition is close to that of Gunew (2009), whose work on decolonizing affect theory attempts to conceptualize emotions beyond European frameworks. In this endeavor, Gunew states that specific cultural contexts play an important role in shaping perceptions and experiences of affect, laying the foundations for a political critique of Western accounts that define emotions as “biological and feminine” (p. 13). In this chapter, a sociocultural understanding of emotion will guide the analysis of affect, which includes local contexts, embodied subjectivities and specific situations (Brun, 2016; Massey, 2005). The terms emotion, affect and feeling are used interchangeably rather than defined as separate categories and provide a starting point for the analysis of Venezuelans’ personal stories of migration (Cvetkovich, 2012).

Traditionally, the economic logic has prevailed in research focused on the drivers and consequences of migration (e.g., Bakker et al., 2017), with far less attention being given to the role of emotions in migrant decision-making. The dominance of the economic lens reflects the tendency to separate consciousness and reason from the irrational emotional focus that is often regarded as irrelevant to understand migrants’ experiences and diasporic connections locally and transnationally, and over time (McKay, 2007). On this point, scholars argue that both economic and emotional dimensions cannot be completely separated in the migration literature (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 77) and therefore require careful examination and critique. Previous studies have demonstrated the inherent connections between economic and emotional aspects of migration through relations of care and emotional labor shaping transnational family life (McKay, 2012), such as making regular phone calls, and sending money, gifts and daily material objects. Svašek (2010) goes on to say that emotions are crucial for a better understanding of the “social, economic, political and experiential complexities of human mobility and belonging […]” (p. 867). For instance, migrants spontaneously reproduce homeland-related emotions by means of rituals, symbols and the recollection of their lived experiences (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 77), highlighting the role of memories, imagination, desires and expectations in migrants’ emotional processes (Svašek, 2010).
At the same time, connections between the often-multiple emotional attachments of migrants to their homelands and new places of residence can be linked to the emotional interactions between migrants and host societies. As noted by Svašek (2010), “while an unfriendly welcome in the country of arrival may increase feelings of belonging to the homeland, positive experiences with members of local communities may result in increasing positive emotional investment in new relationships” (p. 877). Abdelmalek Sayad’s (2004) seminar book *The Suffering of the Immigrant* recounts the struggles of migrants in the face of structural inequalities and discrimination in their receiving countries, and how migrants’ negotiations of belonging to origin and host countries make them suffer.

Although migrants’ settlement is still nowadays mainly discussed alongside socioeconomic and rational terms, the emotional factor and its implications on identity and cultural aspects of migrants’ integration journey have been relatively understudied (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Even less available is research on the relationship between emotions and forced migration processes (Ghorashi, 2005). The experience of forced migration presupposes a social ontology of connections, of expectations and feelings that extends beyond humanitarian categorization systems of displacement and resettlement, and emphasizes relational and subjective forms of place and time (Brun, 2016; Massey, 2005; Raghuram, 2009). Emotions as a relevant decolonial framework can help bridge the gap between normative understandings of forced migration and refugees’ own lived experiences in flight and exile (Raghuram, 2009). A focus on the dynamics of refugees’ emotional experiences is crucial for a better understanding of their agency, subjectivities and interactions with old and new reference groups, as well as across time and space. The notion of agency is defined in this study as the capacity of refugees and migrants to shape their individual reality and act toward the improvement of their own life while responding to oppressive structures of power and exploiting and imagining possible futures beyond displacement (Triandafyllidou, 2019).

According to Svašek (2008), emotions are not present in the minds/bodies of migrants in isolation; instead, they emerge in the interactions that migrants establish with their human and non-human surroundings. Svašek argues that while emotional engagements with other human beings are unique in a variety of ways, as they involve multi-sensorial and interactive experiences, it is also important to acknowledge the emotional agency of non-human phenomena and their emotional impact on users and/or viewers. This is particularly the case of new communication technologies,
whose affordances have been increasingly important not only for mediating emotional experiences but also for creating new spaces of emotions within the hybrid and transnational spheres of refugees’ home-exile relationships (Twigt, 2018). The next section of this chapter addresses the mutually shaping processes emerging between technologies and emotions in the context of refugees’ experience.

**EMOTIONS, TECHNOLOGIES AND FORCED MIGRATION**

In recent years, we have witnessed a growing body of work exploring the role technologies play in refugees’ emotional processes in both displacement and settlement contexts (Greene, 2019; Leurs, 2019; Twigt, 2018; Witteborn, 2015). The range of affordances for action and interaction provided by a technological device can be perceived and employed by users in a variety of ways (Hutchby, 2001). Gibson (1982) defines the concept of affordances as the possibilities of agentic actions deriving from the use and appropriation of objects and artifacts. The properties of the device, the agency of refugees and the socio-structural conditions influence the ways in which technologies are used in the different phases and contexts of forced migration (Alencar, 2020a). A review of the literature revealed the use of mobile phones as a source of frequent and diverse emotional gratifications among refugees. The study of Alencar et al. (2018) on Syrian male refugees during their journey to Europe found that they used their smartphones to relieve boredom, cope with stressful events and capture milestones or memories of their journey. In the case of Iraqi refugees living in households in Jordan (Twigt, 2018), or Syrians waiting in refugee camps in Turkey (Smets, 2019), the possibility to access entertainment contents through mobile media devices enabled them to shift their attention from televised war news that can cause emotional distress.

Among the studies on emotions related to the use of digital technologies by refugees, the work on interpersonal connections is very important, in particular in relation to the practice of maintaining relationships with family and friends who have remained in the home country or moved elsewhere (Greene, 2019; Harney, 2013; Leurs, 2014; Smets, 2019; Twigt, 2018). Digital media are relevant to refugees for establishing communication with transnational intimates that can help them cope with offline material hardship and regain a sense of ontological security (Leurs, 2014). Studies in different displacement settings have shown that the audiovisual affordances of mobile phones (e.g., phone calls, video-chats
and recordings) allow refugees to affectively sustain multiple levels of digital intimacy (Greene, 2019; Twigt, 2018) and achieve some well-being (Wall et al., 2017). In Leurs’ (2014) research, the smartphone functioned as a crucial resource of affective capital for Somali youths stranded in Ethiopia, as they were able to communicate with their parents, even though they were left behind in a distant location (p. 15). As orientation devices, digital technologies enable refugees to imagine and direct refugees’ hopes, aspirations and focus to a future elsewhere (Ahmed, 2004; Twigt, 2018; Witteborn, 2018). As illustrated in Twigt’s (2018) study, many Iraqi refugees were motivated to learn English or obtain practical skills through Internet courses that prompted them to dream about their lives outside Jordan.

At the same time, technologies and their associated uses (as well as the lack of) do not only shape but are also shaped by emotions. In a recent study with Eritreans in Rome, Belloni (2019) highlighted that shame and guilt made refugees disrupt long-distance communication with their loved ones, justified by the fact that they did not manage to achieve a dignified life that could enable them to help their families back home. Harney’s (2013) and Witterborn’s (2014) observations of asylum seekers in Naples, Italy and Germany showed that their shameful condition for not being able to meet their family’s sociocultural and economic expectations led them develop specific communication practices when communicating with families online, such as expressing animated voices or containing facial expressions.

Moreover, the role of emotions in accessing and engaging with technologies has also been demonstrated by studies on the intersections between technologies, affect and politics. By moving beyond research on diasporic social relations, Witteborn (2015, p. 76) analyzed how emotions like shame, anger and fear were co-constituted through and structured digital and embodied practices of people in particular settings of institutionalized control, such as Internet cafes in shared accommodations for asylum seekers in Germany. As moral and change agents, emotions like shame and anger kept women away from using and working in the computer rooms as a result of male practices (e.g., women experienced direct address and gaze of men in the Internet spaces) and disruption of cultural conventions, which could potentially threaten their integrity and respect within their family and community. Fear also affected digital practices among asylum and refugee migrants, as many reported not using mobile
phones or social media in order to avoid government surveillance (Witteborn, 2015).

Drawing upon a co-constitutive understanding of the relations between emotions and technologies (Ahmed, 2004; Witteborn, 2014), this chapter presents a study that explores, for the first time, the different temporalities and spatialities characterizing the migration experiences of Venezuelan refugees coming to/in Brazil. Understanding the link(s) between emotions and digital media through a co-constitutive lens helps elucidate how social, cultural, political and economic factors interact with refugees’ specific experiences of mediated affect at different stages and across a range of contexts in understudied regions of forced displacement in the Global South.

**Research Context**

Since 2015, according to UNHCR, 2018, approximately four million Venezuelans have fled hunger, violence and hyperinflation caused by a political, social and economic crisis in Venezuela, as well as by international economic embargoes. Official statistics estimate that by January 2020 more than 262 thousand migrants from Venezuela had entered Brazil through the border with Roraima (a state located in Northwestern Brazil), with the majority crossing into the country by land. The state of Roraima currently hosts 13 shelters that function as reception centers for more than six thousand refugees. In the city of Boa Vista, capital of the state of Roraima, more than 3822 thousand Venezuelans live in the streets and approximately 2800 thousand reside in spontaneous occupations. There are also official registers that many Venezuelans share private houses with Brazilian families or Venezuelan fellows (REACH, 2018). Migration governance in the region has been institutionalized through the program ‘Operação Acolhida’ (Reception Operation) of the Brazilian armed forces in interaction with government and humanitarian agencies, as well as religious and civil society organizations who collectively assist Venezuelans in the provision of basic needs, such as food, shelters, relevant information and medical assistance (Garcia de Oliveira, 2018).

The presence of refugees in the region has been mainly characterized by xenophobia, violence and discrimination against newcomers. Venezuelan migrants applying for asylum in Brazil are allowed to work while waiting for their application to be processed. However, many Venezuelans are confronted with the lack of employment opportunities and precarious
conditions in Roraima. These challenges are reinforced by refugees’ inability to sustain continuous, stable and reliable digital connectivity that can help them stay in touch with a wider community and access relevant information and services. For instance, one in every two Venezuelans report not being sufficiently informed about relevant services in the context of their displacement in Roraima, while 69% state they do not have access to digital connectivity (R4V, 2020). The findings from previous research in this context reveal that the media ecology of refugees’ lives in the streets and shelters of Boa Vista is characterized by the collective sharing of technologies, whereas in the case of Venezuelans living in rented homes, there is at least one mobile phone in the house, which is often shared with family members and housemates (Alencar, 2020b).

The Study

The research data in this study is drawn from an educational project aimed at providing language and digital literacy courses for recently arrived Venezuelan refugees in Boa Vista. The project entitled Technology for Good was developed by the telecommunication company Ericsson in partnership with a Brazilian education enterprise. Both stakeholders collaborated with the Department of International Relations at the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR) to implement the project through supplying computer laboratories and financial means for the acquisition of digital devices and hiring personnel in the context of the extension activities carried out by the university. Since 2017, the project has already trained over 630 displaced Venezuelans, including the provision of free Internet access in the computer rooms of the university. The program includes migrants and refugees from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. As both director of the technology center for migrants and refugees and lecturer and researcher at UFRR, Julia Camargo (co-first author of this chapter) played a major role in designing and coordinating the training courses, paying particular attention to the different needs, backgrounds and experiences of Venezuelan refugees who participated in the educational program. During a two-month period, refugee students acquired some knowledge of the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture and were

introduced to the notion of information literacy in online spaces. At the end of the course, adult refugee students were given the option to write and present a short text, in Portuguese, describing their migration trajectories as well as how their experiences with (or without) technology have facilitated (or not) their sociocultural integration in the new society. It is important to highlight that the texts produced by the participants primarily focused on narrating their individual stories and experiences, rather than emphasizing their actual use of technology. The project resulted in a total of 144 short stories written by adult participants (equal number of males and females), aging between 18 and 65 years old, in street situations, as well as living in shelters and rented houses.

Inspired by a care ethics perspective (Brun, 2016; Raghuram, 2009), we, the authors of this chapter, emphasize the importance of engaging more meaningfully with peoples’ experiences of (forced) migration while foregrounding their local contexts and situations. Consequently, we situate in this chapter the particularities of the needs, experiences and aspirations of individuals who migrate in relation to complex spatial and temporal relations that suggest a shared sense of responsibility in the construction of fairer realities.

**Methodology**

Building on qualitative analysis of the 144 stories written by study informants, we selected the fragments that revealed the links between technologies and emotions in the spatial and temporal dynamics shaping their migration trajectories. Although the study links the temporal and spatial dimensions of emotions to essentialist categories that emphasize the linearity of the refugee experience, it also accounts for a more nuanced analysis of refugees’ agencies in relation to a range of emotional circumstances and their associated digital practices. In light of the co-constitutive framework adopted in this study, both positive and negative experiences related to the use (or the non-use) of technologies were coded and analyzed in the stories. Various measures were employed to guarantee anonymity, obtain consent and mitigate the risks of researching this refugee population (i.e., use of pseudonyms). Participants signed an informed consent form and received clarifications about the use of their texts in the context of scientific research at UFRR and professional projects developed by Ericsson. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Review Board of the Federal University of Roraima.
The following sections analyze how the relationship between emotions and technologies shapes the experiences of Venezuelan refugees before, during and after migration.

THE DECISION TO MIGRATE AND PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

Planning the migration process is a period of emotional instability when feelings such as hope alongside insecurity and fear may arise before departure. In the case of Venezuelan refugees migrating to Brazil, the feeling of loneliness for saying goodbye to friends and family and the lack of communication with those who have already left Venezuela came up in the stories shared by informants. As stated by Svašek (2010), the decision to move to another country “can spark different feelings not only in those who leave, but also in those who are left behind” (p. 866), with technologies reshaping the emotional needs related to this process. For Rosa, who resided in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, before migrating to Brazil, the feeling of sadness resulting from the departure of her two daughters was intensified by a condition of information precarity associated to the lack of digital connectivity (Wall et al., 2017), as well as to limited access to entertainment contents, which served as a coping mechanism in the absence of close family members. As she described:

When I was still living in Venezuela with my two daughters, one immigrated to Brazil and the other, Estefânia went to work in another city, I was left alone in my apartment, I regularly called Nelly (my other daughter) in Boa Vista, the last call I was able to make was in November and since then I could no longer make international calls, because my cell phone had no WhatsApp, it was a regular cell phone. I felt lonely and sad because my daughters were gone… (Rosa)

At the same time, analyses of participants’ stories suggest that emotions experienced at initial moments of the migration process can also shape the meaning Venezuelans attach to their use of technologies. The story of Andres below shows that anger functioned as a “change agent” in his decision to leave Venezuela (Witteborn, 2014, p. 78) and that technologies were re-appropriated in relation to negative emotions experienced due to a particular event.
I returned to my home, and I was even sadder when I realized that they had stolen everything of value that I, with many years of work, had gained: refrigerator, washing machine, air conditioner, computer and other objects. Crying with rage, I grabbed my clothes and made the decision to leave, passed by a cousin’s house, told him everything that had happened, he said he could help me’ he lent me his computer and I researched where I would go, saw that Brazil was one of the best opportunities, I took advantage and bought my ticket on the internet, I saw in the website that it was too far away and the road dangerous, so my cousin offered me a GPS, “it will help you a lot on the road,” he said. (Andres)

There was also a sense of agreement in the stories analyzed that the political and socioeconomic situation of Venezuela will continue to deteriorate. Aside from informants’ severe economic hardship, they were also afraid of the uncertainties of life outside their homeland. The mutual constitution of the media-emotion nexus (Witteborn, 2015) can be seen in the analysis of two specific narratives. In the first narrative, Maria, a school teacher in the city of Guayana in Venezuela, described the situation in her house as unbearable, as the salary she earned would only allow for buying a pack of rice, some pieces of chicken, one butter and one kilo of bananas. In response to her intense feelings of despair and hopelessness, Maria created a personal crowd-funding campaign in social media so that she could obtain the necessary material support to migrate to Brazil. Through this site, Maria said she was able to reconnect with friends and acquaintances she had not seen for a long time and who helped her overcome the fear of travelling, as these people had already moved away from Venezuela.

In the second narrative by Antonia, whose husband was already living in Boa Vista, her feelings of hope and expectation motivated her to explore places through blog stories; she found in this platform an ideal place to share experiences, and eventually, a virtual companion for her trip to Brazil. As she put it: “I’ve read all sorts of stories, from the most beautiful to the least desired, from the funniest to the saddest. The most enjoyable part of this quest was finding one of the people who would become a great travel companion, even though he was still a virtual friend.” At the same time, it was also possible to observe in the narratives that digital media uses among refugees provided an entry point for imagining and aspiring different realities of life in new places (Leurs, 2014), while mediating non-physical interactions in time and space through memory and imagination (Svašek, 2010). According to Antonia, listening to their stories made her
fears not seem so great, made her imagination fly and also made her dream of the places she planned to visit; in fact, they made the sadness of migrating diminish to its minimal expression.

**The Journey and the Border**

The phase of the journey and the arrival in the border between Venezuela and Brazil are experienced, in many cases, through dramatic emotions caused by limited or entirely absent communication with family members. Emotions aroused by the lack of connectivity or a technological device were identified in different passages in which Venezuelans narrated their journey to Brazil. For example, Rosana (37 years old) was travelling alone and her mobile phone was the only connection she had with relatives during this period. After crossing the border in the city of Pacaraima, Rosana became really nervous, as she lost connectivity and was no longer able to contact anyone she trusted. “[…] I thought I could use my phone in Brazil with a SIM card from Venezuela, so when I realized this was not possible, it was like I was in the middle of nowhere … all the emotions came and my body got goose bumps and I felt a lump in my throat […].”

The respect Rosana had for certain values in her family prevented her from asking strangers for their phones to be able to call. As noted by Ahmed (2004), social and cultural conventions are profoundly rooted in one’s affective experiences. In Rosana’s family, as she said, “We do not like to beg or ask favors from people we don’t know.”

Other stories, like the ones of Lucia and Adriana, who travelled with their children, shed light on specific emotional experiences related to limited financial resources that made it difficult for Venezuelans to afford using Internet during the journey. Lucia, for instance, described the moment she felt very relieved when a Venezuelan fellow told her about free Wi-Fi hotspots available in many public spaces within the new Brazilian city. The affordances provided by digital connectivity enabled her to communicate through WhatsApp and Facebook and to search information on the Internet without having to pay. On the other hand, there were cases in which Venezuelans shared the great feeling of lending their phones to other fellows, since they were the only ones owing a device with a Brazilian SIM card in the trip from the city of Pacaraima to the state capital, Boa Vista.

Another reported problem was the reception in the Brazilian border, which was described by some Venezuelans as traumatic. Such negative
experiences were caused by both the Brazilian government and the local community at the moment of the reception, with technologies being on the background to either solve or reinforce tensions. For instance, some narratives said that Venezuelans were denied entry in Brazil because they did not carry enough money with them. One woman said she was terrified when this happened to her and the fact that she did not have Internet to call her aunt—who was already living in Brazil—made the situation even more difficult. It was only after a taxi driver in Pacaraima lent her his phone that she could call her aunt, who then said that border guards were not allowed to ask Venezuelans for money. The paradoxical role of technologies in this context can also be seen through the story of Jessica who had to pay all the savings she had (10 Brazilian reais, which are equivalent to 2 euros) to make a phone call. The tension Jessica felt after being left without any money to buy food for her daughter was alleviated when someone gave her a yogurt. The difficulty to communicate with anyone from her family during this critical moment illustrates the strong emotional and physical impact of precarious digital connectivity and accessibility on Venezuelan refugees’ emotions during and at the end of their physical journey.

Adaptation to the New Environment

After their arrival in Brazil and during their adaptation to the new place, precariousness of communication with family constitutes one of the main motives for emotional upheaval in the Venezuelan refugees’ narratives. Gustavo worked as an engineer in Caracas and had to leave Venezuela to find a better life in Brazil so that he could provide for his family back home. In his narrative, Gustavo said his anxiety caused by not being able to contact home could be mitigated if he had access to a device with internet.

For me, the seconds, minutes, hours, days of the month were passing by and I could not communicate with my family because of the lack of phone or a computer with internet … I really missed having a phone so that I can communicate with them, with my beloved ones, with my daughters and my mother. (Gustavo)

According to Gustavo’s and several other people’s stories, communication with family was only made possible again after they became aware that free call and Internet services are provided by the Reference Center of the State’s public university for migrants. Although Venezuelans had to wait
in long lines to be able to speak with family members for a short period of time, the feeling of being close to their loved ones created a sense of security and tranquility among them. This research showed that transnational affect obtained through family communication remains a crucial resource that enables refugees to carry on under precarious living conditions (Leurs, 2014). For instance, the majority of refugees said that digital technologies have become even more relevant after they came to live in Brazil and left their children in Venezuela: “I feel much happier knowing that I can follow the lives of my children through technologies” (Gustavo).

At the same time, the lack of a mobile device with Internet connectivity was an impediment to find employment:

> Without losing my goal of finding a job, I would leave my resume in as many places as possible, but I didn’t have a phone yet. One day I came home and was told that they had called me for a job interview, at that moment I felt an indescribable euphoria and when I asked where the interview call came from, they told me they didn’t remember the company name. At the time of returning the calls, they were not answered and the messages were not answered either. (Angelo)

While it is true that problems related to digital accessibility and connectivity can limit refugees’ agency in specific contexts of forced migration (Wall et al., 2017), it is also important to note that natives’ hostility toward refugees plays a crucial role in creating and fostering social and economic exclusion of this population. The analysis of narratives revealed that discrimination from the local community against refugees has important implications for how technologies are adopted by newcomers. For instance, some narratives described that Venezuelans were using apps to mitigate emotional impacts caused by xenophobia. For instance, the app Uber was employed by Venezuelans to move in and around the city of Boa Vista as a way to avoid xenophobic reactions from locals in public transportations.

During the post-migration period, access to digital connectivity and associated affordances was not the only factor shaping refugees’ settlement process and their wish and need to integrate. Emotions can also help migrants negotiate their experiences in new places (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015), as well as the role of technologies in the adaptation process. In one of the events narrated, Amalia thought that ‘chocolate balls’ (named *brigadeiro* in Portuguese from Brazil) were being given away to people at the
entrance of a supermarket in Boa Vista. When Amalia understood that the sweets were actually on sale, she said she felt so ashamed that the next day she searched in social media for applications that could help her learn Portuguese in order to avoid feeling embarrassed again. As Witteborn argues (2014), moral emotions like shame are constituted through past experiences and serve “as signposts for how to conduct oneself in social interactions” (p. 78). Amalia’s embarrassment for lacking sufficient knowledge of the local language motivated her to engage with technologies for gaining more understanding of the local culture.

Finally, the analysis found that technologies and emotions are intrinsically related to the contact refugees establish with people from the local community. Particularly relevant in this context is the story of Juana, who met a very kind Brazilian woman who offered food and water to her son. At first, Juana said she could not understand what the woman was saying to her, but with the help of a language translator app accessed through the woman’s phone, Juana could read in Spanish what she wrote. Another story shows how Venezuelans with disabilities benefited from participation in a WhatsApp group created by the local community for people with special needs. Sergio was part of this group and said he received support from locals, which helped him feel at home in Boa Vista. As highlighted in the literature review, “positive experiences with members of local communities may result in increasing positive emotional investment in new relationships” (Svašek, 2010, p. 877). To illustrate this further, it is worth referring to the account of Mr. Edward, a former Venezuelan teacher in his sixties who found a romantic partner in Brazil through a dating group on Facebook. The woman, according to him, had recently divorced and wanted to re-start her life through this new relationship. Despite increasing hostility faced by Venezuelans in Boa Vista, Mr. Edward said she did not care that he lived in a refugee shelter and always offered to pick him up by car there, so that they could hang around the city and enjoy each other’s company. Mr. Edward stated that he was very hopeful they both could build a future together in Brazil.

**Conclusion**

This study examined diverse stories produced by Venezuelans living in Brazil and showed how technologies are integrated into their everyday lived emotional experiences, as well as how people appropriate technology on the basis of their emotional needs at different stages and in different
contexts of their migration trajectory. Considering the mutual interaction between emotions and technologies (Witteborn, 2014), the use (or non-use) of technology by refugees shapes and is shaped by their affective experiences. Specifically, the situation of digital precarity among Venezuelans produces different emotions, which in turn generates specific technological appropriations by refugees.

At the same time, the collective belief that digital technologies represent a critical aspect of Venezuelan migration to Brazil has been particularly prominent across the data. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that highly optimistic views of Venezuelans regarding the role of ICTs in satisfying the demands of their lives as expressed in the stories could also be attributed to their participation in a project that is based on the idea of “technology for good,” which can potentially foster superficial, “utilitarian” relations to technologies in refugee contexts (Awad & Tossell, 2019). In the current study, we are not supporting stereotypical views that solely connect refugees’ digital experiences to struggles for survival, which contributes to marginalizing refugees as passive victims deprived of agency. In line with Awad and Tossell’s (2019) critic of the utilitarian approach to smartphone use in the context of refugee settlement, digital connectivities are situated here in relation to refugees’ efforts “to defend their right to safe and dignified lives” in the new country (p. 12). This includes sustaining stable and reliable connectivity that facilitates their access to information, services, job and educational opportunities, health assistance, intercultural integration, social connections and enhanced well-being.

The ongoing reconfiguration of the international migration landscape, where the vast majority of migratory movements are taking place in developing countries, highlights the urge to include specific digital policies from the point of view of refugees’ lived experiences in these locations. In this context, it is essential to design digital policies and practices that place a greater emphasis on the subjectivities and diversity of refugee lives, instead of deploying technologies that serve to amplify even more power asymmetries, social inequalities and the commercialization of refugee migration and stories. The intensity of (forced) displacements in the Global South also represents a promising opportunity for decentralizing the production of (academic) knowledge about the role of the digital in migration, which is for the most part developed in relation to mobility and integration processes in Global North countries.

With the results deriving from this study, we aim to raise awareness for the need to think about social policies that account for factors beyond the
economic development, such as the emotional security, adaptation and well-being not only for people experiencing forced displacement but also for host communities. The development of approaches that recognize the specificities and diversity of forced migration contexts, while decolonizing refugees’ affective and digital experiences, offers promising pathways for doing justice to their struggles, agency and need to rebuild a new life elsewhere.

REFERENCES


