



## SEÇÃO: MÍDIA E CULTURA

# Franco-Brazilian perspectives on social reactions to migration

*Perspectivas franco-brasileiras sobre reações sociais para migrações*

*Perspectivas franco-brasileñas sobre las reacciones sociales a la migración*

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**Recebido em:** 31 mar. 2025.

**Aprovado em:** 14 jul. 2025.

**Publicado em:** 25 set. 2025.

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to provide a cross-sectional study of social reactions to migration from the Franco-Brazilian perspective comparing these two different national contexts. The cross-cutting perspectives will be based on several elements, including considerations of the history of migration and the socio-demographics of the immigrant populations of the two countries, drawing up a differentiated portrait of migration, before looking at the social treatment of immigrant populations. We will look at the discriminations suffered by immigrant populations, particularly those of non-European origin, before examining negative social reactions to migration, including the existence of moral entrepreneurs intent on portraying migration as a threat to economic and existential security. Finally, in the context of these various elements of cross-perspective, we will consider the extent to which these migrations should be seen in the context of the construction of certain populations as minorities.

**Keywords:** migration; France; Brazil; social reactions.

**Resumo:** O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar um estudo transversal das reações sociais à migração a partir da perspectiva franco-brasileira em uma comparação dos diferentes contextos. As perspectivas transversais serão baseadas em uma série de elementos, incluindo considerações sobre a história da migração e a sociodemografia das populações imigrantes dos dois países, elaborando um retrato diferenciado da migração, antes de olhar para o tratamento social das populações imigrantes. Serão tensionadas as discriminações sofridas pelas populações imigrantes, particularmente aquelas de origem não europeia, antes de examinar as reações sociais negativas à migração, incluindo a existência de empreendedores morais com a intenção de retratar a migração como uma ameaça à segurança econômica e existencial. Finalmente, no contexto desses vários elementos de perspectiva cruzada, será considerado até que ponto essas migrações devem ser vistas no contexto da construção de certas populações como minorias.

**Palavras-chave:** migração; França; Brasil; reações sociais.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo es ofrecer un estudio transversal de las reacciones sociales a la migración desde la perspectiva franco-brasileña, comparando estos dos contextos nacionales. Las perspectivas transversales se basarán en diversos elementos, incluyendo consideraciones sobre la historia de la migración y la sociodemografía de las poblaciones inmigrantes de ambos países, elaborando un panorama diferenciado de la migración, antes de examinar el trato social a las poblaciones inmigrantes. Examinaremos las discriminaciones que sufren las poblaciones inmigrantes, en particular las de origen no europeo, antes de examinar las reacciones sociales negativas a la migración, incluyendo la existencia de emprendedores morales que intentan presentar la migración como una amenaza a la seguridad económica y existencial. Finalmente, en el contexto de estos diversos elementos de perspectiva transversal, consideraremos hasta qué punto estas migraciones deben considerarse en el contexto de la construcción de ciertas poblaciones como minorias.

**Palabras clave:** migración; Francia; Brasil; reacciones sociales.



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## Introduction

In Europe and North America, migratory flows have become a political issue structuring contemporary political divisions (De Wilde *et al.*, 2019). This article seeks to shed light on the construction of this political conflict by examining social reactions to migration in France and Brazil, two countries with very different histories and social structures. In France, as in the rest of Europe, immigration has been constructed as an extremely important social concern by a number of actors, particularly on the far right of the political spectrum (Simonneau; Gattinara, 2019). Since the 1990s, according to Didier Bigo, an equivalence between migration and security issues has tended to become hegemonic, as part of a governmentality based on fear (Bigo, 1998). Governmentality through fear refers to the widespread perception of migration as a security threat, in a situation of broader growing securitisation. In this context, the social treatment of migration is shifting from protecting vulnerable populations to securitising populations that are perceived as dangerous. The social representation of migration is highly distorted, with the proportion of immigrants in France greatly overestimated by a significant proportion of the population, as is the proportion of the population of Muslim origin (Beauchemin, 2019). In addition, the relationship with immigration has a significant ethno-cultural dimension, with populations of non-European origin<sup>3</sup> often equated with the Muslim religion (Brun; Cosquer, 2022). At the European level, immigration has become the main factor explaining the vote for far-right political parties (Arzheimer, 2018). Of course, the apocalyptic vision of those involved in these social reactions to migration is very different from the much more nuanced findings of social science research on migrations, particularly the two "*Trajectoires et Origines*" surveys, the largest studies on the subject to date in France carried out by INSEE<sup>4</sup> (Institut National de la Statistique

et des Études Économiques) and INED (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques) (Pan Ké Shon; Scodellaro, 2016).

In Brazil, the social configuration is very different, with a much lower immigrant rate of around 1.7% of the population (Droulers; Broggio, 2017). Immigration is relatively invisible compared to the major problems of discrimination linked to racism experienced by Brazilian society, particularly in relation to the indigenous and Afro-Brazilian populations. However, the situation seems to be evolving with a change in the composition of migratory flows, which are increasingly coming from Global South countries such as Haiti and Venezuela, sometimes giving rise to negative social reactions (Brésil, 2018). Finally, the daily lives of immigrants are characterised by a series of forms of discrimination, particularly in access to residence permits and foreigners' rights.

The aim of this article is to provide a cross-perspective study of social reactions to migration in these two very different national contexts. To characterise the phenomenon of migration, we will use the INSEE definition, which considers an immigrant to be a person born abroad in a foreign country. This should be understood in the French context, where many repatriates were born French abroad, particularly in Algeria. To reflect the Brazilian context, we will add to the definition of "foreign-born person in a foreign country", "who came freely to the country", in order to differentiate immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the descendants of slaves whose social and demographic importance is a determining factor in the construction of the Brazilian nation. When the term "migrant" is used, rather than immigrant, it will highlight the fact that the person is in the process of migration, and sometimes traveling, as the migration to another country is still in process. The term refugee refers to persons in the process of claiming asylum or having attained refugee status.

The cross-cutting perspectives will be based

<sup>3</sup> In France, most of the population of non-European origin comes from Subsaharian and Northern Africa (3,5 million persons), Asia (1 million persons) and the Americas (0,4 million persons).

<sup>4</sup> INSEE is the institution of reference in France regarding the study of populations. It produces and updates every year the national census.

on a number of elements, including considerations of the history of migration and the socio-demographics of the immigrant populations of the two countries, drawing up a differentiated portrait of migration, before looking at the social treatment of immigrant populations. We will look at the discriminations suffered by immigrant populations, particularly those of non-European origin, before examining negative social reactions to migration, including the existence of moral entrepreneurs intent on portraying migration as a threat to economic and existential security (Simonneau; Gattinara, 2019). Finally, in the context of these various elements of cross-perspective, we will consider the extent to which these migrations should be seen in the context of the construction of certain populations as minorities.

This article is the result of a research collaboration on social reactions to migration developed at the School of Communication, Arts and Design - Famecos - PUCRS in Porto Alegre and funded by the CAPES/PRINT program. Several methodological tools will be used in an attempt to answer these questions. In addition to references to pre-existing research in the field of migration in France and Brazil, this article draws on four distinct sets of data. For the French side, the general data on discrimination is supported by field research produced by the Montpellier Discrimination Observatory, which has produced several studies using mixed methods on the trajectories of young graduates from immigrant backgrounds living in Montpellier's inner-city neighbourhoods, on the segregative effects linked to racism in housing in Montpellier, and on discrimination in the access to benefits and public services through digitalization (Observatoire [...], [202-]).

The second type of data in France is based on the results of researching anti-migrant groups in Calais. In this border town between France and Great Britain, migratory flows provoked violent reactions from anti-migrant groups. These groups are at the intersection of traditional social movements and vigilantism. For these groups, digital communication aimed at their community audiences is a highly effective way of reaching large

audiences on social media, but also of building community audiences, 'tiny publics' to use Gary Fine's words, which can then be mobilised as part of the group's actions. The fieldwork on these groups was carried out using mixed methods, with semi-structured interviews and analysis of the content published on Facebook, making it possible to establish a sociography of these groups (Gardenier, 2018), but also to analyse their digital communication (Gardenier; Monie, 2018).

The research in Brazil is based on the results of exploratory qualitative research into the mobilisations of Porto Alegre's *Forum Permanente dos migrantes* group, a participatory democracy initiative that aims to bring together immigrant communities from different countries (Haiti, Senegal, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, etc.). Using an ethnographic approach, a dozen interviews and a series of participant observations follow the actions and mobilisations of the forum and give the point of view of the forum organisers and community leaders of different nationalities. These elements raise the question of the experience of migrants in southern Brazil, between invisibilisation, the feeling of administrative discrimination and the experience of racism linked to skin colour. This initiative can also be interpreted as a community organising initiative (Talpin; Balazard, 2016), showing both the possibilities and the difficulties of this form of organisation, which aims to involve the members of the group mobilised, albeit with varying degrees of success.

Finally, the question of social reactions to migration, which is emerging in Brazil, will be addressed through an analysis of the content published on X (formerly Twitter) concerning Venezuelan immigrants, particularly around the anti-Venezuelan violence in Pacairama in 2018 in northern Brazil (Brésil, 2018). This content designates these immigrants as undesirable both as immigrants and as ideological enemies, equated by the right and far right with communism, due to the political orientation of Venezuela led by Nicolas Maduro (from whom they are fleeing).

## **Part 1: Social positions and social reaction to migration in France**

### **Historical elements of migration and successive racial categorisations**

From the 19th century onwards, France experienced several waves of migration linked to the industrialisation of the country, against a backdrop of demographic decline following the Napoleonic Wars. Migration from the interior, particularly from the south of the country to the capital, was followed by migration from neighbouring countries such as Belgium and Italy. After the First World War, other nationalities, such as the Poles, formed the battalions of immigrant workers. Other waves were linked to geopolitical events and persecutions, such as Armenians fleeing genocide, European Jews fleeing persecution or Spanish refugees fleeing Spain following the defeat of the Republican camp. After the Second World War, immigration came from the south of Europe, with particularly high levels of Portuguese immigration, and from the countries of the former colonial empire that had become independent, notably the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia). Today, many immigrants come from sub-Saharan Africa, mainly living in the Paris region. Most of these new arrivals worked as unskilled labourers in industry, construction or agriculture (Noiriel, 2018).

These multiple waves of immigration have given rise to numerous social reactions. The different waves are thus racialised. It should be remembered that racial categorisation varies according to period and context. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, racial hierarchies differed in colonies, where the opposition was mainly along white/non-white colour lines, and in the European metropolises, where racial hierarchies were established between European populations according to shifting and contradictory criteria: Southerners versus Northerners (France and Italy), Germanic peoples versus Slavs in Central Europe, racialisation of migrations from Southern Europe (France) or Ireland (Great Britain) (Noiriel, 2012).

Each wave of migration has been subject to a process of racialisation, constructed as biologi-

cally and culturally inferior to the local population. In France, this was the case for southerners, who were presented as "racially degenerate". The term "narbonnoïde", referring to an origin from the capital of the Aude department, even became a violent insult in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then it was the Italians' turn to be the victims of violent racism, the most violent expression of which was the Aigues Mortes massacres in 1893 (Noiriel, 2018). Finally, after the Second World War, the contingents of North African immigrants who arrived after the Second World War fell victim to the same process, losing in the process the "white" status that had been conferred on them by several eminent racist "scientists" (Noiriel, 2012).

After the Second World War, the racial hierarchies legitimised by biological racism were called into question in the context of the struggle for decolonisation, biological racism having been further discredited by the genocides of the Second World War which it had served to legitimise. Condemned by the UN, racism and racial discrimination were banned in France, notably by the 1972 Pleven law (France, 1972). However, this ban on biological racism did not signal the end of the racialisation of immigrant populations, but rather its transformation. Promoters of racism, notably the New Right, theorised about a new form of racism, based not on supposed biological inequalities, but on cultural differences. Thus, in this recomposition of racism, the differences between peoples would be above all cultural, with cultures being supposedly too far apart to be compatible. In the far right, this recomposition of racism has resulted in a shift from ethno-nationalism to what Graham Macklin calls civic nationalism (Ashe *et al.*, 2021). In the case of France, the process of social reaction to immigrant populations now revolves around the rejection of Islam, to which immigrants from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa are assimilated (Brun; Cosquer, 2022), but its scope extends far beyond the political field of the far right.

### a. Socio-demographic characteristics of contemporary migration

In 2022, 10.3% of the French population is made of immigrants (Population [...], 2024), almost 7 million people. Almost a third of immigrants are of European origin (32.4%), almost half are from Africa (Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa) (48.2% of the immigrant population) and the rest are from Asia, America and Oceania. Non-European immigrants therefore make up 67.6% of the immigrant population, or just over 4.7 million people (L'essentiel, 2025). Furthermore, are concentrated in the urban areas of France's ten largest cities: the proportion of non-European immigrants ranges from 12.5% (Toulouse) to 23.2% (Paris) of the population of these metropolises, i.e. between 1.8 and 3.36 times higher than the national average. The "Trajectoires et origines" survey highlighted some of the geographical and economic characteristics of immigrants of non-European origin. Combining the concepts of income deciles and type of housing, the researchers showed that non-European immigrants can be divided into two groups: immigrants with intermediate income levels (income deciles 4 and 5) who live in urban neighbourhoods with a mixed population in terms of origin (where immigrants are a minority). The second category is that of immigrants in the lowest incomes groups (deciles 8 and 9) who are concentrated in segregated areas, characterised by both high levels of poverty and a population predominantly of non-European immigrant origin (Pan Ké Shon; Scodellaro, 2016). It should be noted that in collective representations, immigrants are assimilated to segregated areas such as sensitive neighbourhoods and housing estates, whereas the group of immigrants who are better integrated economically and whose housing is more spread out within the urban area is, on the contrary, invisible.

In terms of employment, a recent publication by INSEE shows that the proportion of jobs held by immigrants is extremely high in the Paris region, accounting for almost 22% of total employment, or 1.25 million people. Immigrants are concentrated in certain areas, in particular unskilled jobs in

the service sector (catering, personal assistance, cleaning, security) as well as in construction and public works, and to a certain extent in industry. These jobs are also gendered, with immigrant women concentrated in cleaning, personal assistance and child care, while immigrant men are construction workers, delivery drivers, security workers, industrial cleaners, caterers and platform workers (Herbet; Jacquesson, 2022).

To this extent, it is possible to say that the group of immigrants, and above all non-European immigrants, overlaps to a large extent with the most precarious fractions of the working classes, unlike the established fractions of the working classes, which are less affected by immigration. These fractions are characterised by the occupation of unskilled jobs in the market and service sectors, which are highly precarious (Abdelnour, 2012). These jobs are also to some extent excluded from the guarantees of the salaried society as described by Robert Castel, characterised by guaranteed employment and the services associated with salaried employment (Castel, 1999). Lastly, the form of employment of these populations more often takes the form of non-conventional forms of employment, with work in the form of sole proprietorship or self-entrepreneurship, particularly in connection with the activities of platform capitalism, which recruits many employees from among the immigrant populations in the priority neighbourhoods of the metropolises. To this extent, and as shown by INSEE research on the Paris region, the immigrant group is characterised by a situation in which they predominantly occupy unskilled and insecure jobs in modern metropolises, and are also to a certain extent indispensable to the economic development of these areas, which today concentrate the economic dynamism of the French territory (Herbet; Jacquesson, 2022).

However, it is important to qualify this statement: while the majority of immigrants fall into this social group, a large proportion of the immigrant population or those of immigrant origin are trying to escape this situation and are seeking a better economic situation, in particular by acquiring



higher education qualifications for the children of immigrants, with the aim of changing their situation both in terms of geographical location (moving from segregated neighbourhoods to mixed urban areas) and salary sector (moving into intermediate professions, skilled blue-collar jobs, or even the executive and higher intellectual professions group). Proof of this is the growing number of children of immigrants who obtain diplomas and go on to hold skilled jobs, despite the discrimination they have suffered. The rate of increase in higher education qualifications from one generation of immigrants to the next is much higher than that of the majority population (Barasz; Furic; Galtier, 2023). But the existence of this counter-trend is not yet enough to counter the fact that the majority of the immigrant population is assigned to these jobs. Moreover, while migration, far from being invisible, crystallises the fears of a large part of the population, the category of immigrants who have achieved a stable situation is to a large extent stable (Beaud; Confavreux; Lindgaard, 2008), whereas according to the *Trajectoire and origines* survey, the group of poor immigrants living in segregated areas is as numerous as the group of immigrants with average incomes living in mixed urban areas (Beauchemin; Ichou; Simon, 2023).

## **b. Migration and discrimination**

Even today, despite the fact that discrimination is prohibited by law and that a series of measures have been put in place to prevent it (public anti-discrimination policies, Human Rights Defenders), the experiences and life paths of people from immigrant backgrounds, particularly from outside Europe, continue to be shaped by situations of discrimination, as shown by the "Trajectoires et Origines" studies (Beauchemin; Ichou; Simon, 2023) and the collective research published in *L'épreuve de la discrimination* (Talpin *et al.*, 2021).

This discrimination can be seen first and foremost in the field of housing. Numerous studies show the existence of discrimination linked to origin in the field of private housing, with many

landlords rejecting applications from applicants with African-sounding names, while, on the contrary, "sleep merchants" take advantage of the vulnerability of the most vulnerable immigrant populations to rent them housing in very poor conditions (Kirszbaum, 2018). Conversely, although non-European immigrants wait longer to obtain social housing, on average 5 years compared with 3 years for people of no migratory origin, they remain over-represented in social housing, 40% compared with 12% for the rest of the population (Bonnal; Boumahdi; Favard, 2013). This discrimination partly explains the concentration of some immigrants in certain areas of towns and cities and the creation of the segregated urban areas mentioned above.

This discrimination also manifests itself in the field of employment, with most research based on *test methods* showing that people of non-European immigrant origin have a lower chance of obtaining job interviews and of succeeding in them, setting up a form of "national protectionism" that does not say its name, and echoes the national preference advocated in particular by the Rassemblement National (Girard, 2017). Here again, although not the only factor, this discrimination is thought to be one of the factors explaining the nature of the jobs held by immigrants. For women, this issue crystallises around the wearing of the headscarf, which is frequently cited as a reason for discrimination (Talpin *et al.*, 2021). However, it is important to qualify this statement by noting that this discrimination is more of a social filter than a watertight barrier, in the sense that it makes access to certain jobs more difficult without totally preventing social mobility, unlike rigid segregation. The children of immigrants with higher education have more difficult career paths, marked by lower pay and greater job insecurity, caused by discrimination (Calmand; Couppié; Herard, 2018), but they nevertheless manage to achieve upward social mobility in relation to their parents' professions, enabling some of the children of immigrants to enter the middle and upper management and intellectual professions despite discrimination (Gardenier, 2024).

Finally, research shows that foreigners are discriminated against in their access to rights, in particular through dematerialised procedures for applying for residence permits. The *Défenseur des droits* and many associations have denounced these as forms of discrimination (Rapport, 2022). Lastly, a number of studies have shown that certain groups from immigrant backgrounds are subject to police profiling, i.e. they are constructed as particularly criminogenic sections of the population subject to specific security treatment, as evidenced in particular in the case of identity checks based on facial characteristics (Dufour; Dupuis-Déri, 2022). While these forms of discrimination cannot sum up the entire experience of immigrant populations in France, they nonetheless have an impact on the life trajectories and experiences of immigrants.

### c. Social reactions to migration

Finally, the issue of migration is generating major social reactions in France, with numerous debates and controversies. Not all of these reactions are negative. While a significant proportion of public opinion has a strongly negative view of immigrant populations, acceptance of immigrants is still on the increase according to various opinion polls, showing the existence of a social conflict around the issue rather than a unanimous reaction of rejection (Dufour; Dupuis-Déri, 2022), with the existence of a whole sector of associations and activists working to support and assist immigrants and refugees (Pette, 2023).

On the other hand, a whole series of actors are acting as moral entrepreneurs, referring to migrations as a form of threat and danger (Simonneau; Gattinara, 2019). It should also be noted that these framings are part of a more global context of governmentality through fear and law and order ideology and the assimilation of migration to a security issue, as highlighted by Didier Bigo in a more general social context of securitisation of social issues that previously fell within the scope of social policies (Bigo, 1998).

More than the major electoral parties, it is specific actors who are the entrepreneurs of causes

that are the reaction to migration: groups aiming to produce "alternative" knowledge and above all social movements using vigilantism. Indeed, the staging of patrols and border surveillance operations seems essential to the political construction of these movements. This enables anti-migrants to frame migration not as a matter of helping vulnerable people, but as a reaction to a danger to the national community. What we call performative vigilantism allows the production of an image that makes migratory flows visible and attempts to offer a counter-narrative to the discourse advocating the welcoming of migrants. The use of vigilantism thus becomes a powerful element in the repertoire of action of the far right, whose discourse, according to Rasmussen, merges with image, following the example of Donald Trump's use of social media (Rasmussen, 2019).

## Part 2: Social positions and social reaction to migration in Brazil France

### a. History of migration

The history of immigration in Brazil is very different. The main settlement dynamic in Brazil after the Portuguese took control was that of colonisation based on the forced mass displacement of African populations as part of a plantation-based economy relying on slavery, with sugar cane and coffee plantations and mining as the main activities. Slavery carried such weight in Brazilian society that the Brazilian Empire was both the country that saw the largest number of slaves traded (between 3.5 and 4 million) (Saillant; Araujo, 2007) and the last country to abolish slavery in 1888 (Bihr, 2018). Moreover, the ethnoracial tensions that still run through Brazilian society today concern indigenous peoples and the descendants of slaves rather than migratory processes (Ribeiro, 2019).

On the other hand, the Brazilian state encouraged the migration of European settlers in order to change the population and "whiten the country". More than ten million enslaved Africans arrived in various parts of the Americas between the 16th and 19th centuries. Brazil accounted for 46% of

this number, receiving the largest number of enslaved Africans in the world (Gomes; Gomes, 2023). In the 19th century, the debate about the end of slavery began cautiously. The ideas in favor of abolition converged on two points: slavery was against the foundations of religion (Christian) and reason (Enlightenment). Hofbauer (2006) states that the idea of an immediate end to slavery was rejected, as there was great concern about the continuity of agricultural production. The idea of reducing the slave population was linked to a project to encourage immigration, preferably European: white immigrants were supposed to replace black slaves on plantations and subsequently accelerate the process of establishing the first industries in the country's urban centers.

It could be expected that in a land like Brazil – considered extremely healthy and Christian by definition – the transformation of colors towards white would only be a matter of time, especially if there were marriages between individuals with white skin color and others with black skin color. Thus, the idea of whitening encouraged the belief that future generations could overcome the condition of “inferiority” (Hofbauer, 2006, p. 173, our translation)<sup>5</sup>.

Since the colonial period, the main groups of immigrants have been Italians, Portuguese, Spanish and Germans, with emphasis on Italians who, between 1870 and 1920, represented 42% of the total number of immigrants. Other nationalities were also part of the country's migration history. Brazil has the largest Japanese community outside Japan, especially in São Paulo. It also has the third largest community of Polish descendants in the world, mainly in the states of Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul.

However, while representations of these migrations remain vivid, they no longer correspond to contemporary migratory flows, as population movements from Europe to Brazil have dried up. On the other hand, contemporary migrations come from the Global South: other South American countries (Chile, Bolivia), African countries (Angola,

Senegal, etc.), Caribbean countries (Cuba, Haiti) and above all Venezuela. The numerical importance of migration is much lower than in France: 1.7% of the population in 2022 compared with 10.3% in France, but remains significant given the size of the Brazilian population: 3.7 million people. Nevertheless, contemporary immigration tends to take forms similar to those of immigration to Europe, and it is worth considering whether a change in the social relationship towards migration might not be at work in Brazil, bringing Brazilian society closer to French society. Currently, according to the Migration Report (Brasil [...], 2025), published by the National Secretariat of Justice (Senajus), Brazil has 1,713,123 migrants (2024 data), more than 60 thousand refugees, and more than 60 thousand applications under analysis. Most of the requests for recognition of refugee status are from Venezuela and Cuba.

## **b. Migration and discrimination**

We carried out ethnographic research with the Porto Alegre Permanent Forum on Migration, a participatory democracy initiative for migrants in Porto Alegre, grouped together at the federal level in COMIGRAR (National Conference on Migration). The research consisted of attending meetings of the forum's steering committee, which we joined as a sociologist specialising in the subject, taking part in various events organised by the forum, and conducting semi-directive interviews with migrants, each representing different communities (Haitian, Senegalese, Bolivian, Venezuelan). We also note that the various community leaders with whom we spoke all had achieved a degree of economic stability: one is a project manager in the Porto Alegre city employment service, another is a specialist educator in an association funded by the city, and yet another is an electrician in a construction and public works company. Several salient features emerge.

The first factor identified by respondents was

<sup>5</sup> Podia-se esperar que numa terra como o Brasil – considerada extremamente salubre e cristã por definição – a transformação das cores em direção ao branco seria apenas uma questão de tempo, sobretudo se houvesse casamentos entre indivíduos de cor de pele branca com outros de cor de pele negra. Assim, a ideia do branqueamento incentivava a crença de que futuras gerações pudessem superar a condição de “inferioridade”.



invisibility. Forum members feel invisible in the eyes of Brazilian society, and that their issues are not sufficiently recognised by the various levels of government: municipal, state and federal. They point to a political indifference towards the difficulties and discrimination experienced by these groups. The stated aim of the migrants' forum is to obtain recognition for the various migrant communities, in particular by obtaining the right to vote in certain elections, for example at state and municipal level. This diagnosis is part of what Axel Honneth calls the struggles for recognition (Honneth, 1995). By 'struggle for recognition', we mean social movements that aim to raise the profile of, and gain recognition for, groups that they perceive as marginalized and invisible. For Fraser, this dimension is essentially symbolic, seeking to incorporate the group into institutions and valorize its social representations. She contrasts this with redistributive struggles, where the issue is the distribution of economic resources, either directly within the productive apparatus or through state redistribution (Fraser, 1995). Here, most of the demands fall within the field of recognition.

A second aspect of the Porto Alegre Migrants Forum's demands concerns what is perceived as administrative discrimination: for immigrants, it is very difficult to obtain papers allowing them to reside. While there are no problems of illegality for immigrants similar to the French situation, it is rather a situation of discriminatory dysfunction that is denounced by the immigrants. Each application for papers takes a very long time, if it is successful at all. Most Latin American immigrants (Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, Venezuela) wait a very long time for their papers and have to deal with requests for documents that are perceived as absurd, but manage to obtain their residence permits and, for some, naturalisation, after long years of waiting. On the other hand, Senegalese and African immigrants have an even harder time getting their papers, which they say makes it very difficult for them to become legal. One community leader reported that members of his community perceived particularly discriminatory

behaviour on the part of certain Federal Police officers in charge of immigration, to such an extent that a petition was drawn up and submitted to the Federal Police, leading to the change of service of certain officers. Finally, some indigenous Venezuelans receive no response to their requests for papers, with agents declaring them lost with each request and new application. The only community to report no problems is that of Haitian refugees.

In addition, immigrants with black skin report experiencing discriminatory behaviour, which is not linked to their immigrant origin, but rather to their assimilation into the black Brazilian population. They explain that they experience all sorts of vexations and discrimination. One respondent described a situation that particularly affected him. While taking public transport (train) to work, he noticed that most passengers refused to sit next to him because of his skin colour, preferring to stand rather than sit next to a black person (in Rio Grande do Sul, the majority of the population considers itself to be white). He said that he felt very bad about this situation and bought a car as soon as the situation allowed in order to avoid living such discriminatory experience every day, even though public transport costs him less. Respondents also reported discrimination based on skin colour in their search for accommodation and, above all, at work. They said that they were paid less than their white colleagues, and explained this as caused by discrimination linked to their skin colour.

### **c. Migration, racial categorisation, social reactions to migration**

Finally, it can be noted that the invisibilization observed by the permanent migrants' forum is not the case of Venezuelan immigrants. It would appear that they are subject to negative social reactions similar to those that can be identified in Europe. In 2018, in the Amazonian town of Paracaima, riots targeted Venezuelans as a group social after a crime committed by a person of Venezuelan origin (Brésil, 2018). Venezuelan immigrants are thus emerging as a target for certain

politicians and far-right activists, particularly on social networks, which has led us to analyze the content published on the microblog X (formerly Twitter) about Venezuelan immigrants between August 1 and September 30, 2018, which preceded and followed the most high-profile attacks in the media on August 18, 2018.

Pacaraima, 215 km from Boa Vista, the capital of the state of Roraima, is the main gateway for Venezuelans to enter Brazil. On August 17, a Brazilian convenience store owner was robbed and assaulted by a Venezuelan. He required medical attention at the local hospital. Images of the victim entering the hospital circulated on social media.

**Image 1** – Publication<sup>6</sup> about a convenience store owner attacked by Venezuelans



**Source:** Morais (2018).

In the Instagram post above, it is highlighted that the convenience store owner from Pacaraima was not only robbed by immigrants from Venezuela but also violently beaten, showing the severity of the attack that resulted in hospitalization. In retaliation for the attack on the mini market owner, residents of Pacaraima organized themselves through social media and attacked

Venezuelan camps. The sites were destroyed and burned, and the immigrants were sent away from the city. The violence was motivated by the spread of misinformation, as we can see in the two Instagram posts below. In the case of the convenience store owner who was attacked, it was reported that he had been the victim of felony murder, which was false.

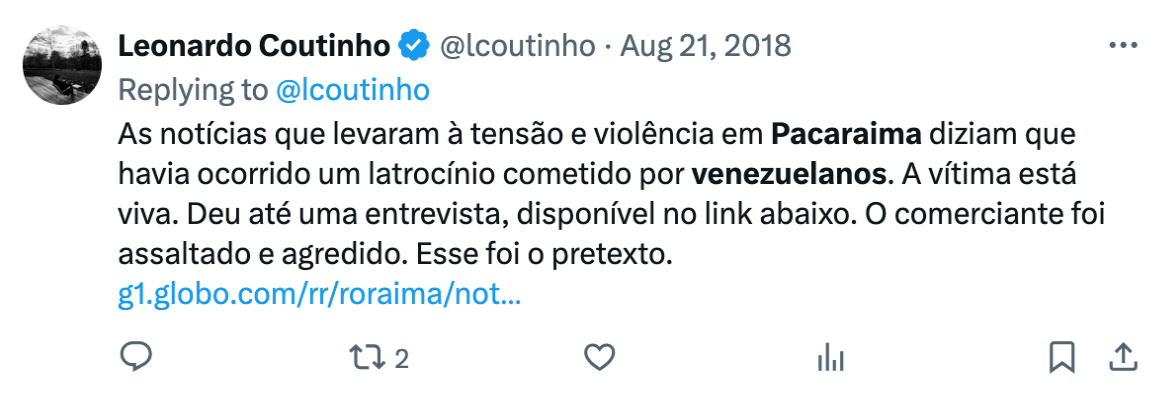
<sup>6</sup> Text of the post on X (our translation): "@TarcisoRenova - The convenience store owner from Pacaraima was not only robbed by immigrants from Venezuela, but also violently beaten inside the commercial establishment, where he also lives. The victim was taken to the General Hospital of Roraima (HGR)".

**Image 2** – Misinformation spread by profile on social network X stating<sup>7</sup> that the mini market owner was killed by Venezuelans



**Source:** Isto É Rondônia (2018).

**Image 3** – Publication<sup>8</sup> about the disinformation that was circulating before the attacks on Venezuelans



**Source:** Coutinho (2018).

Before the incidents, around 1,500 migrants lived in the city, representing 10% of the local po-

pulation. After the attacks, 1,200 people crossed the border back and returned to Venezuela. Some

<sup>7</sup> Text of the post on X (our translation): "@istoerondonia – War on the border: Venezuelans kill an elderly man and the population of Paracaima expels everyone and sets fire to their belongings".

<sup>8</sup> Text of the post on X (our translation): "@lcoutinho – The news that led to the tension and violence in Paracaima said that there had been a felony murder committed by Venezuelans. The victim is alive. He even gave an interview, available at the link below. The mini market owner was robbed and assaulted. That was the allegation".

comments highlighted the consequences of migration without planning and due reception. Other publications framed the Venezuelans as criminals who had entered Brazil to commit crimes, as we can see in the Instagram post below.

Text of the post on X: @MarcoSantosD – Rede Globo does not show the wave of violence in Paracaima, neighboring municipalities, and in the capital Boa Vista, which tripled due to the disorderly immigration of Venezuelan criminals, who entered Brazil only to steal, rob stores, homes and people with extreme cruelty. Rede Globo is the largest open television channel in Brazil (Santos, 2018, our translation).

**Image 4** – Brazilian accuse Venezuelans of being criminals and blame the mainstream media for hiding the facts from the population



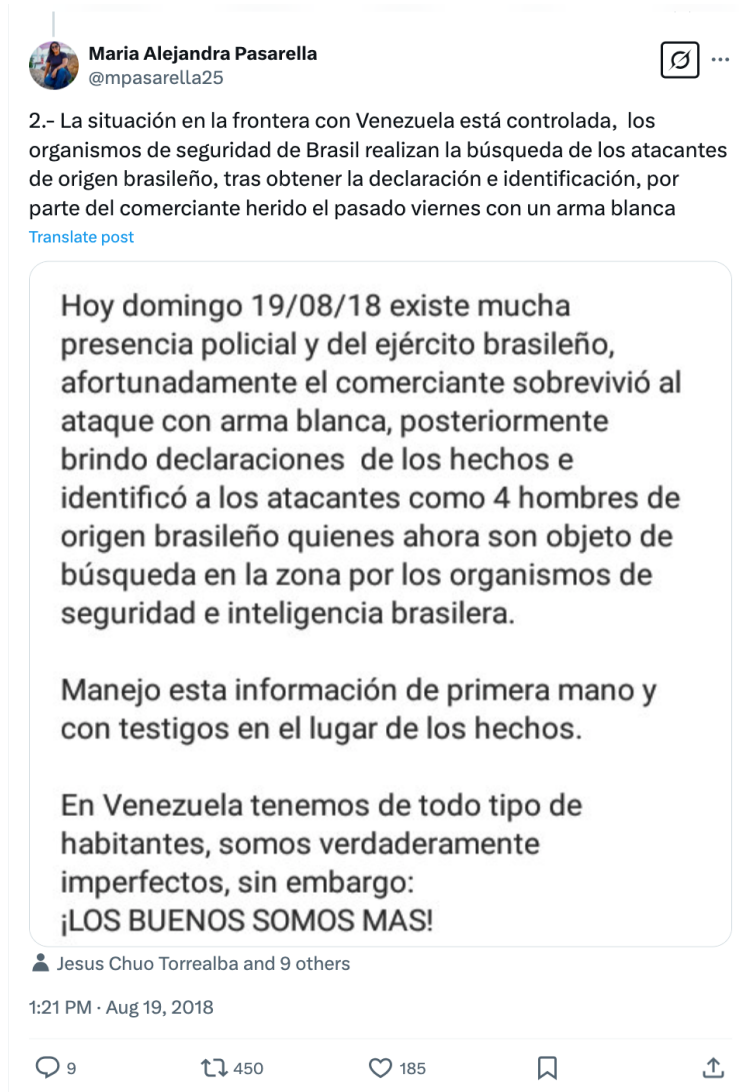
**Source:** Santos (2018).

On the other hand, some of the publications supported the Venezuelan people and argued that not all immigrants were criminals, such as this publication posted by a supposed Venezuelan journalist, which also presents misinformation by attributing the attacks to Brazilians.

A situação na fronteira com a Venezuela está controlada. Os órgãos de segurança no Brasil realizam buscas aos agressores de origem brasileira, depois de obter a declaração e identificação, por parte do comerciante ferido na última sexta-feira com uma arma branca (...) Dou essa informação em primeira mão com testemunhas no local dos fatos. Na Venezuela, temos todos os tipos de habitantes, somos verdadeiramente imperfeitos, no entanto: Há

mais de nós, pessoas boas! (Pasarella, 2018, our translation).<sup>9</sup>

**Image 5** – Publication in defense of Venezuelans, but spreading misinformation



**Source:** Pasarella (2018).

The economic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, exacerbated by US sanctions, has driven the migration of citizens to Brazil, especially in Paracaima, because they can access the territory by land. When they enter the country seeking support and opportunities, they end up finding it difficult to survive in a structure that cannot support the number of migrants entering the

country.

Venezuelans fleeing to Brazil, for the most part, cross the border city of Paracaima by bus after a journey of one day or two and proceed to Boa Vista, the capital of the state of Roraima in northwestern Brazil, or to other cities in the Brazilian Amazon. Due to inadequate provision of public infrastructure and insufficient opportunities in the local job market for the incoming population, these cities have experienced a

<sup>9</sup> Text of the post on X: "@mpasarella25 – The situation on the border with Venezuela is under control. Security agencies in Brazil are searching for the attackers of Brazilian origin, after obtaining the statement and identification of the mini market owner who was injured last friday with a sharp weapon. I give this information first-hand from witnesses at the scene of the events. In Venezuela, we have all types of inhabitants, we are truly imperfect, however: There are more of us, good people!".



significant transformation in their spaces as well as in the ordinary lives of their inhabitants (Alencar, 2020, p. 507).

Social problems such as homelessness, occupation of public spaces, increased prostitution, hospital overcrowding, and open xenophobia and conflicts between residents and newcomers have become highly visible in Pacaraima and Boa Vista (Alencar, 2020). In addition to these factors, far-right groups accuse Venezuelans of increasing crime rates in the region, fostering xenophobia,

which is reflected in the publications found on the X platform. In the post below, a user of the X platform relates the xenophobia that occurred in Brazil to Nazism in Germany. Text of the post on X (Sousa, 2018, our translation): "@Inez\_Sousa - The year is 2018, residents of the city of Pacaraima (Roraima) burn belongings of Venezuelan immigrants in the middle of the street! Hate speech and xenophobia in the 21st century. In the 1930s, in Germany, Nazism was established similarly!"

**Image 6** – Publication linking attacks on Venezuelans to hate speech and xenophobia practiced during the Nazi period in World War II



**Inez Sousa** |  
@Inez\_Sousa



O ano é 2018, moradores da cidade de Pacaraima (Roraima) queimam pertences de imigrantes venezuelanos no meio da rua!

Discurso de ódio e xenofobia em pleno século XXI.

Na década de 30, na Alemanha, de forma parecida instalava-se o nazismo!

[#Xenofobia](#) [#SenhorPresidente](#) [#Paz](#)

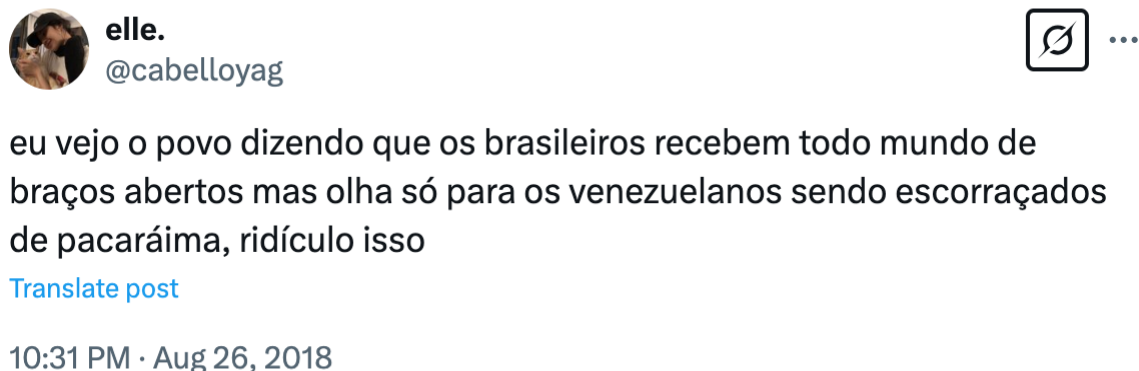
4:51 PM · Aug 20, 2018

**Source:** Sousa (2018).

Some of the publications present a critical view of the case and reflect on the myth of racial democracy and the cordial man (Buarque de Holanda, 2015), a concept coined by historian and sociologist Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, who describes cordiality as a characteristic of the Brazilian people. The author associates characteristics such as generosity and hospitality with Brazi-

lians, understanding themselves as a collective and being motivated by affection. In the case of Pacaraima, we see a people driven by hatred and intolerance. Text of the post on X (Elle, 2018, our translation): "@cabelloyag – I see people saying that Brazilians welcome everyone with open arms, but just look at the Venezuelans being chased away from Pacaraima, it's ridiculous."

**Image 7** – Publication questioning the cordial man narrative associated with Brazilians



**Source:** Elle (2018).

In response to the attacks, the federal government (Operação [...], [20--]) created "Operação Acolhida" to assist Venezuelan refugees and migrants. The effort consists of the voluntary and free relocation of these vulnerable people from the municipalities of Roraima to other cities in Brazil. The effort involves the federal government, states, municipalities, the Armed Forces, judicial bodies, international organizations, and more than 100 civil society organizations. Brazil registered (Nascimento, 2025) the arrival of 194,331 migrants in 2024. Venezuelans lead the list of those sheltered, with 94,726 people received by Operation Acolhida.

Based on the analysis of the content of the posts on X, it is possible to infer that with the rise of the far right in the world and Brazil, a network of disinformation distribution was created that generated hatred and violence against Venezuelans. The lack of support and structure during the year of the attacks also fueled xenophobia. Despite this, some of the comments expressed concern about the intolerance of the Brazilian people and the lack of reliable information that contributed to the collective violence and aggression suffered by Venezuelans.

### Part 3 & conclusion: Points of comparison

In conclusion, negative social reactions to migration in France take place in a very specific context. Immigrants, especially those from outside Europe, constitute a significant minority: 4.7 million immigrants of non-European origin, or almost 7% of the French population. The vast majority of these people are concentrated in the major metropolitan areas and, far from being unproductive, they make a significant contribution to the labor force in these cities, particularly in the Paris region. Part of the immigrant group occupies the lowest-paid jobs in industry and services, often with a precarious status: entrepreneurship, precarious work, including work for platforms.

Historically, each wave of immigrant populations has been subject to a process of racialisation that only ceases with the arrival of a more recent population (southern populations, Italians, North Africans, etc.). This process manifests itself in a number of forms of discrimination that help to define the social position of immigrant populations. This discrimination is particularly evident in the fields of employment and housing, where it contributes to the allocation of immigrant populations to certain sectors of activity and to segregated urban areas. However, it is not possible to reduce the trajectories of immigrant populations to these situations. Despite the existence of these

discriminations, some immigrants escape them and manage to acquire more advantageous qualifications and positions.

Many actors contribute to the negative framing of migration. The anti-migrant groups mobilising in Calais are an example of that. Their vigilantism is not so much aimed at securing the borders of the Schengen area as at creating a spectacle of vigilance that presents migrant populations as belonging to the field of security and requiring appropriate treatment by the authorities, rather than as belonging to the category of vulnerable populations. In this sense, video activism makes it possible to produce images that frame migratory situations between France and Britain in opposition to social reality.

First, the numbers of immigrants are exaggerated. In terms of social representations, the group of immigrants with average incomes is underrepresented, while the group of non-European immigrants living in precarious conditions in segregated areas is overrepresented and burdened with numerous negative representations. These portray immigrant populations as criminogenic and associated with crime. Despite their importance in various employment sectors, immigrant populations are portrayed as unproductive, which would make them a burden on the various mechanisms of the welfare state. The most radical actors in these negative social reactions even present the presence of immigrant populations as a 'replacement' of the European population by a 'globalist' conspiracy, which would constitute an existential threat. While there is no factual basis for this narrative, its extraordinary circulation, especially via social media, demonstrates the capacity of this type of narrative to resonate with the imaginary of sections of the population.

Differently from French reality, in Brazil, the population faces prejudice and discrimination resulting from colonization, which led to the enslavement of Africans in the country and the extermination of the indigenous peoples. This fact gave rise to social inequality that marginalized the black and indigenous peoples, who still struggle to this day to reach positions of power. European

immigration was encouraged in the country to whiten the population after the end of slavery. In recent decades, economic and humanitarian crises have driven migration mainly of inhabitants of Latin American countries, especially Venezuelans who share a border with the country. The intense migratory flow of Venezuelans in 2018, without adequate planning and support from the Brazilian government, combined with the growing influence of the extreme right and the spread of misinformation, generated a wave of violence in the city of Pacaraima.

By analyzing publications on social network X, it was possible to identify false content that generated hatred against Venezuelans. The mainstream media was discredited on social media. Part of the population preferred to believe the misinformation circulating on social media rather than the reports published by the press. Far-right politicians have fostered hate speech and xenophobia, encouraging violent acts. On the other hand, some publications presented a critical view of the events and recognized the intolerance practiced by the Brazilian people.

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*Os textos deste artigo foram revisados pela Texto Certo Assessoria Linguística e submetidos para validação dos autores antes da publicação.*