International Institute of Social Studies

Endless Crossings
Mapping border-crossing journeys from Venezuela through Brazilian *Acolhida* operation's boundaries

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CONARE	*Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados* (National Refugee Committee)
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 19
ENCOVI	*Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida* (National Survey on Living Conditions)
ID	Identity Document
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
R4V	Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform
SUS	*Sistema Único de Saúde* (Unified Healthcare System)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Abstract

This research paper is an exploration of the borders and boundaries put in place by the Brazilian *Acolhida* operation as mapped out by those who have traversed them coming from Venezuela. Hegemonic narratives put forth by the media and governmental vehicles have praised the government's initiative, yet, fairly little work has taken into consideration the ways in which it affects Venezuelan migrants and refugees attempting and managing to make their way into the country. This paper dissects the places where these frontiers were encountered and the ways in which they were experienced by theoretically grounding the discussions on critical cartography, immigration governmentality and migration and border studies. To achieve this, this research's collaborators and I make use of autoethnographic mapping, through which stories are drawn onto paper and narrated through words, going over paths taken from various parts of Venezuela all the way to Recife, Pernambuco. Mapping brings to the forefront how border-crossing is a highly heterogenous experience, greatly based on where one is positioned within power structures, allowing refugees to either traverse or be held back at the operation's frontiers. *Acolhida's* institutional arrangement, multidimensional background, and bordering practices have generated a framework that this research's cartographers have experienced at diversely located borders and boundaries. These definitions are found to eventually conflate, accounting for their entanglement within the operation's workings. Finally, mapping also sheds light on their shapeshifting qualities, and the dynamic and agentic ways through which refugees perform, adapt or contest them.

Relevance to Development Studies

The nexus in between development and migration has been looked at from various perspectives. Some that are at the forefront of current debates are, for one, that opening the frontiers to migrants and refugees might hinder development, and, in opposition, that it might actually boost the economy. This study I present here is specifically about an operation put in place by the Brazilian government, *Operação Acolhida*, which softened territorial frontiers refugees crossing over from Venezuelan lands. *Acolhida* does not only rely on national funding, as it is also financed by a US American development agency, and several international agencies and NGOs. My contribution does not wish to analyse the results of the intensified numbers of border-crossings for the country of arrival, rather, I dive into how the operation is experienced by those traversing its boundaries. This research goes over how government, agencies and NGOs exercise control over borders and boundaries, and how border-crossers interact with them within a development context. With this, I wish to "move outwards" (Raghuram 2009: 113), reframing this analysis to critically challenge the narrative of border-crossings as impediments/facilitators of development and focusing on those at the centre of the imposed frontiers: border crossers.

Keywords
Borders, boundaries, bordering practices, migration, mapping, Venezuela, Brazil.

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1   What is this research about?

On the morning of the 17th of December of 2018, a group of 117 Venezuelan refugees arrived at the Castro Pinto airport, in Recife. Within this group were Irene, Carolina, Fernando and Carmen[1]. Their border-crossing timelines diverge, but all of their paths have been continuously steered and intersected by a governmental operation but in place by the Brazilian administration, *Operação Acolhida*. It has the intents of supervising, managing and controlling Venezuelan migration into the country, and receiving and settling Venezuelans all throughout its territory. Irene, Carolina, Fernando and Carmen have mapped their journeys from their previous homes to their current ones, and their stories have traversed mine beginning August of 2020. This research paper is that which has been produced at this crossing: an exploration of the borders and boundaries put in place by this operation as *cartographed* by those who have overstepped the Brazilian border and as gathered by another border-crossing party: myself.

In Portuguese, *Acolhida* is an affectionate word that has no one literal translation to English, but it can be said to mean "welcoming", "hosting" or, if removed from its warmth, "reception". By the beginning of 2020, the *Acolhida* operation was being publicly been applauded by the UNHCR for being Latin-America's leading state in the recognition of Venezuelan's refugee status requests (UNHCR 2020a). Not only that, but media coverage in the region I call home has contradicted the prevailing global pattern of xenophobic reactions against migration: their arrival was televised and celebrated, while the government's relocation programme appraised. Looking at the operation's portrayal in the media, it appears as if the internal boundaries of Venezuelan migration – many of them imposed and mediated by the government's policies – are still blind spots. These blind spots, however, are undoubtedly not as unclear for those who have and are currently experiencing them. In that sense, this research has focused on the experience of borders and boundaries throughout journeys that traversed the path that was laid out by the *Acolhida* operation – learning specifically about how, where and for whom these barriers have emerged.

Now, if the geographies mentioned here didn't already give it away, surely the operation's title highlights the fact that this is no south-to-north migration account. Both countries' location and common histories interlace in ways that make these border-crossing stories possibly diametrically diverge from the ones being told by those seeking refuge in the so-called global north. Still, in this account, the territorial line in between countries is monitored and the porosity of the border controlled by a governmental operation which heavily relies on humanitarian aid. Despite its poetic title, *Operação Acolhida* screens who gets to be sheltered, relocated, and even employed, implying that there is a logic behind the inclusion/exclusion pattern. The process is made out of diverse stages and can't be summarised by the mere act of conceding legal residence. Border-crossers tangent the states' control apparatus in different moments and on different levels: geographically, through borders, and socially, through boundaries. In the words of Fassin (2011: 215), "borders are external territorial frontiers and boundaries are internal social categorisations", which jointly attempt (and very often succeed)

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[1] Considering the current political climate in Brazil and the ways in which this research traverses relating topics, with the participants' approval, I have decided not to disclose their real names for safety reasons.

to shape the journeys of those who travel towards new places to settle. "Linking borders and boundaries, therefore, inscribes politics and the state in the question of immigration" (Ibid 2011: 215).

Considering that the border between Brazil and Venezuela remained relatively open previously to the pandemic, this research aims to contribute to understanding of the boundaries mobile peoples experience beyond the geographical border, especially in the context of migration within the global south. Its main question is: *Where do Venezuelans living in Brazil experience borders and boundaries engendered by Operação Acolhida's framework?* In line with the understanding that a place is not only geographical but also a space in time and moment in memory, I ask '*where*' referring to all possible places that that barriers might have been encountered. Searching for those places, the following chapters have been produced by a collaborative investigation on the *Acolhida* operation, to which five Venezuelans have contributed to: four who have been formally brought to Pernambuco through the operation's relocation programme, and one who has relocated by his own means prior to the programme's creation, and who now works in its operationalisation. This research paper will theorise on our discussions regarding: (a) *the explicit institutional arrangement and non-explicit multidimensional background and workings of the Acolhida operation's framework and enforcement*; (b) *the Acolhida operation's bordering practices and how they impact Venezuelans' journeys throughout Brazilian territory; and* (c) *the ways in which Venezuelans intersected by the Acolhida operation perform, adapt, contest and resist the boundaries it creates in their journeys throughout Brazil.*

This research has been steered by the experiences its participants have *cartographed* onto paper and put into words throughout our engagements, and their directions have guided my positioning regarding the following debates. In this paper, I present six chapters which are a nudge in the direction of further contributing to a multidimensional understanding of borders and boundaries. I have made my way to these discussions beginning by going over the methodological path I have taken when looking into borders and boundaries in this context. Then, I continue by looking into the very creation and meanings behind borders and boundaries. Subsequently, I dive into the historical context of the relation between Brazil and Venezuela, the creation of the *Acolhida* operation, and how its framework translates to enforcement on the ground. The following chapter goes over the bordering practices that bound the cartographer's journeys even after the arrival at their current destinations, and the ways in which they have been traversed by this research's cartographers. I conclude with final analyses and reflections.

1.2 Finding a pathway

Methodology

The journey of Venezuelans who have been hosted by the *Acolhida* operation crosses, circumvents, undermines, but also is taken to a halt by several borders and boundaries spread across time and space. To attempt to reach a wholehearted understanding of these dimensions and the relation between them in both their geographical and social senses, I have grounded my theoretical framework on different aspects of critical cartography (Mekdjian and Moreau 2016, Mekdjian and Szary 2018; Halder and Michel 2018), immigration governmentality (Fassin 2011), and, especially migration and border studies (Anderson et al 2009, Carastathis 2018, Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2018, Koca 2019, Green 2010). In building this research I have drawn from several methodologies that bring to the forefront the importance of "non-verbal languages" (Santamaría et al 2020: 62). Particularly, I have drawn from participatory mapping, mixed-media storytelling, and autoethnographic mapping to attempt to construe a line of research that would allow for participant-led investigations on

policy and government led-operations. The goal has been to acknowledge and allow for the "continuous action of memory" (Mekdjian and Moreau 2016: 02) in order to "illustrate less measurable forms of experience" (as quoted in McLees 2013: 286) by making space for narratives to be construed throughout several meetings, coming back and going over converging and diverging impressions on the displacement process throughout Brazil.

In order to incorporate the aforementioned dimensions, I have chosen autoethnographic mapping to explore the relational space between the *Acolhida* operation and the researchers.

> "It is a pedagogical tool guided by an understanding of the geographical, spatial organisation and experiences of groups and individuals as a concrete manifestation of power structures and political conditions. (…) It builds on and from individuals' lived experience of constraints imposed by authorities, as these are embedded in official cartography and serve the exercise of authority." (as quoted in Hager and Mazali 2013: 259).

Maps have the potential of "articulating statements shaped by social relations, discourses and practices" (Halder and Michel 2018: 12). Freed from the positivist cartographer's objectivity, maps are able to allow graphic visualisation of spatial injustices and challenge official and dominant representations. Mapping governmental operations, in that sense, allowed for the counter narratives of people to be reflected through visual aid, undermining the authorities' narratives currently circulating in mainstream media (Elsherif 2018: 253).

Through mapping, I attempt to draw attention to the ways in which the state's policies draw limits circumscribing spaces and bodies. Methodologically, I believe this resource to be able to "connect situated experiences to the more formal policy process" (Wiebe 2019: 29-30). In that sense, this work makes use of this medium attempting to go beyond a true-to-scale and objective view of the world by mapping processes and journeys as a way to: (1) further understand the ways in which they are shaped; (2) subvert dominant notions of borders and boundaries. To achieve this, I have made use of both verbal and non-verbal language, by engaging simultaneously in visual and spoken storytelling.

Mapping borders and boundaries has, nonetheless, many implications. Normative forms of representation of migratory movement are generally the result of a

> "territorial, static and quantitative conception of migration (…), where the continuous line drawings of some migration routes overshadow the political, police and pecuniary dimensions of spatial and temporal 'roughness' that mark the routes taken by migrants" (Mekdjian and Szary 2018: 259).

Both routes and borders are very commonly associated to lines drawn in geographic maps. To escape the dominant representations related to these dimensions I find it important to go beyond linearity. Following Mekdjian and Szary (2015), this methodological process has aimed at reimagining "figurative meanings that generally reduce a border to a line and migration to an arrow and take account of the political and practical complexity of the crossings". It is bearing this is mind that mapping has emerged in this research as a pathway to attempt to collectively decode and unpackage the ways in which Venezuelan migration has been intersected by the *Acolhida* operation.

Positionality and reflexivity

Learning about journeys that aren't your own is inherently complex, and "representing movement in its qualitative, sensitive dimensions is particularly challenging – it implies enquiring the points of view of those who are displaced" (Mekdjian and Szary 2018: 259). I have initiated this research with the firm belief that to understand how these journeys might have been aided, shaped, interrupted or hindered by the state's policies could only be done through

engaging with the stories of those who have both fought and been subjected to them. As argues feminist geographer Key Askins, stories are central to "the politics of witnessing and telling, unpacking subjectivities, rendering visible social and spatial power relations, and co/making knowledges" (Askins et al. 2016: 1279). Additionally, in line with Hill Collins (as quoted in Sörenson and Kalman 2018: 709), I would also like to argue that "individuals who have lived through experiences (…) are move believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences". In that sense, my argument revolves around the claim that to accurately evaluate policy, one should engage with the stories of those who have been affected by it, instead of merely taking into account policymakers.

On the other hand, I wish to make clear that by having had the privilege to listen to the stories told throughout this research process, I do not claim in any way to now "see from their positions" (Haraway 1988: 584). As describes Crossa (2012: 114), I believed that the only way to understand the "processes I was interested in exploring", was through being an insider within the groups experiencing these processes. However, my gaze is informed by my situated and embodied knowledges and is inextricably linked to my political views (Haraway 1988), in the sense that the very interest I have had in looking into this specific topic, the methodology I am employing, and the ways in which I theorize on what has been *cartographed* during this research process are all shaped by aspects of my own journey. Even though I have underlined this research's collaborative aspects, I "cannot transcend my own location" (Alcoff 1991-1992: 06) when narrating and reflecting upon this process.

Locating the place from which I speak and also the space from which this curiosity has sparked, my personal history with migration began when I was seven years old. My parents, two brothers, grandmother and I moved to the very location as the one I am writing from right now – and for similar reasons. All of us Brazilian, north-eastern, and most of us never having stepped foot outside of our homeland, moved to the tiny town of Wageningen for my father to pursue his PhD. However geographically similar, our journeys were very differently shaped by the barriers imposed on us by Dutch immigration law. Still, while borders and boundaries are not foreign to my experience, the position which I occupy as a migrant is marked by privilege: I am a white, middle-class woman whose border-crossing was deliberate, thoroughly planned and supported. In fact, being also currently a migrant in the Netherlands adds another layer of privilege to my positionality as a researcher: I am now a master's student in a European country, speaking to my fellow cartographers through an image on a screen. Also, while I am a migrant where I currently reside, at the place I am performing my research I am a local, and legally, a citizen. This locates me in a position of power in relation to those who have struggled to reside somewhere I have had the option to leave. Not only my privileged position as a migrant and a Brazilian citizen, but also my political views determined the way in which I approached the operation. My upbringing in a left-wing household and my current alignment with left-wing politics made it impossible for me to unbiasedly look into a programme put in place by a government so distanced from my beliefs.

While the abovementioned aspects were crucial to the ways in which I have structured and conceptualised this research, they alone were not the ones to define the outcomes of this investigation. Rather, it has been how my "multiple selves differentially affect and are affected by my relationships and engagements with others who are busy negotiating their multiple identities in their interactions with me" (Crossa 2012: 115). These locations and my positionality are not "one-dimensional or static" (Alcoff 1991-1992:16), and reflecting on them also means reflecting on what the interaction between our individual positionalities – mine, and my fellow cartographers, have produced, in line with what Harding (1992: 458) has described as "strong reflexivity". As much as I have attempted to embed this methodology in participatory mapping methodologies, I still have been read (and have acted as) the formal researcher guiding the process and as also the one mainly responsible for decision-

making. Therefore, I need to acknowledge that the stories being narrated through this research are embedded in and the result of power hierarchies.

Methods

Mapping can be performed through multiple and diverse strategies – in order to map practices that reflect and perpetuate power relations within the *Acolhida* operation, I have mostly drawn from a method entitled "Crossing Maps". This tool is a result of a counter-cartographic workshop developed by a collaboration amongst diverse geographers, artists and twelve Grenoble residents who were, at the time, seeking asylum in France. It entails presenting the journeys of the travellers-cartographers through their own visual representations, "using the conventions of established geography and geopolitics (…), but also representing the experiences of the road (…)" (Mekdjian and Szary 2018: 259). This method considers maps as "meeting places" and "relational tools" that can act in critique of cartography's scientism (Mekdjian and Moreau 2016: 05). Additionally, in opposition to many prevailing contemporary immigration processes, the method described above and, by, consequence, the one that I have employed, does not question experience, focus on 'truth' (Mekdjian and Moreau 2016: 05), nor seek to assess the 'validity' of cross-country dislocations by identifying their motivations for leaving nor their right to stay.

Drawing from this tool and aware of the limitations of my research where it concerns time, scope, and, especially, the current COVID-19 pandemic, I have shaped this process to take place over the course of approximately one month – August to September 2020, strictly online. Bearing in mind what Wiebe (2019: 21) calls a relationship-focused model of research, I have decided on approaching possible cartographers through not only an organisation they knew but also through people they were familiar with. On the one hand, at the time, I found this crucial in legitimising the process. On the other, it has also meant that I have put in the hands of the organisation the selection of participants. While my initial aim was to use their help to approach known Venezuelan refugees by having them send out a call for "research assistants" to multiple people, as a consequence of our dialogues the process was redesigned and the organisation ended up sending invites to specific candidates, and I reached out to participants that had been pre-selected by the organisation. They specified having based the selection on the description I had given illustrating the fact that I wished for gender, sexual orientation and age diversity, and, more importantly, for people who would enjoy taking part in a process that involved the use of visual tools.

Although I was aware that the organisation and their employees were in no way removed from power imbalances, I did not know the specifics of their relations with my soon-to-be fellow researchers. For this reason, I have also relied upon the logistical aid of one of the organisation's employees who had also been displaced from Venezuela, but arrived prior to the operation's creation, and was thus not assisted by it. This entanglement with the organisation's personnel led to contrasting stances on my position. Firstly, it validated the process and conveyed I could be trusted as a researcher. However, in combination with the fact the I was overseas, it magnified power hierarchies, and most significantly, it positioned me as an ally to the organisation, instead of the cartographers. This initially led to some confusion on the part of some, and to a distanced and wary position on the part of others. Throughout the process, I have further ascertained that the role the organisation plays in the relocation process is larger than I had predicted, and have come to find that the relation between them and the participants has not always been smooth. For this reason, I have had to incisively shed light on the nature of my relationship with the organisation and diminish their role in the process in order to actively make space for storytelling and listening.

After receiving the candidates' contact information, I individually reached out to the respondents and introduced myself, the proposal, and had informal chats through phone

calls and messages. Wiebe (2019: 21) defines a relationship-focused approach as taking the time to "listen, getting to know the people and the place". I wish this had meant time to meet people and places while gathering at the same location, but this was translated to an online environment by devoting much time to connecting, in various senses: firstly, through making acquaintance with one another; then, by discussing my initial ideas and the ways in which it would (or wouldn't) be possible to interact with them; and, finally, by also finding the time to understand the ways in which this method could work in an online environment. Sörenson and Kalman (2018: 709) emphasize the importance of time and space in the research process: it should suffice to "express subjectivities through different methodological techniques". Central to the process were daily interactions and meetings every two or three days². We have engaged collectively or individually through several informal unrecorded meetings and hours and hours spent interacting on messaging platforms. Several meetings were scheduled to discuss my proposal, and all throughout the process we have gathered many times to go through our concerns and what had been produced thus far.

Wishing to counter extractivist modes of research, rather than sitting down to ask questions, I have opted to create space for the cartographers to "tell their own stories, in their own voices, on their own terms" (Wiebe 2019: 21). I have sought to merely create space for stories to be told instead of deciding which questions to ask, honouring the limitations imposed upon me, even if implicitly. Additionally, I have attempted to steer away from "pain and damage-centred" research in the direction of a desire-centred framework: not denying the experience of pain and trauma, but "but positioning the knowing derived from such experiences as wise" (Tuck and Yang 2014: 231). This method was designed as an invitation to investigate the ways in which Venezuelans have interacted with the *Acolhida* operation – reflecting on what would be of use to either those who have arrived, are arriving, will arrive or what would be of help to them, individually. This was done with the intention of drawing attention to policy and its implications, "shifting the gaze from the violated body to the violating instruments" (Tuck and Yang 2014: 241). In order to privilege the perspective of the cartographers, I have respected the narrative trails they laid out from their points of departure all the way to their arrival in Recife – seeking not to diverge nor take a different path from the one that I was allowed in to.

Although decentralising control over the focus of each individual *cartographed* story was a priority to me, there was no straightforwardness in achieving this when it came down to translating theory onto reality. The method we have engaged in is a time-consuming one, and taking part in this research transcended participation – every cartographer involved conducted their own individual autoethnographic research. For this reason, I considered that given the aforementioned specifics in combination with the possibilities of accessing a grant on my part, it would be ethical to compensate my fellow researchers for their time. Compensation came with its own non-monetary price: it created another hierarchical layer to the process, which hindered people's perceived autonomy. On several occasions, material has been sent to me in search of a binary acknowledgement in between what has been supposedly done in a right/wrong manner. I responded to these interactions attempting to underline how research assistants had full autonomy in deciding on the ways in which they shared their own accounts, its size, length, richness of detail and medium. My intentions, however, have been read differently by each individual, which meant that the ways in which they bordered

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² Our formal meetings have been held through either Zoom, Meet or WhatsApp, and before initiating the mapping process we agreed on a schedule to guide our gatherings that could be modified, if needed. I have created a common group on WhatsApp through which we regularly went over organisational matters, and I was vastly approached through individual chats to discuss individual questions, ideas and suggestions.

their own stories has also been led by their relation to the organisation, and the extent to which their political positions supposedly aligned with mine.

Performing this research during a pandemic has further bordered the process, limiting it by a technological frontier as I could only work with people who had access to some kind of internet and possessed a device to hold the meetings with. Having communicated with participants through exclusively online tools, I have fully experienced the way in which they cannot possibly fully replace live interaction: myself, as well as the other participating investigators, have not been able to observe bodily expressions and understand unspoken cues the same way. This has accounted for a barrier to more informal ways of bonding and trust-building, as we were deprived from casual and spontaneous moments of gathering that could have occurred before or after the actual arranged meeting. Much to my distress, I have also unable to organise and provide for safe and comfortable places to meet, which meant cartographers have produced individual maps, isolated in their own homes.

Our first official collective meeting was designed as an official introductory moment: I invited participants to introduce themselves and what led them to want to take part in this process; then, I once again addressed my location, research theme, methodological ideas, proposed an online framework, went over security and privacy issues, and then gave the floor back to the soon-to-be cartographers. Our second round of meetings was individual – I found that one sole online collective gathering hardly manages to create a sense of ease amongst everyone, which was materialised by the round of questions and observations arriving on my phone through private messages afterwards. In order to make space for participants to ask questions comfortably, the second formal turn of encounters was held on a one-on-one basis. In addition to the aforementioned reason, we also had to discuss some logistics: we needed to figure out a regular meeting time that would work best for everyone and the logistics of receiving the materials to produce the maps.

The following meeting took place on the next day, when we met once again altogether to discuss some questions surrounding mapping. After some reflection, I specifically chose to use the term 'mapping', seeking to deconstruct its relation to western positivist cartography – at the same time, I also tried to bring into the discussion completely distinct ways of mapping in an attempt not to overly determine, dominate or influence the process. Over the news two days, one of the organisation's members and I arranged for some crafts supplies to be delivered. We have provided participants with different materials they could choose from, such as various types of coloured papers, pencils, lines and fabric. They have been delivered in much the same way as they would be by postal service and have been dropped off at participants houses, bearing in mind social distancing and health precautions.

On the following fourteen days, we had consistent twice-a-week collective meetings, and several individual informal online conversations about the process. Each cartographer materialised their own individual journey onto paper and narrated the process as they wished: highlighting some parts and leaving out others. Towards the end, I have realised that participants were getting fatigued after more than one hour of online interaction – as, in all honesty, was I. To circumvent this, on the last week of our official agenda, we decided on having individualised final presentations, and, afterwards a collective and less extensive one. On our last collective meeting, we agreed on limiting narration time, so no one would get screen fatigued. We began by giving everyone around fifteen minutes time to either go over their final map, their feelings about the process, their evaluation of mapping as a method – or a combination amongst all of these. Then, we talked a little bit about the major issues that came to the forefront during the research process, and how they could be addressed. The final moment was set aside for participants to evaluate this research's methodology, and also how my mediation has been as a researcher.

Chapter 2
Mapping the cross-over

Introducing the border-crossers who have taken part in this research, this chapter will briefly present those who have, in an autoethnographic fashion, mapped their journeys from various parts of Venezuela to Recife, Pernambuco. In this section I will also display the map's finalised versions, go over the mapping dynamics and cartographers' views on the process.

2.1 Who, when and where

The people who have assisted this research and whose journeys will be shared in this document have all overstepped the frontier between Venezuela and Brazil between 2017 and 2018. Our paths have crossed with the aid of an international christian NGO which has a strong Brazilian branch and is very active, locally. Their position within the operation's framework is one of many nuances. They describe themselves as going by the principles of *pastoralidade tranformadora³,* which is in line with the liberation theology sector of the catholic church. It does not vocally align with the current ultra-right government, nor did it with the previous right-wing one which implemented the operation. At the same time, the humanitarian programme they have put in place is financed by the US state department, which has been, in its turn, vocally praised by Bolsonaro.

Irene, Carmen, Carolina, Fernando and Wilkemann all relate differently to the organization. Wilkemann has been the first to cross the border to Brazil three years ago, at a time when the operation wasn't yet put in place. He is a social psychologist and is currently working for the NGO as one of their officers in the migration and refuge promotion team. He is now 44 years of age and arrived by himself when he was 41. A year later he was followed by his wife and two children, who were then, with his help and through his connections, relocated by *Operação Acolhida.* He has been of much operational aid, as he has helped me with printing documents, collecting material, buying some of the supplies and also distributing them to cartographers. We have also had the opportunity to chat multiple times, and he has shared much of the knowledge derived from his experience as both a programme official and a Venezuelan refugee. At the same time, cartographers (some more than others) did not feel completely comfortable with his presence, and after some collective discussions regarding the subject, we agreed it would be best if he did not take part in all our gatherings.

Irene, Carolina, Fernando and Carmen have all been relocated with the aid of the operation. Irene is a social worker and is currently 24 years of age, and arrived in November of 2018 by herself, and was then reunited with her parents and siblings as she reached Boa Vista. Carolina, now 27, arrived in July of that same year with only one of her daughters, to find her husband waiting for her at the Brazilian edge of the frontier. Fernando, currently 23, previously worked with politics and sales in Venezuela, and identifies as being LGBTQI. He arrived by himself in December of 2017, and spent a whole year in Roraima's capital, Boa Vista. Carmen, now 34 years of age, is an assistant nutritionist and describes herself as currently being an entrepreneur, COVID-19 survivor and massage therapist. She arrived at the border with her husband, son and daughter in January 2017, and was told that their children could not cross the frontier because they had neither passports nor IDs. She recounted: "We got stuck in Santa Elena de Uairén. My husband went on to Boa Vista, and I stayed there,

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³ Literally translates to 'transformative pastoralism' and stands for a type of religiosity focused on social transformation and solidarity work.

alone with the kids." It was only after returning to her mother's house back north, and then deciding to give migrating another chance, that she managed to cross the territorial border to Brazil in November of 2018.

2.2 Drawings, maps and stories

The journeys chronicled in this document have been done so by interweaving words with images, tracing the places traversed through displacement. Most cartographers have opted to represent their paths by making a collage with differently coloured paper, and in opposition to migration maps commonly portrayed in media outlets, not one of the maps has been made out of one single arrow traversing entire countries. All maps outline complex dynamics, different flows and multiple paths which then combined gave form to one intricate journey. Visually, most maps nudge towards a sense of chronology – however, in our gatherings we have journeyed back and forth through accounts, skipping phases and them going back to points we had already surpassed. The narratives were multidimensional in ways that are hardy capturable in conventional maps. Even though we have explicitly discussed mapping as a concept – and I was aware the mainstream image that this word might evoke – the pieces were designed in ways which are hardly obvious (Mekdjian and Moreau 2016), with projections comprised out of images from space, close-cut ground level plans, eye-level panoramics and images of people in various arrangements. The maps were carefully thought through every step of the way: they were considered a final piece of art, and many ideas were drafted on other pieces of paper in order to plan and prepare for the making of the final product.

Initially, I worried language could be a barrier: although I reached out in Spanish, my shortage of words in this language was very easily spotted, and everyone thought it would be best to continue in Portuguese. All participants have been living in the country for at least about two years now, and their fluency in Portuguese by far surpasses my modest Spanish. Communication shifted tongues and sometimes cartographers used their mother language to make informal commentary or communicate with one another. Sometimes, they plainly forgot they had shifted to Spanish to then realise, laugh, and ask me if I understood any of it – which I did, most times. Written words on maps were also caught in a mix in between both languages. The proximity in between our words allowed Spanish and Portuguese languages to be interwoven, and images were used as the meeting place in between what we did not know how to say otherwise.

All maps have moments in which the different stories converge, but contrasting narratives take place. Many of the same geographical locations have been represented in different ways, colours, shapes, through the use of different symbols, drawings or legends. Carolina and Carmen both chose to dialogue with Brazil and Venezuela's cartographic representations by drawing their territories in combination with their flags, demarking the borders in between them, also specifying their means of transportation: airplane, bus or feet. Fernando mapped several parts of the journey by affixing different drawings on a continuum of sheets of Kraft paper, adding visual representations of himself and his emotions. Irene has drawn landscapes and floorplans, each on a different sheet of paper, and initially assembled them like a story book, which, reflecting upon this combination, could be even described as an atlas. Such diversity might be taken as a figurative representation of the particular and contrasting ways cartographers have interacted with them. Each cartographer dialogued with the mapping process setting their own individual boundaries as to what this research was allowed to access in terms of information regarding themselves, the operation, or the interaction between them. This bordered the extent to which they wished their accounts to be told, "marking what is off-limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred and what can't be

known", constituting a type of refusal (as there are many) as outlined by Tuck and Yang (2014: 225).

I find that our dialogues have been steered by, amongst other things, their perceptions on the safety and usefulness of this research. Carolina's cartographic experience, for example, was marked by silence: she negotiated her participation by sharing mostly her positive experiences with the operation and the organisation which hosted her in Recife. She managed to read my somewhat evasive critical approach and attempted to counterbalance it by repeatedly stating she was satisfied with the framework and grateful to the operation's officials. This was perceived by other participants, who repeatedly attempted to instigate her into sharing more details. I found out that later she had also been contacted by the organisation to speak out to the media regarding her experience in Recife. This might have had an influence on how she felt about the safety of speaking out, considering it might impact her prospects of being contacted again for future work. Irene, on the other hand, after being somewhat hesitant to share her story, changed her mind after some of her colleagues openly shared theirs. However, throughout meetings, she repeatedly described her drawings as child-like, and questioned how they might be of use. She stated:

> "I'm happy to share these stories. I thought it was good. I've sent a picture to my mom and told her my map looks like a kid's. She said I should keep for when I went over to her place, to show her".

Map 1
Carolina's map

Source: Fieldwork, September 2020

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Map 2
Irene's map

Source: Fieldwork, September 2020

Carmen and Fernando engaged in a different way, viewing the maps as a more "concrete (…) and relatively safe space" (Hanger & Mazali 2013: 11) taking more time and greatly specifying their accounts. Carmen deeply connected to the policy evaluation aspect of it. She put together a very detailed map of her journey with all the organisations she had contact with during the process, gave specifics on their functioning and evaluated their services, splitting her commentary into five different categories, which were represented by colours. Her map very clearly connected her "situated experiences to the more formal policy process" (Wiebe 2019:29). During our final meeting, she hung her map on the wall, and her husband and children, who were initially out of frame, progressively started taking part in our conversation, making the meeting quite an event. When assessing the method, she narrates:

> "In the beginning I wasn't sure about the connection [between mapping and policy]. (…) Now I think we should always use drawings to evaluate public policy. Now I see how they can be useful for all areas – it's a way of expressing an idea or a reality in a simple way, in a way that everyone can understand".

Map 3
Carmen's map

Fernando's account was the one that most stood out to me as profoundly "emotive, personal, and heartfelt" (Wiebe 2019:22). He describes:

"[Mapping] drew out many emotions, I stumbled upon stuff I thought I had overcome, phases of my life I thought no longer had a meaning to my life… Through drawing I realised that there were things I really did not overcome. There are still wounds that I had to put some sanitiser on – and in this case the sanitiser was drawing each drawing, each line of my story. I realised that when I spoke, it didn't really match what I felt inside. I was really, really good. (…) I really like this strategy, it was like therapy".

He details having used the opportunity to process the experiences he had during his journey. After initially having reached out to me individually with the intents of checking my relation to the organisation, he felt safe to share not only his experiences but word his precise feelings in a very open and honest way. Not only did he draw the places which were a part of his journey, but also added very expressive images of himself and others. He also wrote extensively, using words as a way to give further details on what he had represented.

Map 4
Fernando's map

Source: Fieldwork, September 2020

Map 5
Fernando's map
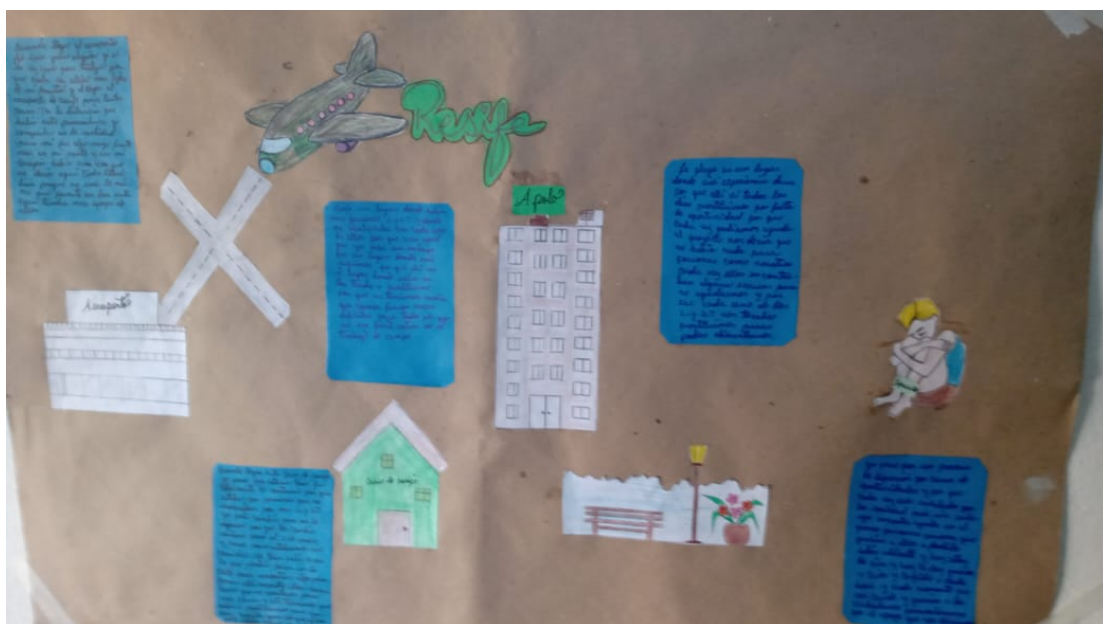
Source: Fieldwork, September 2020

Chapter 3
Making the border

I find it complex to draw the line as to where and when exactly this story begins. Irene, Carolina, Fernando and Carmen have begun their accounts at the time when they started mobilising towards dislocation. I would like to take some steps back to the historical moment where lines were drawn in between places to determine where one could legally locate oneself. In this chapter, I will theorize on the creation and maintenance of borders and boundaries, as they deeply relate to a programme that controls the frontier and establishes who gets the right to be relocated, where, and when. I will begin by approaching borders as geopolitical tools materialised by western cartography, and then proceed to critically narrate the ways in which they have been guarded by states.

3.1 Drawing the line

Geopolitical developments have made walls, fences and checkpoints common denominators of what is frequently produced in the media and reproduced by our imaginaries when thinking about migration. Migration itself has – or should have – more to do with movement itself than necessarily to the barriers imposed to it. Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi (2018: 13) go as far as stating that "migration", as a concept, is "an invention of the nation state" when it inscribes not merely moving but "crossing borders". Moving, in that sense, surpasses changing one's place of location to confronting limitation to one's movement – both previously, during and after one's journey. During that journey, "borders embody different implications and meanings for those who confront them, depending on context and social actors' location within intersecting structures of power" (Mendez and Naples 2014: 24). Also, the effects of such borders on different people "do not remain static but may change according to individual and broader historical and political circumstances" (Vaughan-Williams 2009: 14). It is in this context that I aim to explore the meanings behind 'the border' for those who move and settle elsewhere: dissecting its creation to attempt to question the naturalisation of its existence.

While defining what constitutes a border could be expected of this work, I must state that the definition is as contested as are borders themselves. On a simple note, one might define it as the geographical line separating distinct territories. However, calling upon the denaturalisation of such definitions, borders could be also described as "the inevitable result of the carefully choreographed movements of nation-states against human movement – a planned act of war" (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2018: 13). These lines, which are so much more than visual representations, "mark a particular kind of relationship" (Anderson et al 2009: 06). They place power relations and impart subjectivities (ibid 2009: 06), delineating and transforming our understandings of our surroundings: land is territory and people are (or aren't) citizens.

Galeano (1971) has described borders as the shattering of Latin-America. At the time, European powers, wishing to definitely establish their domains, cut up the land as is if it were theirs. Maps were drawn up to legitimize and stabilize colonialism and nationalism (Halder and Michel 2018: 13), naturalising and territorialising what would only be the beginning of colonial control over peoples and their bodies. In this continent, Portugal and Spain found it suitable to draw a straight line cutting it in two halves – borders were thus one of the graphic tools employed in this endeavour. They were also drawn within national territories to "delineate sexual, racial and class social and spatial distances" (Mohanty 2004: 58). Colonial

rule emphasized physical (and symbolic) separations of sex, race and class, categorizing bodies on the basis on their figurative distances to colonial rulers. This was deemed necessary to maintain authority and power over subject peoples (Ibid 2004: 58). In this fashion, empires were established and overthrown, nation-states emerged, and independencies were declared. However, post-colonisation America deeply resembles the colonised one, as borders are continuously employed in the enactment of power.

Map 6
Tordesillas Treaty line dividing Latin America

Source: https://bit.ly/2TnH8gs
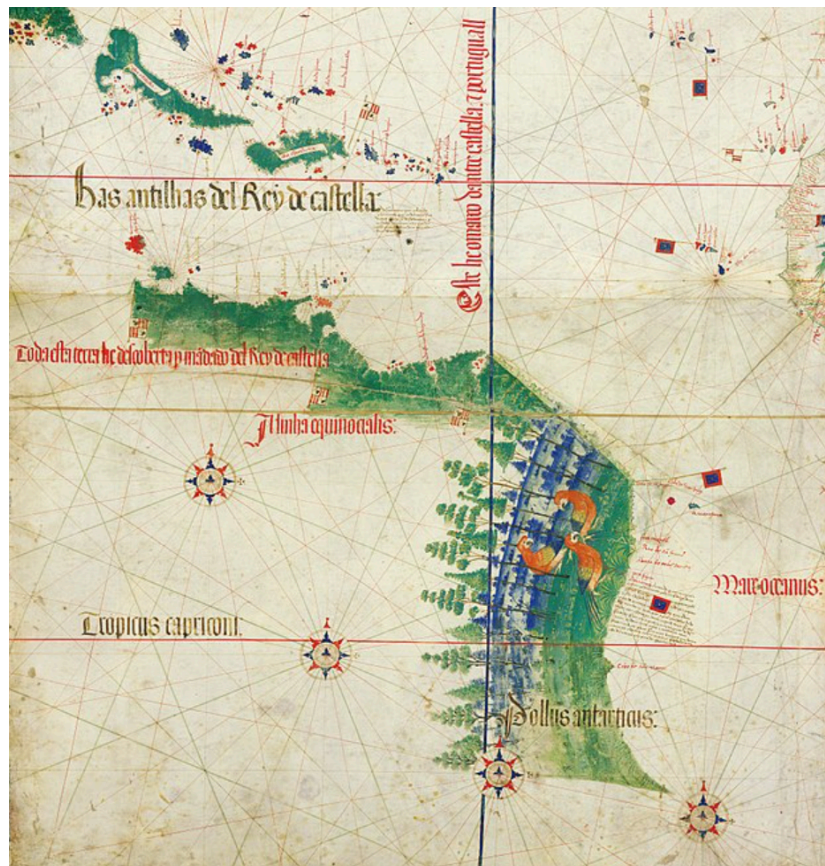
Even though western cartography's positivistic roots may suggest inflexibility, borders are not fixed, quite the contrary. They are continually remade as economic and political conditions shift, equally following and surrounding people in their journeys. Fassin (2011: 214) has described these developments as giving birth to two different bodies of literature namely describing borders as "territorial limits defining political entities and legal subjects" and boundaries as "social constructs that establish symbolic differences and producing identities". Nonetheless, the relation between them – borders and boundaries – is one of superposition, as they both prescribe power, but on different scales. Moreover, looking at the combination between them is "indispensable to the understanding of how immigration is governed and experienced" (ibid 2011: 215).

3.2 Putting up a fence

Migration only goes beyond signifying movement when different states' territories are traversed in such travels. In fact, migrating probably wouldn't be such an embodiment of borders and boundaries if these limits weren't so thoroughly guarded. But then again, would these limits actually be barriers if there were no force guarding the divide? Geopolitical borders "symbolise and structure the security and sovereignty of the nation-state" (Mendez and Naples 2014: 04) and are as inherent to states, as border control is to the definition of borders themselves. Notwithstanding, that control isn't always at the literal – geographical – frontier, although it does draw a concrete line between who is a citizen and who is an alien, who belongs, and who does not. Frontiers between countries surpass the mere rationale of a line, as they are shaped by bordering practices that go beyond building fences and walls. As Balibar has stated, and Vaughan-Williams quotes (2014: 15), "borders are no longer at the border". Further understanding border control and practices is a pathway to understanding which boundaries are imposed upon mobile peoples by the state – even when, discursively or not, it is trying to assist them.

Historically, one of the trademarks of modernity is the state's monopoly over the legitimate rights to movement. Ever since the eighteenth century, its power over individual mobility and collective displacement has progressively increased. Fassin (2011: 214) calls it "a politics of borders and boundaries, temporality and spatiality, states and bureaucracies, detention and deportations, asylum and humanitarianism". This requires a complex state apparatus of control, targeted screening policies and border management.

> "In effect, the deployment of restrictive and repressive policies of immigration has been accompanied by the development of an administrative apparatus at the borders and within the territory to control immigration" (Ibid 2011: 218).

The state is usually the one to establish specific criteria to be fulfilled in order to grant the right to fully establish residence within their borders, determining, therefore, who is righteously deserving of it and who is not (as cited in Bauder 2015: 402).

In order to understand how these frameworks operate and the basis for the (dis)approval of movement, it is necessary to go over its main definitions and the various ways in which they can be classified. Amongst these definitions, migration has largely been used as signifying human movement in its many dimensions. Immigration, on the other hand, is movement as "perceived by the country of arrival" (IOM n.d.a). Now, in regard to the reason behind movement, motives are numerous, and frequently, overlapping (Bernard 2017: 07). According to Beddington (2011, as quoted in Shamsuddoha et al. 2012: 19) they can be due to "social, political, economic, environmental and demographic" reasons. They can also be categorised in two major groups: voluntary or forced. Piguet (2018: 17) argues that there is no clear-cut distinction between both, but plainly put, the former implies that there was some level of agency, and the latter, that there wasn't. In this case, it can also described as displacement, which been defined by the IOM (n.d.a) as being

> "the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters."

The status granted upon these displacements "under domestic or international law is a factor of great importance in determining the protection they [migrants/refugees] receive and their future" (Bernard 2017: 07).

Categories such as 'migrant' and 'refugee' have been used to distinguish the legitimacy of the requests of those on the move. Nevertheless, there is some contestation between the

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terms – while IOM uses migrant as an umbrella term (IOM n.d.b), the UNHCR defines a migrant as "someone who chooses to move mainly to improve his or her life" (as quoted in Karakoulaki et al 2018: 03). Additionally, the aforementioned agency recommends caution: "blurring the terms 'refugees' and 'migrants' takes attention away from the specific legal protections refugees require" (UNHCR 2016). The reason behind the distinction between the two terms is the international legal protection the refugee status entails. Many activist, scholars, and even news vehicles such as Al Jazeera (Malone 2015) argue that in some cases, for political reasons, the term migrant does absolutely not apply. Feller, Director of the Department of International Protection of the UNHCR, asserts that the "distinction is central to how the UNHCR exercises its mandate" (2005: 34) and that if this line is blurred, so will be the "distinction between immigration control and refugee protection" (2005: 27).

Migration scholars have, nonetheless, questioned if it is actually feasible to easily place mobile peoples within these categories. "This is not merely an issue of semantics. Categories have consequences. They entitle to some protection, rights and resources whilst simultaneously disentitling others" (Crawley and Skleparis 2018: 59). This binary categorisation further reinforces the state's control, as they are responsible for hierarchising, prioritising and legitimising (or not) people's journeys – "further reinforcing a dichotomy which discriminates against 'migrants'" (Crawley and Skleparis 2018: 60). Immigration controls have the power of sorting "traffic into legitimate and non-legitimate", leading to an active production of ideal profiles of those who are to be welcomed:

> "It is not only 'hard workers' who are produced (…), 'good wives' who do not challenge patriarchal families, 'straight guys and gals' who adhere to correct sexual scripts, 'good parents' whose parenting accords with the requirements to produce 'good children' are policed (…)." (As quoted in Anderson et al 2009: 07).

These efforts construe specific types of screenings: anti-racist perspectives expose immigration control's deep roots in racism, while feminist perspectives emphasize how cross-border mobility restrictions disproportionately affect women (Bauder 2015: 399).

Summarily, immigration controls and their logics explicit the exclusionary and bordering state logistics on a simultaneously physical and ideological sense – asymmetrically affecting different kinds of bodies: as says Alexander (1994: 06), "not just any body can be a citizen". People who retain different citizenships, ethnic backgrounds, economic statuses, gender identities, sexual orientations (and so on) differently experience border control and bordering practices. These experiences, while related to the geographical border, are not necessarily located around their whereabouts. It is from this point of view that Vaughan-Williams (2009) argues in favour of a "more sophisticated conceptualisation of both the nature and the location of borders and bordering practices". Following that line, scholars from varied fields have "advanced the analytical construct of the border, extending its meaning beyond literal and territorial definitions" (Mendez and Naples 2014: 03), and feminist theory has "expanded this work to use 'the border' as a theoretical device to interrogate how multiple systems of exploitation and oppression intersect and also are resisted" (Ibid 2014: 03).

Intensified internal processes of control contribute to the never-ending process that has become crossing. "The border not only has two sides that separates two states, but a third element as well: a space in between" (Sohn and Gonzales 2019: 167). Turner (1979: 465) defines this space in between as liminality, which literally means being-on-a-threshold, and figuratively translates to "a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of (…) preserving law and order and registering structural status". Chicana feminist Anzaldúa has extensively looked into borderlands, and described them as "paradoxical, contested spaces of everyday life characterized by instability (…), boundary-making, (…) but also of resistance and continual reconstruction where new identities are formed" (as cited in Mendez and Naples 2014: 03). Intensified control is

also intensely productive – mobile peoples, while subjected to the internal and external aspects of border control, also actively perform, adapt, contest and resist their ways into citizenship. This is performed in multiple and diverse ways, embedded in the complexities of people's intersecting identities.

Chapter 4
Controlling the border

Stepping back into the specific surroundings of the *Operação Acolhida*, in this section I will go over the regional backdrop of its creation, taking this account through the location where Brazilian and Venezuelan histories intersect, then proceeding to explain the grounds behind the massive displacement of the latter's citizens. Finally, I will go over the operation's framework within its political landscape with the intention of laying out the grounds to comprehend how border and boundaries unfold locally through the Brazilian state's border management.

4.1 Historical and political context

Venezuelan migration to Brazil increased in a period of remarkable shifts in national politics – in 2016 Brazil's right-wing successfully managed to impeach the Labour Party's political mandate. Dilma Roussef was substituted by Michel Temer, a so-called centrist that progressively steered the country towards austerity policies after being officially appointed president. It was during his rule, in 2017 and 2018, respectively, that Brazil's immigration policy was revised and the *Acolhida* operation created. Most importantly, 2018 was also the year Jair Bolsonaro won the national elections. Always extremely vocal on his support for Trump's administration and on his rejection of Chávez's and Maduro's, his rule has been a turn of events in the way the country dealt with foreign policy. From a progressively growing strategic alliance starting in the 70's until a deepened political alignment by the turn of the century (Nunes 2011), now, with the election of an extremist right wing Brazilian leader suddenly the country's president is vocal about supporting a military intervention in Venezuela (Marim and Obregón 2020: 17, Braun 2020, Dias 2019).

Brazilian and Venezuelan political contexts have profoundly shifted over the course of the last twenty years. Accordingly, the political relations held between them have equally changed. Historically, both Brazil and Venezuela have been part of what has been called "the pink tide", or, in other words, the progressive wave that hit Latin-America around the year 2000. The wave led the continent to recover some sense of unity, "associated with notions of sovereignty and development" (Dos Santos 2019: 148), politically aligning both countries' leaders. At the time, it was believed possible to tame capitalist development without questioning economic growth. Quoting Walter Benjamin, Dos Santos (2019: 111) states that instead of pulling the breaks on capitalism, these governments fast-tracked, being then dragged by the same process they thought would emancipate them.

Venezuela's progressive and vocally socialist-oriented government was unable to disentangle its economy from the workings of the world's large imperialist forces. Ever since petroleum was found in its soil in 1917, it has been dictating the country's economy. US American companies have historically controlled large parts of this market, and Chávez's government was deeply dependant on oil. In its inception, social policies benefitting from the oil revenue indisputably led to social change. However, since the Venezuelan economy privileged the distribution of the petroleum earnings over the production of necessary goods, the plummeting barrel prices unavoidably led to its crash (Dos Santos, 2019). Not only that, the economy was further and more severely impaired by sanctions imposed by the US government in 2017, which claimed to be "encouraging Venezuela's government to respect human rights". In reality, "the sanctions deprived the Venezuelan economy of many billions of dollars of foreign exchange" (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019: 04-06).

As a result of the aforementioned processes the country experienced a gigantic hyperinflation and a dramatic decrease in imports. This has also meant public health complications due to water and sanitation issues, lack of electricity, and an enormous reduction in food and medicine available, amongst many other collapsing complementary systems. Consequently, the population's caloric intake was drastically reduced, and mortality and disease have plummeted. According to Weisbrot and Sachs, the sanctions decreed by the US have been nothing less than death sentences for the Venezuelan people: "according to the National Survey on Living Conditions (ENCOVI by its acronym in Spanish), an annual survey of living conditions administered by three Venezuelan universities, there was a 31percent increase in general mortality from 2017 to 2018" (2019: 15). These conditions weren't a mere push for the millions of people affected by them – they were the fuel for the displacement for one of the biggest exoduses Latin-America has experienced in recent history.

Although this story is one of south-to-south migration, it is in no way "the result of a string of unconnected emergencies, but rather an integral part of north-south relationships" (as cited in Piguet 2018: 23). Capitalist strategies for development in combination with US interventionism have had very real impacts on the lives of Venezuelan people(s). I wish not to spectacularise the situation, but I fear using "economic struggles" to describe the reasons behind the displacement is not nearly enough to convey the enormity of the damage that has been inflicted onto this country's residents. While Irene and Carolina have brushed over their reasons for leaving the country by stating that their families experienced severe financial issues, Fernando and Carmen have expanded onto those definitions by sharing their experiences through different words and images. On his map, Fernando has worded his departure as "farewell", and drew an image of himself hugging his aunt. He had previously left the country for work, and upon return, he described:

> "I could no longer find my place in this country. I was my country (…), the country in which my family was, the country to which my roots belong to… but it was a completely different country than the one I had left. I felt emptiness. I needed to leave".

Carmen gave a brief, but potent description: "We ate only rice. For weeks. I weighed 36 kilos".

Similar conditions inarguably led to the displacement of millions of people. Especially after 2016, geographical border-crossings from Venezuela to Brazil drastically increased: Venezuelan requests for refuge jumped from 04 in 2011 to 17.865 in 2017, increasing up to 61.681 in 2018, as recorded by the Brazilian National Refugee Committee – CONARE (2019: 25). Nevertheless, this numerical increase should not undermine the fact that already throughout 2010 and 2016 there are significant numbers of registered Venezuelan immigration. At that time, it was made out of highly qualified professionals in prominent managerial positions, most of which already having work visas and crossing the frontier by hovering over it by plane. After 2016, the scenario shifts more dramatically, and the physical border between both countries is increasingly traversed by vehicles cruising from Santa Elena to Pacaraima. Not long thereafter, impoverished populations also progressively voyaged their way into Brazil, increasing drastically the number of refuge solicitations (Baeninger 2018: 137), the proportion of women and children (Demétrio and Domeniconi 2018: 193-194), and the quantity of marching feet overstepping the line in between both countries (Marchao 2018).

Figure 1
Venezuelan refugee requests
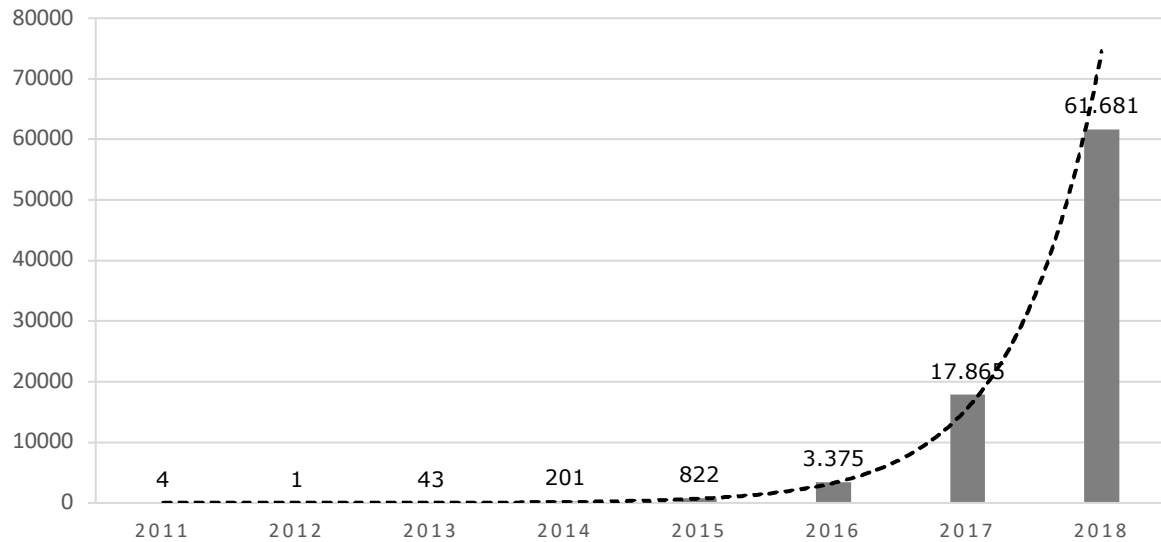
Source: National Refugee Committee 2018

4.2 A 'welcoming' operation
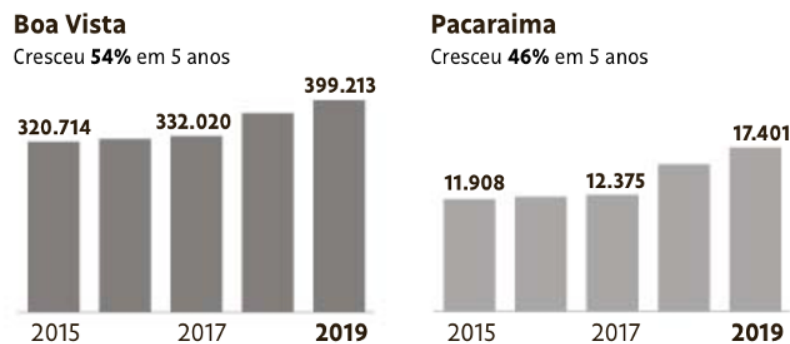
Institutional arrangement

Irene, Carolina, Carmen, Fernando and Wilkemann crossed the frontier amongst large numbers of fellow Venezuelans. These numbers, however, are a fairly recent phenomenon. While officially ratified in 1859, the border between the two countries has historically been made and remade. Not that long ago, Brazilians were the ones predominantly moving, involved in both legal and criminalised activities (Rodriges 2006). The geographical frontier between both countries is mostly located within the Amazon rainforest, being barely accessible to humans. This location renders the limit quite unclear – for the most of it, it isn't physical, only imaginary. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the frontiers were open, and the crossover used to be so smooth that both countries' residents easily settled on the other side of the divide, mostly for commercial reasons.

Crossing over to Brazil used to be regulated by the *Estatuto do Estrangeiro* (Forgeigner's Statute), which was written and sanctioned during the years in which Brazil was governed by a military dictatorship. In 2017, it was substituted by the 13.445 Law (Brazilian Government 2017). This bill is viewed by many as being progressive (Souza 2018): it amplifies migrants' rights and simplifies the regularisation of their legal status according to the country's legislation (Enriconi 2017). As of the date in which it was sanctioned it became a possibility to apply additional measures with the intents of aiding residents from specific countries, such as granting humanitarian visas. This can be of particularly help to Venezuela citizens, for instance (Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, Brazilian Government n.d.). In addition, after the numbers displaced populations started dramatically increasing, the UNHCR has firmly asserted that due to the shortages the country is facing, most of its nationals should necessarily be entitled to access a refugee protection programme (*Folha de São Paulo* 2019).

As I write this, moving through the frontier from Venezuela is still on halt. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined and hardened the worlds geographical borders: one of the first measures applied by the federal government was restricting border-crossings, while

internally, Brazil remained untouched by federal regulations regarding health safety measures. Before this health hazard emerged, the influx was coming overarchingly from the Venezuelan side, with about 500 people crossing the border to Brazil on a daily basis (*El País* 2018). It is estimated that about four million Venezuelan citizens have already left their homes (*A Gazeta 2019*), 264 thousand to Brazil alone (UNHCR 2020a). Geographically, the only spot through which crossings were legally performed is located on the highway between the cities of Santa Elena de Uairén and Pacaraima, leading Venezuelans directly into Roraima state, now home to most of those who have settled in Brazil. Both Pacaraima and Boa Vista, the state's capital, have now the highest populational growth in the country, the first one with a rate of 46% over the last five years, and the second, 54% (Amâncio 2019).

Figure 2
Populational growth in Pacaraima and Boa Vista

Boa Vista
Cresceu **54%** em 5 anos

320.714 | 332.020 | 399.213

2015 | 2017 | **2019**

Pacaraima
Cresceu **46%** em 5 anos

11.908 | 12.375 | 17.401

2015 | 2017 | **2019**

Source: Amâncio 2019

Roraima state has the lowest per capita income of the country (R4V 2020: 42), and its services are facing severe shortages, affecting both Brazilian and Venezuelan populations. A report published by the R4V (2020), the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, notes that near to all surveyed population in the cities of Pacaraima, Boa Vista and Manaus (capital to the state of Amazonas) notify urgent unmet needs. Most alarmingly, housing is scarce: in the entire state, there are about 5838 beds in temporary shelters (UNHCR 2020b), while in Pacaraima alone there are 3822 Venezuelans facing homelessness (IOM 2020). In between, thousands have resorted to "substandard, overcrowded and precarious rental accommodations" (R4V 2020: 42). The report also highlights that these shortages are resulting in large protection risks, such as discrimination, labour exploitation, child labour, gender-based violence, malnutrition and overall health problems.

Confronted with this situation, and amongst the legal scenery described in the paragraphs above, a specific operation was set up to manage, supervise and control the entrance of Venezuelans into the country. In February 2018 the Federal government issued a Provisory Measure (no. 820/2018, now converted into law no. 13.684/2018) and two additional decrees determining the assemblage of the Federal Committee of Emergency Assistance, which is composed by the actors showed at Figure 3, below. This committee put together *Operação Acolhida,* with the aim of "covering mainly three axes: ordering the frontier, providing emergency shelter and relocating Venezuelans to other states throughout the country (Silva 2019: 45). On a national basis, it is the Federal Committee of Emergency Assistance that deliberates on the development of actions, activities and projects ('Comitê Federal' 2020). Temporary residency and refugee requests and recognitions are both handled by the Federal Police, while the paperwork is issued by the Internal Revenue Service; legal counsel

and social services are provided for by as the ministries of Human Rights and of Social Development, who respectively. Effectively, border control is coordinated by both the Ministries of Justice and Defence, embodied by the Federal Polices and the armed forces. The latter, in combination with UN agencies and NGOs are mainly responsible for the actions' coordination, providing food, healthcare, shelter and relocation (R4V 2019).

Figure 3
Actor operationalisation
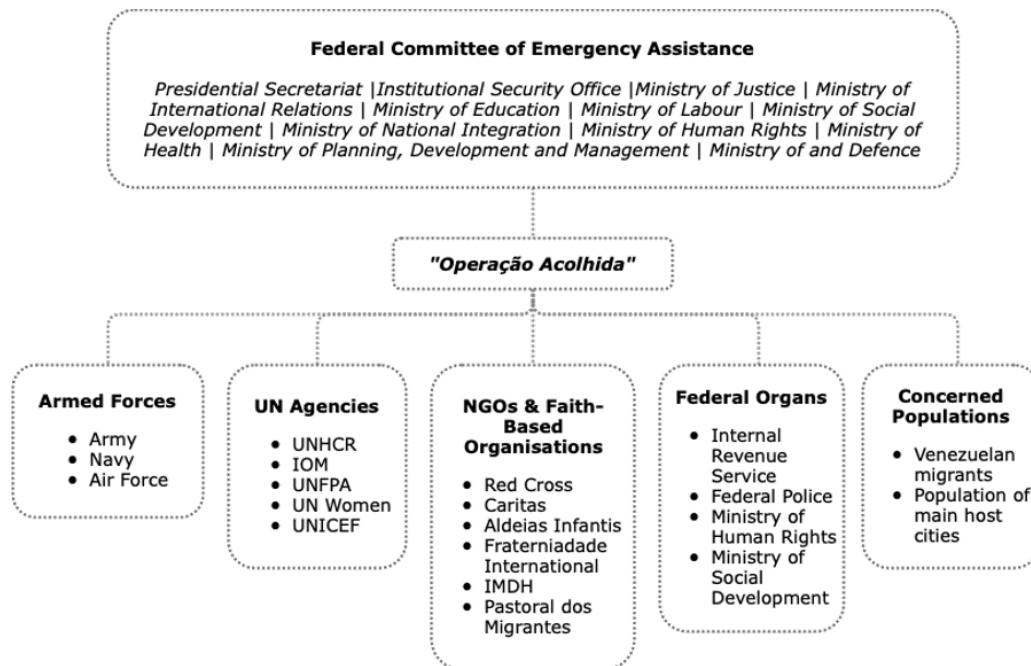
Source: 'Comitê Federal' 2020

The framework described above is implemented through several stages, which are placed at different locations. For mobile peoples to formally access shelter, relocation, housing or employment, they necessarily have to traverse most, if not all, of these stages. In their accounts, all cartographers have described going through different combinations of these places of passage, which necessarily included the border; the federal police; work permit, vaccination card, identification card and refuge or residence protocol stations; bus station, rented accommodation or shelter; Rodon II shelter, airport, *casa de passagem* (temporary accommodation), and then, their current homes. Accounts did not follow the same order, as similar stages could be traversed on different spots of the journey: the institutional framework put in place covers a large geographic area, as it initiates at the territorial frontier and extends its way into several Brazilian cities across the country.

There is no one story of how the process is navigated, but with the purpose of providing some sort of systematization, the chain might be described as going as follows: after crossing the frontier, one gets access to regularising one's legal status in the country by getting in line to issue their documentation. Following these steps, once refugees are able to get access to their documentation, next in line is accessing formal shelter and/or relocation. These steps are intertwined as sometimes accessing one opens the way to the other, no matter the order. As far as relocation goes, once one successfully manages to be included in one of the flights, all selected applicants must mandatorily move from the places they were to the Rondon II shelter. From there, one moves from airport to airport. Subsequently, depending on how

and by whom one's relocation process was organised, the steps following arrival at the airport vary. In this case, all of this research's cartographers have proceeded with their journeys from the airport to the *casas de passagem,* which were shared with around one or two other groups or families. Being housed in theses *casas* only lasts until one gets access to formal employment. However, the relocation project came to an end, and many refugees had to find their own accommodation with the help of a stipend they have been provided.

A displaced border

Operação Acolhida's framework has been repeatedly represented in this research's cartographers' maps. All accounts split the journey into different sections, which were most commonly divided by the stages put in place by the operation – especially in Irene's, Carmen's and Carolina's accounts. These stages have been described as gates that hardened or softened the frontier in between Brazil and Venezuela, closing or opening passage to the next one. Carmen's map most clearly shows the complexity of the process: it portrays many different institutions which were involved and how the ways in which she has engaged with them were contrasting and sometimes, confusing. When looking at it, I am struck by the how puzzling the crossing process appears to be: overstepping a line seems quite far from it. Still, symbolic representations of the division in between countries were present in all accounts in the form of flags or territorial limits, but for all crossings performed between the timeframe of December 2017 and December 2018, the physical act of overstepping the line in between Venezuela and Brazil has been quickly brushed over in cartographers accounts. Some have even described it as a quick and simple process: there was no obligation to provide for any documentation. Additionally, another fact strikes me as a symbol of how the actual territorial divide doesn't necessarily translate the actual division: Carmen describes strongly experiencing xenophobia in Santa Elena de Uairén, even previously to reaching the frontier.

After border-crossing, following *Acolhida's* steps is not an imposed obligation, as there are no mechanisms in place to persecute or expel non-Brazilian citizens. These steps do not determine if one can physically be in the country but are crucial in the arbitration of who gets access to shelter, relocation, and employment. Without a refuge protocol, a vaccination record card and a Brazilian ID card there is no access to shelter. This has proven to hinder other steps of the way: during the days in which the documentation is being processed, many have to resort to the streets for refuge. Not accessing shelter also makes it harder to access relocation. Accessing formal employment, in its turn, is extremely difficult under any circumstance, but considering current conditions in Roraima, employment without relocation presents an even bigger challenge. This chain of events, or rather, benchmarks, were, in sharp contrast to north-to-north crossing accounts, continuously stressed in cartographer's maps and oral narratives while little attention was paid to the actual geographical frontiers. Accessing minimal living conditions was especially bound to having crossed them.

Considering the abovementioned developments, and in line with Vaughn-Williams (2014: 15) I would like to argue that also in the case of the Venezuelan-Brazilian border – previously to COVID-19 – the border was, in fact, not only at the border. Although the author conceptualised his understanding mostly on European and North-American borders, I would like to add that also in this story the border has shifted – but in different ways. At the time Irene, Carolina, Fernando and Carmen traversed the frontier, the limits in between Brazil and Venezuela can described having two main dimensions – a territorial, and a non-territorial one. However, when I say non-territorial, I do not wish to deprive them from being spatially located, I just aim to convey they weren't placed in intersecting lines between distinct territories. Cartographers' accounts have underlined how these places symbolically subdivided the journey and created a series of new boundaries which needed to be traversed, internalised within Brazilian territory. The ways in which taking this path predetermined the

extent to which refugees managed to fully access the country highlights how the barrier is not at the frontier but rather has been dissolved to fit in between the process' stages.

In line with Fassin (2011: 218) the Brazilian state has, in fact, put in place a "complex administrative apparatus". However, due to many aspects regarding Brazilian legislation, resources and managerial capacity, its relation with Venezuela, and external political influence (which will be further discussed below) the Brazilian state has approached border control through a process that rather than focusing on extensive and ample restrain, meshes itself with humanitarianism and decides on who gets included. When I say inclusion, however, I do not mean it based on a binary nexus in which exclusion means not being allowed in/being escorted out of the country. Rather, it means getting stuck in a place of in-betweenness, of being geographically located within a country but not accessing its main services and being deprived of formal economic opportunities. Geographically, the materialisation of this in-between space is the state of Roraima. This state came up in account as borderland, "a place, stretch or band of land whose location and edges were never entirely fixed" (Green 2010: 263), but also as an actual border, as it is a place in which it is possible to enter but extremely difficult to cross if you wish to continue your path elsewhere. In Irene's map, for example, most drawings representing this stage of the process appear somewhat colour deprived in comparison to her other ones. Cartographers also mentioned how, there, their lives went through a stage of suspension, mostly revolving around seeking the operation's aid. In that sense, this research's accounts have highlighted that the border has not only been dispersed throughout *Acolhida's* stages, but has also been displaced. Although it might not be rigid at the Brazilian frontier, Roraima state still constitutes a territorial limit which is hard to overcome by Venezuelan refugees.

A shapeshifting border

There is no single story on *Operação Acolhida*. During this research, I could be told to have listened to five of these – however, there were many and sometimes diverging ones which fit into one single person's account. Now, there is also the story told by the media, which happens to be the first I came in contact with. Their story mostly aligns with the stories told by the Brazilian government, which, in its turn, is currently informed by the US government. And then there is the story I am now telling through my own voice, by having listened to others. When I began listening, I had a pre-existent narrative I had been weaving in my mind, which was bound together by my opposition to the current and previous government in combination with my political understanding of what this border-control programme might have meant. I thought the media's tale to one of romanticisation – which held true, to some extent. Having said that, now, I find that I was stuck in a binary wishing to classify the programme and its impacts upon Venezuelan refugees. From where I currently stand, the cartographers' experiences with the operation were contrasting and conflicting in many ways, and there is no single dimension to what we have encountered on this mapping journey.

Operação Acolhida is neither has neither an uncomplicated institutional framework nor is removed for international political interests. Mid-September 2020, the US secretary of state Mike Pompeo was strolling through Boa Vista's shelters with Brazilian minister of foreign relations Ernesto Araújo and Roraima's governor, Antônio Denarium (*Portal Roraima 1 2020*). The US has been notorious for backing coups in Latin America, and in Venezuela it has been no different. It now claims to be supporting the country with "development and democracy assistance" (Congressional Research Service 2020: 01), and is currently providing – or, perhaps, investing – 39 million dollars in humanitarian operations assisting Venezuelan refugees in Latin America (USAID n.d.) This aid came at about the same time in which the US was hardening its borders, and Brazil was, on the other hand, softening theirs. Even though this appears to be in apparent contradiction to its right-wing stance, the bill easing Brazilian

frontiers had been pending in the senate ever since 2013 (Oliveira 2017), having been drafted previously to the country's rupture in political orientation. *Acolhida* was created and put in place in the midst of this transition – and the newly found openness of the Brazilian government in receiving migrants and refugees might have just perfectly matched the US' ideals.

The US' interest in Venezuelan oil is no news, and the Latin country's collapsing economy might lead the way for a governmental shift which is more in line with US politics. Drawing from US American immigration norms, it does not interest them, however, that the population whose displacement they have contributed to overflows over their own borders. Additionally, their interest in putting forth a military intervention in Venezuela would benefit from as many Latin-American allies as it could rely on. While I have not encountered explicit literature on this, it is my understanding that this scenery has provided the perfect circumstances for the Brazilian borders to become more porous to the reception of Venezuelan citizens. In that sense, in can be said that *Acolhida's* many dimensions are also the result of the multifaceted circumstances leading to its creation: progressive policy has intertwined with imperialist interest birthing an operation which "welcomes" refugees into its territory.

Although the media has not broadcasted the circumstances, they have been fairly vocal regarding Brazilian welcoming efforts. *Acolhida* in Recife has not failed to perform accordingly, and cartographers have naturally picked up on this. Carmen has especially outlined how publicised their first moments of arrival in Recife were, in sharp contrast with their final arrival at the *casas de passagem*. She described how the airport was filled with journalists and photographers on the morning of the group's arrival. Leaving the airport, they took bus rides with tour guides around town, escorted by a police motorcade. At their next destination, Recife's catholic university, they were hosted for a dining ceremony, with equivalent amounts of photographers and journalists. Speeches were given by authorities and the food was delicious, and free. The final stop was the *casas de passagem*. At their final destination, there were no journalists, no photographers, no reception. She recalls the houses had one inch of dirt all over the walls, floor and counter. Little water was available, and by the time she finished cleaning with the help of other women, she could no longer take a shower. The fifteen following days, the organisation hosting them was on holiday, and provided little assistance.

Now, by sharing this account, I mean to illustrate how rapidly shifting *Acolhida's* circumstances actually were: they frequently went from a warm welcome to a cold-hearted reception. I wish also to make the point that its actions were not only the result of progressive policy but also of underlying political moves and mediatic efforts. However, this also means that there were plenty of distinct moments to the journey. And while I believed the border to have been translated to a mere series of internalised barriers, my perceptions were soon debunked by the women in the group, whose accounts switched back and forth through anxious, sorrowful, but also hopeful and joyous moments which were mediated by *Acolhida*. Fernando, the only man and also the only openly LGBTQI person in the group of cartographers, was since the very beginning the only one who's perception mostly fluctuated to a prevailingly critical overview of the operation. Not only that, but he was constantly encouraging his colleagues to be more open and honest about eventual unfavourable opinions that might have come up. He frequently argued: "There was no *acolhida*[4]".

The heterogeneity of the accounts soon showed that the operation's multidimensional backdrop paved the way for an equally multidimensional, but also fluid and varied, bounding framework. During our discussions, it was mostly agreed that being hosted in this country by the *Acolhida* operation was a contradictory experience to most, if not all, cartographers. This is not only considering the territorial vs. experiential nexus but also the multifaceted emotional aspects participants have attached to them: In line with Mendez and Naples

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[4] In this sentence, used as meaning "welcoming", as opposed to the operation's title.

understanding (2014) of how borders could equally mean protection or violation, some have, despite experiencing extreme difficulty, expressed immense gratitude to the programme – others summarised its workings as immensely excluding and harmful. Overarchingly, what came out through cartography, was how the experiences of boundaries was a highly individual and inextricably tied to one's positionality. They proved to be more than closed barriers, rather being closer to gates: opening or closing, depending on who stood in front of them.

Chapter 5
Crossing the border

This chapter dives specifically into the bordering practices shaping *Operação Acolhida's* performance of the border, beginning by exploring the ways border control is exercised. Then, I will go over the specific instances of control, examining how they are experienced by cartographers and the different ways borders and boundaries interact in these accounts. Finally, I will look into participants' engagement with the frontier, and the multiple means utilised to overcome and cope with being bounded.

5.1 Bordering practices

Outsourcing border control

Cartographers' accounts regarding the openness of the geographical border during the implementation timeframe of the *Acolhida* operation have highlighted is porousness. However, as the physical line between both countries is traversed, several other mechanisms have been put in place that potentially hinder the journey's continuation. Fassin (2011: 215) has exemplified this by stating "the frontier is all around us" – the state-made operation *Acolhida* might as well be one of the materialisations of this concept. Now, in order to look further into the mechanisms that bound border-crossers' lives beyond the territorial frontier, Koca (2019: 545) argues that one needs to look into bordering practices. Making use of Mezzadra and Neilson, she defines them as "embodies practices of inclusion and exclusion, 'hierarchisation and control', that create spaces where migrants and refugees are subject to varying degrees of 'subordination, rule, discrimination and segmentation''. In line with her work, I would like to look further into non-territorial divides – boundaries – by understanding them as being constituted by diverse bordering practices.

Even though the Brazilian state, supported by US funding and aided by international agencies and religious NGOs, has put in several efforts into softening the territorial border for Venezuelan citizens, this research's *cartographed* narratives have pointed out how it has been diluted into different stages of the process. One of the ways through which the Brazilian state has done this was through outsourcing border control to various different actors. Most central to the accounts were the Armed Forces, the UNHCR, the IOM, and the organisation through which Venezuelan refugees managed to access Pernambuco. Bordering practices are performed, although differently, by all of them – which shows the multiplicity of actors involved in "the business of bordering" (Koca 2019: 547). Still, through this operation, the Brazilian state has granted unconditional access to Venezuelan refugees to procedures such as having their ID's, work permits, vaccination cards and SUS (Sistema Único de Saúde, the Brazilian public and free health care system) cards made. However, in relation to accessing shelter, relocation, education and employment, different bordering practices take place, as not all arriving refugees have accessed these services equally.

Some questions arise as to whom these services are managing to aid, considering many have been left out of accessing certain spheres or receiving certain services or benefits. All of this research's cartographers and also Wilkemann, who did not cartograph but did provide specific insights into the operation, have underlined that the ones who preferably receive attention are those who are most vulnerable. By the UN's definition, those are:

"children and adolescents (including many who can no longer attend school); people who are in poverty or extreme poverty; pregnant and nursing women; older persons; indigenous people; people in need of protection; women and adolescent girls at risk; people with disabilities; and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex" (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019: 04).

Considering all cartographers fit into at least one of these criteria, but not all manage to traverse barriers the same way, it can be argued that some are given priority over others. Seeing that the Brazilian government, by setting up *Acolhida*, has loosened control over who gets through the border, boundaries are now mainly responsible for holding some back while they are softened for others pass through. Seeing that control has been outsourced to different organisations, they are the ones to define where the line is eased, or rather, which identities should be bounded, and which ones shouldn't.

Shelter and relocation

Being a Venezuelan citizen, there is no specific criteria one needs to fit into in order to be granted the right to remain within Brazilian borders. Yet, once the borders are transposed, shelter and relocation are not available for everyone arriving. Primarily, refugees need to have tended to the entire process of having their Brazilian documents issued – those who don't manage due to lack of information are naturally ruled out. But this is by far not the biggest challenge. Back in Boa Vista, Venezuelans have reported having been split into groups based on their marriage status, sexuality, and having or not having children. The four cartographers who performed a great part of this research have recounted being equally sorted into these categories, and they have pointed out that some categories are given preference over others. Understanding how this screening was performed was a challenge: most of them have been hosted by different shelters and everyone seemed to specify different things on different occasions, stating different groups were given preference to. At the same time, no one seemed to understand why some managed to be sheltered and relocated so quickly while others didn't manage at all. Fernando had an explanation for this:

> "There was a time when they [those responsible for the shelters] only accepted those who had families, those were the ones taken as most vulnerable. Then, there were a couple of months when they only accepted LGBTQI people, because they were being humiliated [on the streets]. There was a lot of xenophobia and homophobia in Roraima state. They would hit [them/us], throw stones…"

Now, with a great deal of Venezuelan refugees entering Pacaraima state, its services soon overflowed, affecting both local and newly arrived populations. To resolve this, the Brazilian state's main solution to this strain been providing relocation to other states. *Acolhida* relocates the Venezuelan population from Boa Vista to Recife on four different modalities: 'shelter to shelter', 'family reunion', 'social reunion'; and 'guaranteed job position' – which account for 30, 20, 41 and 9 percent of all relocations, respectively (UNHCR n.d.). So, for relocation to be achieved, candidates have to be matched with available employment or shelter vacancies elsewhere, which is done by the UNHCR, IOM and NGOs. They do so relatively independently, although they sometimes do work together. Wilkemann explained that relocation mostly depends on the demands of those who are responsible for shelter and employment upon arrival at the states, so organisations do the work of matching the applicants' profiles with the vacancies. For the 'guaranteed job position' modality, which out of all of them is the one in which the least relocations have been performed, this means that while non-governmental organisations control the process to some extent, it is the market – in the form of individual companies – who establishes who gets relocated or not.

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All of this research's cartographers have been relocated through the 'shelter to shelter' modality. For most, accessing a relocation programme, especially to a locality one actually wishes to relocate to, was a draining task. Carolina was the only one who managed to score a spot through the shelter she was being housed in. Carmen describes spending countless hours and entire days in line attempting to access a relocation programme while she was homeless, to then, informed by a friend, come a across a rather empty place enlisting names for a flight that would soon be leaving Roraima. The place happened to be located behind a church, and there was no line, no fuss. Through them, Carmen managed to be placed on a flight leaving that very same month. She described it as being pure luck, or, most probably "faith". Irene described going through a similar situation at the same church – arriving by chance, and then managing to get her family's names on a list. Fernando's account was a tad different. In desperate need of relocation, he narrated having been helped by one of his clients who, through church, knew a Jesuit who was working with the operation's 'shelter to shelter' module. Through him, Fernando managed to access a spot in a relocation flight.

Hearing these accounts, I was struck by how pivotal the church's role was: all refugees but one, Carolina, only managed to be relocated due to having directly reached out it. Still, on her map, the church occupies a central space. Puzzled by these stories, I enquired Wilkemann about this on several occasions. He said that in the case of the organisation he works for, they create criteria which they then send to the UN, which, in return, sends a list of the selected applicants back to them. About the criteria, he explained:

> "People who are most vulnerable, you know, within this branch of the church. (…) So, who are they? The most excluded ones: the elderly, families with children, especially the ones who were unhoused."

Now, in relation to most cartographers having been unable to work their way through an official selection with the UN, he notes:

> "It's complex, very complex! If you want to be relocated you have to *apadrinhar*[5] yourself with someone… with a church, an NGO. There are catholic ones, evangelical ones, mormon ones… Everyone is a part of it, and each of them might be putting forth their own relocation programmes".

Similarly to what Koca (2019: 557) has described, in the case of *Acolhida* we see "a private actor working to secure a basic human right [such as shelter] that is traditionally the state's responsibility" – not only that, but the actor in question happens to be a religious one. It is performing a 'sorting' function in behalf of the state, concerning eligibility for the entitlement to this basic right". *Acolhida* has enabled organisations to, in an independent fashion, draw up their own criteria as to whom should be the recipient of their aid, creating their own bordering practices within Brazilian territory. When considering Wilkemann's contribution and the ways in which he highlighted the centrality of churches in the process, it becomes clear that a large part of those who have been relocated have been screened by criteria based on the principles of the christian faith. Religiosity has, then, been the scale through which "refugees who are worthy of protection and those who are not" (Koca 2019: 548) have been differentiated.

The stories being told through this document have underlined that the frontiers are two-fold: territorial and non-territorial – so, in line with Fassin (2011) made out of borders and boundaries. However, when it comes to the screening processes put in place to define who gets to be sheltered and relocated, while they relate to refugees' perceived identities, they can't be said to be deprived from a territorial aspect since they do determine who moves

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[5] *Apadrinhar* is a word which has no literal translation to English, but in this context – and loosely translated by myself – it means taking up a sponsor, a patron, someone who can help you out.

across state borders and who doesn't. At this point of the journey, borders and boundaries overlap: the bordering practices put in place in Roraima state relating to shelter and relocation conflate the theoretical separation between borders and boundaries by creating a very tangible – although invisible – geographical border, while being still strongly reliant on boundaries as "internal social categorisations" (Fassin 2011: 215). In that sense, the social boundaries created by largely religious organisations determine Venezuelan refugee's territorial locations within Brazilian territory.

Employment and education

Once cartographers managed to relocate, their stories take a bit of a different turn. Considering all who managed to do so have done it through the "shelter to shelter" modality, everyone who arrived at Recife on that December morning in 2018 was housed by the organisation who relocated them. At that moment, the journey would take their search elsewhere: finding employment, education, or both. In Pernambuco, insufficient employment is, overall, no news: the numbers record and average of 12,6% (*Portal Folha Pernambuco* 2020). Still, cartographers have reported having been told that there would be employment in the state, but are now all struggling to find jobs. Carolina has been unemployed ever since arrival, while her now ex-husband did manage to secure formal employment. Irene, on the other hand, after facing almost a year of unemployment, resorted to working full-time for a pillow making company for half the minimum wage and a place to stay behind their shop. Fernando has highlighted that for LGBTQI people it has been an even a bigger struggle. He specifies that beyond xenophobia, they have also homophobia to deal with: out of only 10 openly LGBTQI people who were relocated by the organisation, only one found formal work.

Limited access to education has also been a reality for many of those arriving in Pernambuco. Carolina has shared she has been waiting for a vacancy to finish high school for two years now. Fernando has been meaning to apply to university, but found bureaucratic boundaries along the way:

> "They [a university] made me send for my documentation in Venezuela. When it arrived here… Well, they thought people wouldn't manage to get the documents! I spent a lot of money trying to get these documents here. When they see you have managed, in less than two months nonetheless, they couldn't find what to answer. They said I had to study Brazilian history. I told one of the NGOs employees… you don't even know Brazilian history, how will I know, I have been here only one year!".

He narrates an extensive process through which university staff clearly stated they would make an effort to include Venezuelans into their programmes, but have done nothing so far.

Attempting to access schools and jobs, refugees have been "confronted with invisible borders placed within hierarchical structures" (As quoted in Koca 2019: 548). These invisible borders, are, in line with Fassin (2011), in fact boundaries drawn by educational institutions and the Pernambuco market. That is where the organisation through which relocation was perfomerd comes in: they have the power to shift these boundaries, shaping the process to allow for some to cross-over, which means others don't. Rumford (2006) has named this as their ability to deborder and reborder, creating their own bordering practices. Carmen has exemplified this by praising how fast her children accessed schools, and explained that everything was organised by the NGO. On the other side of the spectrum, Fernando has shared that while the organisation cleared the path for children, none of the youth who has arrived on their same flight have accessed education. He also recounted that the NGO adopts similar procedures when it comes to employment: sometimes facilitating contact in between companies and Venezuelan refugees. When he was considered for this, he shared that once he got to the place of the interview, he glanced at his colleague's curriculum placed on top of

the pile, and it was marked: "URGENT". His colleague was given preference to by the NGOs screening criteria: he has children, while Fernando does not.

These accounts have led me to believe that work and employment isn't merely harder to access due to Pernambuco's lack of opportunities, but also due to the organisation's active employment of specific bordering strategies which open the way to certain groups of people, while leaving others behind. No words are better than Fernando's to further explain this:

> "There are a group of 10 LGBTQI people who came here to Recife, and of those ten, only one got a job! So you see, not even 50% of the people managed to be employed! Do you know why? Because they focused more on who had children. Only people who had children accessed jobs and benefits. If this was the case, they should have brought only people who had children [to Pernambuco]!"

For the case of boundaries, and what they represent in people's lives, it might mean that they are porous and can, in fact, be transposed. Now, in contrast to the case of shelter and relocation, the organisation does not have virtually full control over who accesses these services. Additionally, the boundaries set in between refugees and schools and jobs do not stand in the way of their movement, nor strand them in a specific place, thus not overlapping with territorial borders the same way. Both sets of boundaries, however, are instrumentalised by the hands of a religious actor whose bordering practices have determined how Venezuelan refugees' lives are bounded by the *Acolhida* operation.

5.2 Performing, adapting, contesting, resisting

Bordering practices have traversed cartographers' lives in many ways. Departing from the understanding that the *Acolhida* operation delegates border control and allows space for multiple actors to put in place different bordering practices, the combination amongst these various practices comprises what could be described as the Brazilian state's performance of the border, in accordance with Green's definition (2010). Even though the media, with the aid of humanitarian agencies, insists on portraying refugees as one-dimensional victims and one-way receivers of this performance, the ways in which they have interacted with said practices were heterogenous. This research's cartographic stories have drawn multidimensional images of what has taken place, and, for the most part, they have been pictures of agentic border-crossings, in which the limitations imposed upon refugees have been constantly negotiated with authorities or with themselves. Being cognisant of the borders' both rigid and pliable aspects, and in many ways, aware that there is a performance taking place, cartographers have described the ways in which many mobile peoples, by either performing an act themselves; adapting to whatever is expected of them; or plainly contesting bordering practices, "move from positions of 'oppression' to positions of 'resistance'" (as cited in Naples 2010: 514) – without any of these instances globally defining or determining a set-in-stone relation to all boundaries along the way.

Especially when it came to shelter and relocation criteria, performance has been underlined as the main door-opener. As different organisations' criteria varied, and even the same organisations have employed different criteria over time, borders have come to signify an opening or a halt depending on the identity of those confronting them (Mendes and Naples 2014). This has also meant that opening or closing gates could be circumvented by performing a different identity than the one one might identify with. Fernando described:

> "A lot of people pretended to be gay, a lot of people pretended to be married. (…) There's a person who's here with me now that registered themselves as LGBTQI to manage to get into a shelter. That was when they were only accepting LGBTQI people in the shelters… So, you know, to have a decent roof over your head…"

He also made a point in underlining how this was, in fact, performance, exemplifying: "my homosexuality does not depend on a house, my homosexuality does not depend on a registration form. I know what I am!". Additionally, he explained that as soon as the relocation phase was over, no one found it important to keep performing, and those who declared to be married to come as 'a family' demanded to have different rooms upon arrival.

Adapting as a way to encounter employment has also been a resource. Carmen used to work as a nutrition assistant at a hospital, and Irene was doing her graduate studies in social work when she had to leave her home. Now they have both had to take on employment that did not match their previous positions. Still, none of these adaptations have been described as being as painful and unpleasant as the way in which Fernando described his: in need of providing for himself, he recounts having to resort to prostitution in order no guarantee some food and a place to live. He expressed a lot of distress about having to resort to this means: "I lost my personality. I became someone completely different". He confessed having to change his previous behaviour to adapt to working in this business, and that only now he is finding his way back to who he believes he used to be. He has also shared that he hasn't been the only one and that in fact, most LGBTQI people are or have worked with prostitution at one point during their journeys.

Lastly, but maybe, most importantly, it is needed to underline that *Acolhida* has not only made way for performance and adaptation, but also to active contestation. As has already been highlighted, its boundaries have not been taken as givens, and resistance has certainly also been a way to traverse them. Carmen narrates almost daily confrontation with guards as they overused their power and abused refugees seeking shelter at the Boa Vista bus station. When Carolina was struggling to find a shelter with her husband and child, she had to actively contest the screening processed and those responsible for it – which was no easy task. It took her some time to gather the pictures and organise to bring the matter to the local university, who was involved in the process. And finally, Fernando – who, through not only his actions but his tone, voice, words and even posture towards the organisation – has symbolised, to me, resistance to being bounded into occupying less space than he should be entitled to. He has actively organised mobilisations, given statements to the media and even attempted to legally prosecute one of the organisation's members to contest the boundaries imposed onto him and his colleagues. He has demanded the NGO to provide LGBTQI refugees the very same aid families have been entitled to; the Brazilian state to recognise his previous education; and Brazilian universities to make room for those who have not been born within the same borders as this country's citizens.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

6.1 Never-ending arrival

A couple of days after we met, Fernando unexpectedly called me seeking to better understand where exactly my views on *Acolhida* located me. Ever since seeing that first story on the local news, I have looked at the operation with scepticism – placing me at a rather cautious place. From the very beginning, I departed from the understanding that *Acolhida*, despite putting together a framework that opened the borders to Venezuelan citizens, reproduced them at different locations. Even though I have not explicitly put this into words, it showed – and Fernando, who shared sides with me, then proceeded to share much more. My possibly biased beliefs, however, were also countered, as I have come to find that the operation mobilises a wide range of emotions and evokes multiple meanings, since it did not only engender boundaries – as I suspected – but did, in fact, also ease them. With this work I have indented to lay out these manifold interactions, grounding them on the political backdrop and interweaving them with theoretical understandings of borders and boundaries.

Mapping has been the canvas trough which stories have been told. They have been differently *cartographed,* with more or less detail, depending on where cartographers placed the boundary in between what I could or could not access. This tool, performed the way it was, has been particularly handy in surfacing the specific viewpoints through which cartographers have mapped their journeys. Their "additions, omissions, and personally crafted notations" (Hager and Mazali 2013: 276) have been pivotal in outlining the ways in which participants have interacted with borders, with the mapping process, and, with me. Having performed this research online has also meant that the process was deeply individualised, as there was no practical need to share opinions or reach common agreements as to what should or shouldn't be mapped. This aspect of the methodology accounted for the deeply personal one-of-a-kind maps, and has shed light on the ways in which "people who retain different citizenships, ethnic backgrounds, economic statuses, gender identities, sexual orientations (and so on) differently experience border control and bordering practices" (Alexander 1994: 06).

Venezuelans living in Brazil experience the borders and boundaries engendered by *Acolhida* at several locations – this research's findings allow me to argue that they are three-fold. Firstly, there is the geographical border located between both countries, which despite having been softened by the operation, undoubtedly marks at least a symbolic division in between distinct territories and nationalities. Secondly, seeing that the institutional arrangement put in place by the operation has outsourced bordering practices, cartographers have experienced boundaries at the intersection of their paths and the workings of agencies, organisations and also actors such as educational institutions and more broadly, the local market. At the moment, non-state actors are playing a pivotal role in the inclusion of some, and, by consequence, in the exclusion of others – they are greatly, if not primarily responsible for shaping bordering practices, bounding refugees' journeys.

Now, having drawn from Fassin's (2011) contribution, I wish to add that with *Acolhida,* not only borders and boundaries appear as bounding locations, but that they also create a third limitation conflating both definitions. The intricate web of developments within national but also foreign politics has opened Brazil's territorial frontier only to internalise and displace the border to the edge of Roraima state. In that sense, as a third location, there are the bordering practices which do not constitute a palpable nor geographically demarked line

but hinder and impede movement leaving Roraima state through the use of social categorisations. The state's edge most definitively embodies a limitation more than it ever has and one hardly surpasses without the aid of organisations. Thus, creating a border, but also, a boundary – and revealing the entanglement in between both definitions.

Looking at *Acolhida's* institutional arrangement, multidimensional background, and its bordering practices has brought to the forefront the heterogeneity of places where one could experience the borders and boundaries, shedding light on their shapeshifting qualities. The sudden implementation of a governmental operation has contributed to the experiential shift of the border's location from the edge of the country to the edge of Roraima state. The complex institutional framework and the level of autonomy of the actors involved also brings to the forefront how easily the boundaries shapeshift in between passages and barriers, depending on which criteria is enforced. Relationally, shapeshifting in between openness and closure also deeply related to where border-crossers were placed within power structures, allowing them to either traverse them or to be left behind. Additionally, depending on one's embodied subject position boundaries equally shifted in time and space: looking back at them from the location one occupied when *cartographing* also deeply defined how individual experiences were read.

Now, when borders and boundaries were encountered in their unopened form, cartographers have accounted not passively waiting for assistance, but rather differently engaging with the apertures – allowing themselves to shapeshift accordingly, either by performing and assuming different identities than the ones they identified with; adapting in an attempt to find ways to enable their stay in the country; or contesting and resisting the screenings and impositions striving to change their current situation. This deeply counters their hegemonic portrayal in the media and underlines how the interaction with borders is not only one of limitation, but of continuous transformation, where one "shifts out of one's habitual formation" (Anzaldúa 1987: 79), and is an agentic interlocutor of one's bounding.

As I reach the end of this paper, I would like to say that arriving in Pernambuco was in no way closure, as cartographers' displacement was followed by a line circumventing their location wherever they went. Fairly recently, their paths have traversed mine. As I was bounded by the impossibility of traversing my homeland's borders for the very first time, I have been moved to question the way in which they continuously bound the journeys of others. Their stories have illustrated the entanglement, multidimensional aspects and shapeshifting qualities of borders and boundaries, and I hope this work has managed to contribute to the ways we look at them – or, at the very least, has served as an invitation to think differently about where the limitations of our geographies lie; who has laid them there and with which purpose; and, especially, who gets to traverse them and who does not.

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