

Media use and appropriation in the experiences of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees in the city of Barcelona

Usos y apropiaciones mediáticas en las experiencias de inmigrantes y refugiadas/os LGTBIQ+ en la ciudad de Barcelona

Hadriel G. S. Theodoro

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Hadriel G. S. Theodoro

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8491-4544>

Superior School of Advertising and Marketing,
Rua Dr. Álvaro Alvim, 123. Vila Mariana (São
Paulo), Brasil 04018-010

Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain
hgtheodoro@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of this work is to analyze media use and appropriation of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees residing in the City of Barcelona (Spain), mainly those mediated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The qualitative methodology includes (a) a set of theoretical reflections aimed at discussing the specificities of LGBTIQ+ immigration and some of its interfaces with the field of communication, and (b) semistructured interviews conducted during 2019 with ten LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees from countries in the Global South. In general terms, it was possible to verify that media are an essential element for these people at different stages of their migratory project, such as in the construction of imaginaries, the obtaining of information, and interactions of a transnational nature.

Keywords

Media; Communication; LGBTIQ+; Queer; Immigration; Immigrants; Refugees; Refuges; Technologies; Social media.

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar los usos y apropiaciones mediáticas en las experiencias de inmigrantes y refugiadas/os LGBTIQ+ residentes en la ciudad de Barcelona (España), principalmente aquellos mediados por las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TICs). La metodología cualitativa incluye a) un conjunto de reflexiones teóricas destinadas a discutir las especificidades de la inmigración LGBTIQ+ y algunas de sus interfaces con el campo de la comunicación; b) entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas durante el año de 2019 con diez inmigrantes y refugiadas/os LGBTIQ+ de países del Sur Global. En términos generales, se pudo constatar que los medios de comunicación son un elemento esencial para estos sujetos en diferentes etapas de su proyecto migratorio, como en la construcción de imaginarios, en la obtención de información y en las interacciones de carácter transnacional.

Palabras clave

Medios; Comunicación; LGBTIQ+; Inmigración; Inmigrantes; Refugiados; Refugio; Tecnologías; Redes sociales.

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1. Introduction

When it comes to the theme of immigration or refuge, it is very easy to use reductive explanations –homogenization, quantification and victimization are the most common. Yet, such explanations contribute nothing to the understanding of social, cultural, economic, political, religious, subjective factors, etc. involved in any human displacement process. The result is a dynamic of (in)visibility that normally privileges stereotyped representations of the migrant subject, reiterating discourses and practices that impel her/him to a position of subalternity (**Delory-Momberger**, 2015; **Santamaría-Lorenzo**, 2005; **Mezzadra**, 2005).

In the case of LGBTIQ+ immigrants (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexual and gender minorities), the scenario is even more complex. The condition of an ontological difference in the face of the hegemony of cisgenderism and heterosexuality (**Butler**, 2011) favours an invisibility (social, political, media, academic, etc.) of their own existence and, consequently, of the specificities encompassed in their mobility (**Theodoro**, 2020; **Theodoro**; **Cogo**, 2020).

Studies such as those developed by **Andrade** (2019), **França** (2017), **Nash** and **Gorman-Murray** (2014), **Manalansan IV** (2006), **Rouhani** (2016) and **Wesling** (2008) demonstrate the interrelationship between the sociogeographic space, the different forms of oppression and violence against the LGBTIQ+ population, and their displacement. They also point to the need for not disregarding their historicity. In this sense, they show how the ways of experiencing sexual orientations and gender identities affect all stages of these subjects' migratory projects.

In light of this situation, the dynamic and intercultural roles that media assume in contemporary times are important factors to be taken into account, since they permeate everyday life and are fundamental to the construction of spaces of interaction (**Silverstone**, 2010). Consequently, migrations (including those of LGBTIQ+ subjects) are crossed by multiple mediations, involved, for example, in the provision of representations, in the formation of public opinion, in the establishment and/or maintenance of social networks (local, national, inter and transnational), and even demands for rights and citizenship (**Alencar**, 2017; **Brignol**, 2015; **Retis**, 2018; **Ros**, 2010; **Szulc**, 2019).

Therefore, they affect both the displacement and the process of adaptation to the new socio-cultural context in which the migrant subject lives. For this reason, in order to foster a better understanding of LGBTIQ+ immigration, the present study takes as its research problem the media uses and appropriations by these subjects –mainly those mediated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).¹ The qualitative methodology includes

- a) a set of theoretical reflections aimed at discussing the specificities of LGBTIQ+ immigration and some of its interfaces with the field of communication; and
- b) semi-structured interviews carried out during 2019 with ten LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of Barcelona.

According to Christine Delory-Momberger, through interviews it is possible to access what can be called “biographical spaces”. Access to autobiographical narratives allows for verifying how

“... individuals shape their experiences, how they signify the situations and events of their existence, how they integrate, structure, interpret the spaces and temporalities of their historical and social environment” (**Delory-Momberger**, 2015, p. 62).

Hence the relevance assumed by the word and the narrative (through a “biographical activity”) in establishing bridges between the individual, the social and the historical.

As a researcher, dealing with these narratives is not a simple task, as they are never neutral spaces; on the contrary, they are permeated by ethical, language, knowledge, discursive competence, authorization, legitimacy, and power issues (**Delory-Momberger**, 2015). In fact, this was the most difficult part of the fieldwork, because the invisibility of LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees undermines their location, access and approach to participation in the study. Furthermore, the interview process related to sexual orientation and gender identity issues is usually very costly for LGBTIQ+ people, given that their experiences are permeated by situations of discrimination and violence, which are most often traumatic. Mainly for these reasons, the only selection criteria for the participation in the research were that LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees

- a) came of countries of the Global South;² and
- b) live in the city of Barcelona.

The establishment of other selection criteria, such as age, nationality, time of residence in the country, etc., might interfere in the development of the study, because it could restrict the possibility that certain subjects would participate.

Table 1. Interviewees in the city of Barcelona

Interviewee*	Age	Country of origin	SOGI**	Migratory condition	Period of residence ***	Date of interview
Ariel	40 y/o	Chile	Non-binary person	Immigrant	11 years	Oct. 2019
Casio	35 y/o	Venezuela	Gay	Refugee	4 months	Mar. 2019
Eric	35 y/o	Peru	Gay	Refugee	1 year and 2 months	Jan. 2019
Hugo	23 y/o	Brazil	Gay	Immigrant	11 years	Feb. 2019
Luana	29 y/o	Brazil	Trans woman	Immigrant	11 years	Feb. 2019
Manuel	21 y/o	Peru	Gay	Refugee	4 years	Jun. 2019
Núria	29 y/o	Chile	Lesbian	Immigrant	4 years	May 2019
Olga	39 y/o	Peru	Trans woman	Refugee	2 months	May 2019
Pilar	39 y/o	Venezuela	Lesbian	Immigrant	10 years	Mar. 2019
Yan	36 y/o	Philippines	Gay	Refugee	7 months	Feb. 2019

* The name of the interviewees was changed to preserve anonymity.

** Sexual orientation; gender identity.

*** At the moment of the interview.

From the narratives of the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees interviewed, the analysis is based on media consumption that defines their migratory project, especially with regard to uses and appropriations in daily experiences.

2. Capitalism, migration and media

The problematization of the capitalist economic system is essential for any study on migration in contemporary times. This is because capitalism cannot be dissociated from a global conjuncture of the production of goods and subjects, of wealth and poverty, of advances and setbacks, of connection and isolation, of mobility and borders (Sassen, 2014; Santos, 2017). All of these elements directly or indirectly influence the migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects and the dynamics of media uses and appropriations.

For Sassen (2014), globalization, the “financialization” of capital, the transformation of technical capacities, and the current configuration of the consumer society have large-scale effects. They result in a situation in which advanced political economies create an extremely complex world, which tends to reproduce frequent brutalities, among them *expulsions*. On the one hand, if this economic-financial system generates capital and is capable of enabling projects that we need to improve our living conditions, on the other hand, the lack of regulation culminates in practices that are extremely harmful to people, homes, economies, and governments. These factors become a pathology of global capitalism and, together with the rise of control policies and criminalization of human mobility, contribute to the precariousness of the experiences of migrant subjects.

We are faced with a contradictory frame: the deregulation and infocommunicational interconnection of the financial markets promote a constant flow of goods and capital, contrasting with the contribution to the expulsion of several other systems (economic, social, environmental, etc.) that this same logic of functioning raises (Sassen, 2014). That is why, despite the increase in displaced populations, especially in the Global South,³ it must be borne in mind that

“... the borders have changed their meaning, but have never been so alive, as the exercise of activities globalized do not do without a government organization capable of making them effective within a territory” (Santos, 2017, p. 42).

In all of these complex relationships between capital and human displacement processes, gender and sexuality must still be considered as one of the intrinsic dimensions. This requires taking into account that sexism is a by-product of capitalism’s insatiable appetite for profit, transforming daily life into a locus of oppression of women and sexual minorities (Mogrovejo, 2015; Preciado, 2008; Rubin, 1993). In this sense, it is necessary to bear in mind that sexuality and gender expressions are signified asymmetrically in the sexual and body economics that capitalism also imposes on us, assuming different positions and purposes. A simple example is to look at domestic work: although it is essential for the maintenance and continuity of the human labour force that capital requires, it is not usually remunerated, and historically its task falls almost overwhelmingly on the shoulders of women.⁴

Obviously, the oppression of women and sexual minorities predates capitalism. However, we must understand that, since capitalism began to take on the contours of a concrete system, it has put into circulation concepts of female/male, femininity/masculinity, and homosexuality/heterosexuality that preceded it by centuries. It is one

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of its historical and moral elements, which include the entire domain of the body, sex, sexuality and the respective hegemonic forms of oppression (Rubin, 1993). Preciado (2008) states that it is precisely through the new dynamics of advanced technocapitalism that our subjectivity is managed by biomolecular and media control devices and technical platforms. According to the author, in this contemporary (bio)capitalism, new forms of body

control are processed and codified based on a dichotomy of sex (woman vs. man), gender (female vs. male) and sexual orientation (not-heterosexuality vs. heterosexuality), strictly rooted in capital dynamics and consumption practices. It is therefore necessary to recognize the implications regarding the immigration and refuge of LGBTIQ+ subjects, whether in the processes of expulsion that the capitalist system fosters or in the techno-media dimension.

It is therefore necessary to recognize the implications regarding the immigration and refuge of LGBTIQ+ individuals, whether in the processes of expulsion that the capitalist system fosters or in the techno-media dimension

These complexities lead us to consider that migrations are highly permeated by the media and its multiple technological mediations. The uses and appropriations of ICTs, therefore, remain as a backdrop for the geographical dispersions of subjects and communities today, incorporating their undeniable diversity (Brignol, 2015; Cogo; ElHajji; Huertas, 2012; Santamaría-Lorenzo, 2005; Retis, 2018; Theodoro; Cogo, 2019). The sociocommunicabilities included in the diasporic context that we see intensifying generate experiences strictly mediated by *tekné*, which resignify themselves in everyday life. It is not just an access to media tools, but also a sharing of human experiences that articulate and (re)compose different forms of sociability.

3. Queer diasporas

One of the most important factors to be taken into account in relation to the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects is its historicity. In this sense, the initial step is to recognize that the hegemonic patterns of gender and sexuality are structured throughout human history, presenting specific characteristics in each socio-historical context. Such a process leads to an unceasing production of “normality” archetypes, making subjects who do not conform to these standards susceptible to different types of punishments based on “corrective” violence.

The notion of *queer diaspora* helps us to understand how these regulatory frameworks and their symbolic and material effects are closely associated with the processes of geographic displacement. For Wesling (2008), it is a matter of assuming that human mobility is impacted by the subjective, discursive and material dimension of gender and sexuality, and that, at the same time, geographical displacements influence the (de)construction of normative orders that support the conception and understanding of gender and sexuality in a given socio-cultural context. To better explain it, we can first divide the concept into segments.

“Diaspora”, whose semantic field is wide and at times conflicting, corresponds in general to a geographical dispersion (commonly forced) of a determined ethnic group. The conservation of customs and traditions, the partial adaptation or “assimilation” to the destination societies, the lasting ties with the place of origin and the articulation as a community are intrinsic characteristics to the diasporic experience (Fernández-M, 2008). As Hall (2013) clarifies, the definition of diaspora is based on a dual conception of difference. On the one hand, it is grounded on the formation of an exclusion zone; on the other hand, it is subordinate to the engendering of an “other” that delimits circumscribed positions between inside and outside, between what belongs and what does not belong. Therefore, the diaspora always ends up forging a type of difference of an ontological nature, related to the migratory dynamics that the geographical dispersion of the social group raises (Hall, 2013). Based on this link, the political dimension of the diasporic experience is enhanced. This means that despite the dynamics of dispersion the common origin, the bonds of identification and the collective memory are interrelated, creating new meanings of belonging and resistance (Fernández-M, 2008; Rouhani, 2016).

The *queer diaspora*, in turn, has a strict relation to the concept of *abjection*. The term has been used in Anglo-Saxon context to accuse, insult and pathologize the subject considered “abnormal”, “perverse” and “deviant” in the face of the hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality. According to Butler (2011), this social demotion converts its existence into a life that is not considered as “liveable”, causing its materiality to stop being taken as legitimate. The resulting *less-than-human condition* takes root, with lesser or greater intensity, in the experiences of every LGBTIQ+ subject. In practice, the subject considered as abject becomes a target of ostensible exclusions, which end up taking her/him to a locus where the meaning of the existence starts to collapse (Butler, 2011; De-Genova, 2010; Wesling, 2008). Thus, abjection is configured through a relational chain with a hegemonically constructed “normality”. It cannot be seen as a notably external characteristic or property. Inscribed in the materiality of bodies, abjection emerges as a disturbing force, which destabilizes subjectivities, desires, identities and the hegemonic order from the inside, given that normative dispositions, places and borders are transgressed *in* and *by* the existence of the abject subject.

Therefore, the queer diaspora is associated with the geographical dispersion of a social group marked by abjection. It demonstrates that contemporary conditions of geographical mobility can produce new experiences and understandings

about sexual and gender identities (and differences) (De-Genova, 2010; La-Fountain-Stokes, 2004; Manalansan IV, 2006; Mogrovejo, 2015; Rouhani, 2016; Wesling, 2008). In the queer diaspora, there is intersectional destabilization that axiomatically impacts the migratory experience. The queer confronts sexual and gender normativity and, at the same time, the supposed national stability, since it represents a resistance both to the barriers and limits established by the hegemonic patterns of gender and sexuality regarding national and cultural boundaries imposed on the displacement of the migrant subject. According to Wesling (2008), the construction of the nation state itself undergoes structural arrangements for citizenship, rights, duties and border regulations that are always conditioned to some extent by heterocisnormativity, privileging the subjects that conform to its norms.

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Although it is very difficult to fully understand how the mechanisms regulating gender and sexuality operate in a specific place and time, the social, economic and political transformations resulting from the current phase of globalization are increasingly showing that the “queer” is neither dissociated from migrations nor from their cross-border effects (De-Genova, 2010; La-Fountain-Stokes, 2004; Rouhani, 2016; Wesling, 2008). Hence the need to not neglect the fact that the life experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects are closely linked to territory (as the main bordering factor of nation-state) and their (physical and symbolic) borders.

For example, in many countries there are no citizen guarantees or rights for these subjects, recognized only as objects of abuse and discrimination. As a result, a kind of subordinate community forms, constantly excluded and erased from hegemonic discourses (La-Fountain-Stokes, 2004; Rouhani, 2016). In highly repressive sociocultural contexts where violence is enhanced by customs, misinformation, moral condemnations, religious dogmas, stereotyped imaginaries, and prejudices, displacement becomes a possibility not only of greater freedom, but above all, of survival, of an existence minimally dignified (Andrade, 2019; Mogrovejo, 2015; Nascimento, 2018).

As a geopolitical limit that promotes the foundation of a social space, the national territory, shaped substantially from the modern concept of nation state, presents an intimate relation to the marginalization, vulnerability and precariousness of the existence of LGBTIQ+ subjects, in other words, a *geography of exclusion*. With this term I try to highlight the concrete effects that the heterocisnormative orders in a given territory have on our experiences. Its impacts on subjectivity, on the body, on desires, on sexuality and on the possibilities of gender expression produce a scale of exclusion –in several areas, such as cultural, economic, labour, political, educational, legal, academic, religious, etc. Each territoriality, therefore, presents specific levels of this exclusion, which can generate the will or the need to migrate in LGBTIQ+ subjects (Andrade, 2019; La-Fountain-Stokes, 2004; Nascimento, 2018; Szulc, 2019).

From this perspective, we can understand how the hegemonic norms that fall on sexual orientations and gender identities are linked to the national territory. Internally, large urban centers usually represent a more receptive space, given characteristics such as relative anonymity, less social surveillance, the existence of spaces that allow greater freedom to express differences, and the formation of networks or collectives of LGBTIQ+ people (Andrade, 2019; Bell; Binnie 2004). At the international level, a gradation is established in relation to the acceptability, respect and protection that each country offers to LGBTIQ+ subjects (La Fountain-Stokes, 2004; Nascimento, 2018). In both spheres, the result is the same: mobility.

With regard to the role of the media in the queer diaspora, it is necessary to emphasize its multidimensionality. We can consider, for example, the importance that the media assumes

- a) in the (de)construction of imaginaries (about cultures, identities, spaces and territories, etc.) that can influence the migratory project directly or indirectly (Alencar, 2017; Szulc, 2019; Theodoro; Cogo, 2019);
- b) in the dynamics of the (in)visibility of the theme, which have a political impact on several different spheres (social, cultural, economic, legal, academic, aesthetic, etc.) (Theodoro, 2018; 2019; 2020; Theodoro; Bailén, 2019); and
- c) in forms of political engagement and activism by LGBTIQ+ migrant subjects, as in struggles for rights and citizenship (Szulc, 2019; Theodoro; Cogo, 2020).

The media are also relevant to the configuration of queer diasporic communities at the local, international and transnational levels. Through the social imaginaries, representations and infocommunicational connections provided by the media, these communities are capable of generating a sense of belonging for LGBTIQ+ subjects. Especially in the case of those who undertake a migratory project, these symbolic and material networks are critical to the mobility process. In geographic movements, translations, displacements and reallocations (re)shape the queer aspects of cultural identities and are shaped by them at the same time (Atay, 2017; Dhoest, 2016). This understanding contributes to an intersectio-

nal theoretical-analytical perspective, which allows us to comprehend the communicational dynamics as inherent to the migratory experiences of the LGBTIQ+ subjects.

4. Media uses and appropriations: data analysis

Based on previous theoretical reflections, data analysis is oriented towards media uses and appropriations encompassed in the migratory projects of LGBTIQ+ subjects. It also aims to verify how LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees from countries in the Global South and living in the city of Barcelona make use of the potential of ICTs in planning their geographical displacements, in the adaptation process, and in their daily experiences.

From the data obtained in the semi-structured interviews, a systematization of media consumption by these subjects was carried out, focusing on its uses and appropriations, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Media consumption

Name	Country of origin	Media uses and appropriations
Ariel	Chile	Messaging apps: communication with family; support for other immigrants Social network websites: search for housing; socialization and new friendships; participation in online immigrant groups; support for other immigrants Telephone: communication with family TV: construction of imaginaries about Spain
Casio	Venezuela	Internet: source of information about Spain; source of information about the asylum application process Messaging apps: communication with family; support for other immigrants Radio: news; entertainment Social networking websites: communication with family; participation in online immigrant groups
Eric	Peru	Internet: source of information about Spain; source of information about the asylum application process; construction of imaginaries about Spain Social networking websites: participation in online immigrant groups; job search; the disclosure of work already done TV: construction of imaginaries about Spain
Hugo	Brazil	Messaging apps: communication with family Social networking websites: participation in online immigrant groups; support for other immigrants TV: construction of imaginaries about Spain
Luana	Brazil	Internet: source of information about Spain Social networking websites: contact with friends; source of information about Spain; participation in online immigrant groups TV: foreign language learning and cultural issues
Manuel	Peru	Messaging apps: communication with family Social networking websites: source of information about Spain; construction of imaginaries about Spain
Núria	Chile	Internet: displacement; researches; communication with family and friends; source of information about Chile and Spain Messaging apps: communication with family and friends Social networking websites: participation in online immigrant groups; support for other immigrants
Olga	Peru	Home sharing apps Internet: source of information about Spain; source of information about the asylum application process Messaging apps: communicating with friends Social networking websites: source of information about country of origin TV: source of information; construction of imaginaries about Spain
Pilar	Venezuela	Internet: research; source of information about Spain; activisms Radio: foreign language learning and cultural issues Social networking websites: source of information Telephone: communication with family TV: construction of imaginaries about Spain; foreign language learning and cultural issues
Yan	Philippines	Internet: source of information about Spain; source of information about the asylum application process Messaging apps: communicating with friends

The synthesis of these data allows us to verify that the internet is an essential communication tool for the migratory project of the immigrants and refugees interviewed. Its uses and appropriations are linked to different stages of the migratory project, such as in the construction of imaginaries about Spain as a destination country, as well as in obtaining information on bureaucratic procedures regarding the regularization of migratory status and supporting other immigrants. In the case of Casio, for example, he points out that the information obtained through research carried out on the internet facilitated his migratory project, especially with respect to adaptation:

“I did not have much difficulty in adapting because I did a lot of research on the internet before to come here [Barcelona, Spain]” (Casio, 2019).

This kind of media consumption is strongly related to the social uses and appropriations of the internet. **Brignol** (2015)

explains that in contemporary transnational migratory experiences the internet and its communicational environments directly impact human displacements. Despite the limits that still exist with regard to internet access, ease of use (as in smartphones), low costs and possibilities for interaction are relevant in the construction of the migratory project and in the daily experiences of these subjects (Cogo; ElHajji; Huertas, 2012; Retis, 2018; Ros, 2010). This is explicit in Núria's narrative:

“The internet for me has always been and still is very important. I use the internet to get around, search for things, talk to friends and my family, social networks websites... Also for me to stay informed about the things that are happening in Chile and about the political situation here in Spain” (Núria, 2019).

For the majority of refugees interviewed (Casio, Eric, Olga, Yan), the internet was also vital in the search for information about the process of requesting asylum. When asked about this procedure, Eric, for example, states:

“A friend had commented on this to me, but I still had no knowledge. I got on *Google* and started searching, searching, reading a lot. Every day I read” (Eric, 2019).

On the one hand, if the informational and communicational tools available on the internet help in this process, on the other hand, we can consider that the need for this type of search is related to the invisibility of the topic, which can become a barrier to the very right these subjects have to request international protection (Theodoro, 2020).

In this sense, it is worth explaining that it was only in 2002 that the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* published guidelines regarding international protection based on gender and a specific social group in which cases of LGBTIQ+ subjects are normally included.⁵ However, in the absence of a legal specification that ensures full protection for LGBTIQ+ immigrants in this condition, the acceptability of the asylum application and its granting are subject to a subjective understanding by the legal body of the country where the request is made. In addition, there is very little information and statistical data on the migration of LGBTIQ+ subjects (Nascimento, 2018).⁶ As evidenced in Eric's case, the structural invisibility of migration and, above all, the refuge of LGBTIQ+ subjects entails an informational need that is directly linked to the experience of displacement and the process of regularizing the migratory status.

Still with regard to the online environment, we found that social networking websites are relevant in the experience of the refugees and immigrants interviewed. The communication dynamics provided by these platforms allow different types of interaction (with people and contents), access to sources of information about the country of origin and/or of residence, the construction of community ties, and support relationships to transnational migratory flows. As an example, we can turn to Ariel's narrative:

I am active in the “Chilenas in Barcelona” group on *Facebook* and “Chilenos in Barcelona” as well. I often open these groups and see the contents. There are usually questions from people who are arriving or people who want to come here. If I know something that I'm up to date, then I reply. I participate in this way, collaborating like this. And if I need anything, I look for people there (Ariel, 2019).

Social networking websites are essential to contemporary migratory flows precisely because of their mediation capacity (Brignol, 2015). They converge with a broader logic of transnational social networks, and their uses and appropriations can be seen in the construction of the migratory project (as in the case of Ariel's countrymen, who request information from a group of immigrants on *Facebook*), in the process of adaptation to the country of destination, and in maintaining links with the country of origin (Cogo; ElHajji; Huertas, 2012; Retis, 2018). For the immigrants and refugees interviewed, this was no different. In fact, it shows how the scope of digital culture plays a fundamental role in the queer diaspora (Szulc, 2019).

Mobile applications are another communicational tool widely used by the immigrants and refugees interviewed, and their appropriation is mainly related to message sharing applications. The only exception is the case of Olga and, therefore, I consider it relevant to be analyzed. Olga reports that she used the *Badi*⁷ and *Idealista*⁸ apps to search for housing in the city of Barcelona. Both applications serve to connect people who have vacancies in their homes or apartments with those who are looking for a room to rent. However, the fact of being a trans and immigrant person makes the use of these applications unfavourable for Olga.

What is more difficult is housing. This I can tell you from my own experience. Finding an apartment to live in is very difficult. Even when I had money, I visited many places to be able to rent monthly. I downloaded these apartment search apps, like *Badi* and *Idealista*, but people always said no to me. They used to say: “I'm sorry, but you are not the type of person we want here” (Olga, 2019).

The technology itself does not guarantee Olga an equal position when it comes to finding a home. In this sense, we can question concepts such as intercultural, cosmopolitan and communicative citizenship, commonly used when addressing the role of ICTs in migratory flows. It is evident how socio-cultural barriers (related to social markers of difference such as gender) can be transposed to the online sphere (Brignol, 2012; Retis, 2018), replicating a framework of prejudice, discrimination, and violence to which the LGBTIQ+ population is constantly susceptible (Atay, 2017; Dhoest, 2016). In other words, there are limits to the relationship between migrant subjects and technologies, which prevent a full appropriation of the technique for the construction of better citizenship spaces (Martín-Barbero, 2014; Ros, 2010).

“The uses and appropriations of ICTs are implicated in different spheres of their daily experiences, ranging from entertainment to the obtaining of information; from the imaginary to interactions; from learning to aiding in a transactional migratory network”

Continuing with this perspective, at another moment in the interview Olga points out that these techno-communicational barriers are not limited to her own experience, but also permeate those of other trans immigrant women:

It is very important for you to know this step-by-step, to be informed [about the procedures for applying for asylum]. I have information, I always go on the internet, I have a cell phone. But many trans girls don't know how to use these networks. I saw many trans girls from Nicaragua, Colombia, from almost all of Latin America, who do not know how to use it, do not even know how to search for information. So I think it's a kind of digital right that many LGBTI people don't have. In other words, there is a barrier to being able to access information, to know what to do. When you don't know what to do, where to go, where to find help, it can make the process very difficult (Olga, 2019).

Again it is clear that despite all the technical advances (mainly those related to the internet), we cannot consider that there is an equality either in relation to access or in relation to a *savoir faire*, regarding the knowledge necessary for dealing with these technologies (Martín-Barbero, 2014). As Olga reports, this directly influences the migratory project of many LGBTIQ+ people, whether in access to information, in the process of regularizing their migratory status, or in their daily experiences (Alencar, 2019; Szulc, 2019).

Finally, it is relevant to emphasize that more “traditional media”, such as telephone, TV and radio, are part of the media consumption of the refugees and immigrants interviewed, although these are not in the majority. Their uses and appropriations are more related to communication with family or friends, access to information and learning the language (Spanish and/or Catalan) and cultural issues. It was also possible to ascertain that TV is mainly related to the construction of imageries about Spain. For example, when Eric is asked what he knew about the country before his immigration, he replies:

“I didn't know much. I knew more from what I saw on television, for example, about culture, dances... And that it was a freer country” (Eric, 2019).

Given that imaginaries are linked to the domain of culture, the values they structure are always shared, directly influencing social representations (Santamaría-Lorenzo, 2005). In Eric's case, we can infer from his use of the word “freer” that the imagery built from the consumption of television products also includes the representation of greater freedom for the LGBTIQ+ population in Spanish territory. This is corroborated when he states,

“I believe that, above all, I distanced myself from those problems that I had in my country [Peru]. Here I live well. I can't complain about anything. Here I feel freer, I can wear the clothes I want, I can make my hair colourful... I like it a lot” (Eric, 2019).

These imaginaries are linked to both the experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects (such as in the desire to migrate and in the choice of destination city/country) and also in the representations of the queer diasporas themselves (Atay, 2017; Szulc, 2019).

Faced with this panorama, the analysis makes it possible to attest that the media is a substantial element in the migratory projects of the interviewed LGBTIQ+ subjects. Therefore, the uses and appropriations of ICTs are implicated in different spheres of their daily experiences, ranging from entertainment to the obtaining of information; from the imaginary to interactions; from learning to aiding in a transactional migratory network.

5. Final considerations

The study of the logics of communication in migratory networks in a context of changes in the worldwide migration phenomenon has brought new perceptions about the relations between media, ICTs and human mobility in contemporary times (Brignol, 2015; Cogo; ElHajji; Huertas, 2012; Retis, 2018; Ros, 2010). What stands out most in this process are the social uses and appropriations of the media by immigrants and refugees, how it was possible to verify in the case of the LGBTIQ+ subjects interviewed.

The analysis of the interviews makes it possible to affirm that the applicability of ICTs is essential in the organization of communicational logics that permeate the everyday experiences of the LGBTIQ+ immigrants and refugees living in the city of Barcelona. They are involved in a symbolic dimension (such as the imaginaries) and in a material dimension (as in the consolidation of communicative practices into networks supporting the migratory phenomenon). On the other hand, in line with previous theoretical debates, the specificities encompassed in the existence of LGBTIQ+ subjects affect and at the same time are affected by these communicational dynamics.

It is notable that access to information contributes, for example, to the exercise of citizenship and the guarantee of rights (Alencar, 2017; Szulc, 2019), as in the case of asylum request. However, based on Olga's report, I believe that the continuity of inequalities has been demonstrated both in terms of access and in the media uses and appropriations of some ICTs by LGBTIQ+ subjects, which directly interferes with their migratory project. Theoretically and epistemologically, this creates the need to reflect on the capacity for social transformation arising from these ICTs and their role in improving the living conditions of subjects who are constantly marginalized. It is essential to avoid falling into reductionism or simplifying the complexities encompassed in LGBTIQ+ migration.

“Theoretically and epistemologically, this creates the need to reflect on the capacity for social transformation arising from these ICTs and their role in improving the living conditions of subjects who are constantly marginalized”

6. Notes

1. This study is related to doctoral research in progress since February 2017, funded by the *São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP)* – cases 2016/24566-1 and 2018/18712-0). It specifically aims to analyse how the visibility or invisibility of the ontological difference concerning a non-hegemonic gender identity and/or sexual orientation impacts on the migratory experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects (originally from the Global South countries) living in the cities of São Paulo (Brazil) or Barcelona (Spain).

2. The concept of the Global South is very complex. In this study, its use merely functions as a geographical division, which enables an analytical approach in relation to transnational migrations. However, it is worth mentioning that it is not restricted to a category of geographical boundaries, as it encompasses symbolologies, cultures, policies, knowledge, epistemologies, etc. (Santos, 2019).

3. For example, the countries of the Global South are home to around 80% of the total number of refugees in the world. Thus, the refugee population generates a much greater socioeconomic impact in the Global South, despite the fact that the hegemonic media visibility on the subject emphasizes, in most cases from a negative perspective, the consequences on the Global North (Sassen, 2014).

4. It also affects migratory flows. For example, when considering “care work”, in many countries, professionals in this area are mostly poor, black, migrant women (from internal or external migration) (Hirata, 2016).

5. In 2002, the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* published “Guidelines on international protection n. 1: Gender-based persecution” and “International protection guidelines n. 2: Belonging to a specific social group”. In *Guidelines n. 1*, UNHCR points out the fact that gender is an important dimension in human displacement, highlighting that “historically, the definition of refugee has been interpreted in a context of [heterocisnormative] male experiences, which has led to the failure to recognize many requests for women and homosexuals” (UNHCR, 2002a, p. 3).

Among the various forms of gender-based violence, the document highlights domestic violence, genital mutilation, sexual violence such as rape, sexual exploitation, etc.

<https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2014/9738.pdf>

In *Guidelines n. 2*, UNHCR indicates that there is no single and homogeneous criterion that can define what constitutes a “social group” and which can be considered “specific social groups”. The two most accepted criteria are a) that of “immutability”, that is, a social group that is formed historically based on an immutable characteristic or essential to the human dignity of the subjects that integrate it; and b) “social perception”, based on the sharing (or not) of a common characteristic, which identifies or separates it from society as a whole. Because of this complexity, there is no exhaustive list of social groups that can constitute a “specific social group”.

<https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2014/9741.pdf>

6. According to UNHCR, only four countries provide some type of data regarding the asylum applications for reasons of sexual orientation and/or gender identity: Belgium, Brazil, England and Norway.

<https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2018/11/29/brasil-protége-refugiados-lgbti-mostra-levantamento-inedito-do-acnur-e-do-ministerio-da-justica>

7. In the *Apple Store*, the description of the *Badi* app is as follows:

“Seeking a new flatmate? Have a room to rent? *Badi* makes it easy to find compatible flatmates or rent out your spare room. The app comes with advanced features to ensure a great user experience. *Badi* is simple and fast: list a room, find a room!”

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/badi/id1008653746>

8. In the *Apple Store*, the description of the *Idealista* app is as follows:

“We have designed our app to find the house you need... If you are looking for a shared flat or a tenant for your room, you are also in luck, because this is your application”.

<https://apps.apple.com/es/app/idealista/id465958311>

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