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## **Fighting for Family Reunification: the Congolese experience in São Paulo, Brazil**

**Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli**

**Abstract:** Refugees in Brazil have no political rights. However, problems with family reunification visas in the Brazilian Embassy in Kinshasa was a cause that united Congolese refugees in Brazil. This article analyzes the political articulation of this group in São Paulo. I conducted semi-structured interviews with refugees who act as spokespersons for this movement, and I analyzed their strategies of organization, presentation of claims, and political pressure to solve this issue through analysis of documents produced by them and delivered to Brazilian authorities. Even though they had no success, they developed an organizational structure composed by a WhatsApp group for fast communication and periodic meetings in person in the center of São Paulo. This structure can be used to demand other rights and to continue to pressure the Brazilian government.

**Key-words:** Brazil; Family Reunification; Refugees' activism; refugees; political participation

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### **Introduction**

Conflicts, persecution, and severe violations of human rights motivate people to flee and apply for asylum in other countries. In this search for protection, families are separated when people make hard choices to emigrate alone and leave their loved ones behind. One way to bring families together is to reunite them in the asylum country through the process of family reunification. Family reunification involves granting visas for family members to enter the asylum-country where the refugee is and status to the family member to stay in the country.

Human Rights documents such as the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant of Political and Civil Rights (1966) guarantee the right to family life, to form a family, and non-arbitrary interference in the family. However, not all states in the world recognize that refugees have a right to family reunification, mainly because there is no explicit mention to this right in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). Brazil is a country that recognizes the right of all permanent immigrants (including refugees) to family reunification and family reunification as a principle in its migratory policy according to the Law 13.445 of May 24, 2017 (known as Migration Law). Even before that, the extension of the refugee condition<sup>1</sup> was written in the Law 9474 of July 22, 1997 (known as the Asylum Law) and the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) has formalized its understanding of the

family reunification process for refugees in Brazil in the Normative Resolution number 04 of December 1, 1998 substituted by the Normative Resolution number 16 of September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013<sup>2</sup>.

Brazilian legislation guarantees refugees' rights to be reunited with partners (married and unmarried), ascendants and descendants, and other relatives economically dependent on the refugee in Brazil. According to data from the CONARE, until the end of 2018, Brazil recognized 11,231 people from 84 nationalities as refugees, but just 6,654 kept an active register in Brazil, and 52 percent of them lived in São Paulo (CONARE 2019). Among the nationalities with more refugees in Brazil in 2018, we can highlight Syria<sup>3</sup> (35 percent), Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>4</sup> (15 percent), Angola (9 percent), Colombia (7 percent), Venezuela (3 percent), and Pakistan (3 percent). In 2018, 80,057 people applied for asylum in Brazil, 77 percent of them coming from Venezuela (CONARE 2019). There is not much data on family reunification for refugees in Brazil. During my fieldwork, CONARE provided me with information about family reunification visas requests to people abroad and the extension of the refugee status to relatives in the Brazilian territory. Between 2015 and June 2018, 831 refugees from 24 different nationalities applied for family reunification visas for their families and 58.24 percent of them were Congolese. There is no information on how many of these visas were granted. Between 2010 and September 2018, 765 people from 35 nationalities received the extension of the refugee condition and 38.95 percent were Congolese. Most visas were requested for brothers and men (51.57 percent). However, most extensions were requested for sons and daughters and women (56.18 percent)<sup>5</sup>.

In 2013 CONARE adopted a clear procedure for family reunification visas (the Normative Resolution 16), yet refugees still faced some small problems in their family reunification procedures like delays and lost documents. But the visas were granted. However, in 2018, Congolese refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) started to face problems concerning their family reunification claims in the Brazilian Embassy in Kinshasa, DRC including denial of visas without further explanation, long interviews with family members and suspicions of corruption. Trying to resolve this issue, in the middle of 2018, Congolese refugees in São Paulo organized a group called *Coletivo dos Refugiados Congolese Pelos chamados beneficiários do visto para Reunião familiar*<sup>6</sup> to demand answers from the Brazilian authorities regarding the problems with their family reunification visas. This paper studies the political articulation of Congolese refugees in the city of São Paulo (Brazil) concerning the issue of family reunification visas. During my fieldwork in São Paulo between September and November 2018, I conducted

semi-structured interviews with four refugees who act as spokespersons for this movement, and I analyzed their strategies of organization, presentation of claims, and political pressure to solve this issue through the content analysis of documents produced by them and delivered to the Brazilian authorities.

The Congolese experience of mobilization in São Paulo differs from other more studied cases in Europe because the refugees mobilized using an online space (WhatsApp group) and offline meetings in the SESC São Paulo facilities. It also differs from other experiences of protest in Brazil like the situation with Palestine resettled refugees (Moulin 2011, 2012; Hamid 2012). Congolese refugees were fighting for their right to family reunification not by occupying public areas or going on hunger strikes but by using diplomatic communication channels that are open to all citizens in Brazil. The refugees tried to speak the ‘bureaucratic language’ of the Brazilian government showing that they understood the asylum and administrative processes in Brazil. At the same time, the refugees were facing a counter-discourse of the Brazilian authorities trying to delegitimize their voices, classifying their movement as ‘angry refugees who had their family reunification visas denied because of fraud or bad faith.’ (Interview with representatives of CONARE and MRE, Brasília, September 2018). Their attempt to mobilize grew when more refugees realized that they were not the only ones facing family reunification problems. There was an increase in the number of Congolese refugees participating in the WhatsApp group between September and November 2018. The Congolese experience represents a unique type of mobilization of refugees in Brazil focusing on the right to family reunification. That is, this was not a movement against reception conditions in Brazil (like the case of Palestinians), but was a self-organized experience in a Global South country with progressive legislation on family reunification. Congolese are the nationals that apply more for family reunification visas in Brazil. Syrians have access to humanitarian visas and Venezuelans do not need visas to enter in Brazil. Although other nationalities were affected by family reunification problems, only the Congolese had a high number of visa denials without further information.

This paper has five sections. The second section situates the discussion of the Congolese movement in São Paulo in the literature on political activism of refugees. The third section presents its theoretical framework and methodological approach. The fourth section, subdivided into two parts, presents the results. The first subsection contextualizes the situation of Congolese refugees who applied for family reunification in Brazil. The second subsection analyses the strategies used

by the Congolese refugees in São Paulo to fight for family reunification. The conclusion reflects on the innovative political experience of the Congolese refugees in São Paulo and their claims for fair family reunification processes.

### **Can Refugees participate in the political arena and protest?**

The discussions regarding refugee's possibility of political engagement relate to the way that States, international organizations, and the media portray refugees. Refugees are a consequence of the international system of States<sup>7</sup>. They are the outsiders in a system that reinforces the borders of imagined nation-states (Haddad 2003). That means refugees are not recognized as active citizens of any territory while they have refugee status (Owen 2020). Refugees are also seen as apolitical victims and suffering human beings (Pupavac 2008).

Godin and Doná (2016: 61) argue that, “while refugees flee their country as political subjects, during their journey they appear to lose political agency to become, upon arrival in host countries, the objects of migration and asylum policies, the beneficiaries of assistance, or individuals with traumatic stories.” Fassin (2013) shows how States have portrayed asylum as a limited resource, justifying the need to separate those who ‘deserve’ to receive asylum from those who do not. This perception of refugees as mere victims in need of protection with no possibility of agency and participation may also contribute to the understanding of asylum as a grace granted by States. Moulin (2012) discusses how the Brazilian government and media described resettled Palestinians refugees protesting the treatment they received in Brazil as ‘ungrateful subjects.’ In this logic, the asylum is a gift granted by the State to refugees (Fassin 2013). States expect that ‘grateful’ refugees should not complain of what they receive and how, because States are doing more than they should, considering that refugees are not their citizens (Moulin 2012).

In past years, international and community-based organizations started to address the need to foment refugees’ and asylum seekers’ participation to make refugees more responsible and less dependent on aid (Olivius 2014). However, organizations may create channels of participation for refugees with the goal of better controlling and governing these populations (Olivius 2014). In that case, refugees’ participation is limited to how much is desirable to those providing services to them. Olivius (2014: 93) explains how alternatives to promote women’s participation in two refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh were “an instrument for optimizing the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian operations rather than a tool for the promotion of gender equality.”

Although they helped empower women, those initiatives were not created considering women's demands, but rather the organizations' program implementation needs.

Other literature explains how refugees are involved in transnational political movements (Banki 2013)<sup>8</sup>. This research shows how refugees in the diaspora can make people in the asylum-countries aware of the situation in their home countries and how they try to influence political and social situations in their countries of origin from abroad (Allerdice 2011; Godin and Doná 2016). In theory, asylum-country nationals (citizens) could pressure the asylum-countries governments to do something considering the condition in the home countries of the refugees.

There is a growing literature on the protests of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (non-citizens) considering anti-deportation fight, border control, and access to rights and services provided to immigrants and asylum-seekers<sup>9</sup>. Immigrant protests can take many forms and may involve different actors, including refugees and immigrants, concerned citizens, NGOs, and other community-based organizations (Tyler and Marciniak 2013). Refugee protests are also essential to guarantee the visibility of the refugee cause and to present the public with alternative narratives (Bhimji 2016). However, most studies focus on European countries rather than the Global South (Però and Solomon 2010; Chimienti 2011).

One aspect of this literature is the occupation of public spaces where refugees and immigrants interrupt their regular use as an attempt to be recognized as subjects of rights and not mere objects of protection (Moulin and Nyers 2007). That is, "migrants and their activist allies engage in political strategies of visibility to generate 'outrage' and 'make public' their specific concerns and grievances" (Tyler and Marcianiak 2013: 152). The occupations also transform physical and public spaces in places of resistance while negotiations happen (Bhimji 2016). These studies also present invisible political strategies in everyday practice and integration regimes. They also consider how migrants and refugees mobilize resources, present claims, and organize networks (Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2016).

This literature focuses on critical citizenship studies and acts of citizenship by people that are not considered citizens (Isin 2008; 2012) and the social movement literature (Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2016). Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl (2016: 531) recall that these studies, "show how resistant subjects enact and appropriate (citizenship) rights they may not officially hold and escape regimes of control through (excessive and imperceptible) movement." Many studies in past years focus on the experiences of refugees protesting in European countries (including against the Dublin system)

(Johnson 2012; Stierl 2012) like Austria (Ataç 2016; Merhaut and Stern 2018), Germany (Fadaee 2015; Bhimji 2016; Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2018; Rucht 2018; Odugbesan and Schwiertz, 2018), Switzerland (Bader, 2018), Italy (Oliveri 2012) and France (Millner 2011; Rygiel 2011; Rigby and Schlembach 2013). They show that immigrants protest in public places even facing the risk of being deported, which means their situation is provisory and unstable, and protesting involves real risks to them (Oliveri 2012).

Other discussions highlight the support of citizens to immigrant and refugees' protests and movements. In their volume, Birey et al (2019) discuss migration struggles and the mobilization of solidarity networks after the 'refugee crisis' in Europe in 2015. Johnson (2012) recalls that those solidarity relationships between citizens and non-citizens, where the first 'deliver' the message in the name of the second, can turn in a clientelistic relationship with unequal power relations. Fadaee (2015) also reflects on this, explaining that problems may arise when the immigrants start to frame their claims according to the discourses and interests of the citizen activists that support the cause, losing their voices and primary demands.

Some studies focus on protests outside of Europe, especially in the Americas. For instance, Guerrero and Vanegas (2010) expose the protests of internally displaced people in Colombia. Nyers (2003) reflects on the anti-deportation movement in Canada. Moulin and Nyers (2007) analyze the sit-in protest of a group of Sudanese refugees that occupied a public square in Cairo for three months in September 2005. Moulin (2011, 2012) and Hamid (2012) discuss the protest of resettled Palestinians in Brazil in 2008 and 2009. These resettled refugees initially organized a protest camp in front of the UNHCR Office in Brasília and later in front of the Itamaraty Palace (the headquarter of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - MRE). Moulin (2011) recalls that those refugees were protesting the treatment they received from UNHCR and NGOs in Brazil. They protested using UNHCR's lexicon, demanding resettlement to another country or returning to the former refugee camp (Moulin 2012). Hamid (2012) explains that these protests motivated the movement of the UNHCR Office to a different location in Brasília.

Moreira (2012) describes other historical protests in front of the UNHCR Office in Brazil in 1984 organized by Vietnamese and in 1987 by Chileans. In the cases of protests in front of UNHCR, the refugees wanted to leave Brazil with the support of UNHCR (Facundo 2017). Vera-Espinoza (2017; 2018), in her research on resettlement in Brazil and Chile, also showed agency and resistance strategies of Palestinians and Colombians refugees in these countries. In Chile, with

the support of politicians and civil society organizations, Palestinians refugees succeed in their fight for naturalization (Vera-Espinoza 2017). Moulin and Thomaz (2016) highlight the acts of resistance and mobility and the solidarity networks of Haitians immigrants in adverse reception conditions in shelters in Basileia, Brazil. Finally, Facundo (2017) shows everyday resistance by Colombian refugees (eligibility refugees and resettled refugees) in Brazil. The refugees employed different strategies to engage with UNHCR and NGOs in Brazil like participating in events, “playing” the game of the social assistants and forming solidarity networks with other refugees.

However, none of these protest and resistance experiences of refugees in Brazil focus specifically on family reunification as the main claim, like the situation of the Congolese refugees. Congolese refugees were not fighting against deportation but for family reunification rights and demanding changes in the asylum system in Brazil. Their primary audience was the Brazilian government and their claims and written documents were in Portuguese. In contrast to the resettled Palestinians protesting in Brazil (that were previously living in refugee camps and wanted to go to another country), the Congolese were first-asylum country refugees that were claiming their right to family reunification in Brazil.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

I used the same lens as Johnson (2012) to analyze different moments of everyday resistance. The author understands that those moments of resistance and solidarity “reveal glimpses of a deeper political activity that operates at the level of the every-day and the local” (Johnson 2012: 121). Compared to other immigrant and refugee protests that occupy public places and received visibility, the Congolese activism in São Paulo was a quiet and “invisible” moment of political activism with deep roots in the every-day and local dynamics of the Congolese refugee population in São Paulo.

This paper also adopts the concept of politics of survival to “capture, recognise and help to legitimise the spectrum of resistances” of Congolese refugees in São Paulo (Bassel and Emejulu 2017: 9). Just like minority women surviving austerity measures in France and Britain, Congolese refugees are a racialized and discriminated group whose social justice claims (fight for family reunification) are invisibilized and inaudible due to gender, class, citizenship and race domination structures (Bassel and Emejulu 2017). The Congolese movement is also a self-care and self-help organization created to survive an unjust system that denies their right to family reunification. In that sense, the Congolese experience is self-care as warfare as defined by Ahmed (2014). The feeling of powerlessness due to the continuation of their family reunification problems with no

solution has pushed Congolese refugees to develop these social alliances and solidarity networks that resulted in the creation of the Coletivo (Ahmed 2014).

In this line, I understand political activism (Martin, Hanson, and Fontaine 2007) as “resistance to particular structures of power; it is about building relationships among people that foster change.” (Johnson 2012: 128). Martin, Hanson, and Fontaine’s definition of activism englobes “actions and activities that, because of their limited geographic reach, normally are considered too insignificant to count as activism and yet do create progressive change in the lives of women, their families, and their communities” (2007: 79). This broad definition of political activism (Martin, Hanson and Fontaine 2007), the idea of every-day moments of resistance and agency (Johnson 2012) and the politics of survival (Bassel and Emejulu 2017) are useful lenses to analyze the Congolese experience because it did not get attention from the Brazilian media. It lacked the visibility of other refugee protests that have been analyzed in the works discussed above. However, the mobilization and activist strategies of Congolese refugees in São Paulo tried to change their reality by bringing social change. It was a self-organized way to guarantee their participation, resistance, and agency in fighting for their family reunification right.

The methodology of data collection involved fieldwork in São Paulo between September 2018 and November 2018. I conducted semi-structured interviews with four refugees who identified as spokespersons of the movement (three men and one woman)<sup>10</sup> in São Paulo. The information was complemented by other 15 phenomenological interviews with Congolese refugees in São Paulo (12 men and three women), nine expert interviews with experts and representative of civil society organizations in São Paulo (DPU; two interviews with different people), *Cáritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo*, *Missão Paz*, *Centro de Referência e Atendimento para Imigrantes (CRAI)*, *Instituto Adus*, *Compassiva*, *África do Coração* and a migration lawyer), and four expert interviews with Brazilian authorities in Brasília (CONARE (two interviews) and MRE (one interview with the Visa Division – DIM, and one interview with the United Nations Division – DNU) conducted between September and November 2018. In total, there were 15 Congolese refugee families from São Paulo that directly participated in my research. All interviews were conducted in places suggested by the refugees themselves in Portuguese by me with no need of interpreters, following the desire of the interviewees. All interviewees gave me their oral informed consent. Many refugees knew me before because I was a volunteer in an organization providing services for refugees between 2015 and 2016. Refugees knew my research and how to contact me and I was able to build trust with my informants. I conducted the research in a way to do no harm to my participants following the recommendations of Hugman, Pittaway, and

Bartolomei (2011). I transcribed the interviews and analyzed the themes that emerged using Atlas.ti. I was also able to act as an observant participant (invited by the refugees) of one of their meetings in the SESC São Paulo in September 2018 and of the Seminar on Family, Immigration and Asylum organized by the Defensoria Pública da União (DPU) office in São Paulo with the support of other organizations working with immigrants and São Paulo and organizations created by the immigrants and refugees in October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The refugees were informed that I was conducting research on family reunification and that I was there as a researcher. In those opportunities, I had ten informal conversations with Congolese refugees and other authorities. Finally, the Congolese movement gave me a copy of the undersigned letter (with the annexes) that they sent to the Brazilian government. They gave me their informed oral consent to analyze these materials and I conducted content analysis of these documents and the interviews (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

### **Family reunification for refugees in Brazil: What are the Congolese refugees fighting for?**

The migration of Africans, especially Congolese, to Brazil is a recent movement that started in the 2010s. After the economic crisis of 2008, Brazil was perceived as an international player and a growing economy, making the country an alternative destination for Africans and Latin Americans facing restrictive asylum policies in North America and Europe. The organization of international events like the World Youth Journey (2013), the World Cup (2014) and the Olympics (2016) also allowed more people to receive visas to come to Brazil (Bógus and Fabiano 2015; de Lima, Fernandes and Silva 2017). There were a small number of Congolese refugees before 2005 in Brazil due to the war in the former Zaire, but the increase in the number of Congolese asylum seekers started in 2010 (Lima et al 2017). At the same time, the Democratic Republic of Congo has been facing serious human rights violations and persecutions by the government as well as armed conflict in the East which displaced 4.5 million people in the year of 2018. In that same year, there were more than 140 armed groups active in Eastern Congo (HRW 2019). The country is also facing an economic crisis which put 13 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018 (HRW 2019).

Lima et al (2017) showed that most refugees recognized between 1998 and 2014 (including Congolese) arrived directly in the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Santos. Two-thirds of Congolese refugees arrived by air (with visas) and the rest by ship, but 86 percent of those who

came by air arrived from the Republic of Congo (Lima et al 2017). Most Congolese were recognized as refugees based on conflict (severe and grave violations of human rights) and political opinion between 1998 and 2014. A representative survey of UNHCR and Cátedra Sérgio Vieira de Mello (2019) showed that the Congolese refugee population living in Brazil in 2018 were mostly male between 18 and 49 years and lived in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. All of them had finished at least high school (UNHCR and CSVN 2019). Their average family income ranged between 1,000 and 2,999 (Brazilian reais, between US\$200-600). Most Congolese refugees in Brazil knew their rights and duties (77 percent), wished to vote (80 percent), to stay (78 percent) in Brazil and to obtain the Brazilian nationality (98 percent) (UNHCR and CSVN 2019).

Congolese refugees can apply for family reunification like any other refugee in Brazil. According to the CONARE Normative Resolution 16/2013 (that delimited the family reunification procedure), the refugee had to present the family reunification form and the documentation proving the family relationship (and the economic dependency relation if it was necessary) to the CONARE. Then, the CONARE analyzed the documents and asked the MRE to grant the visa to the refugee's family member in the closest consular authority for him/her. The refugee and his family were responsible for paying the cost of the visa, documentation, and the flight to Brazil. When the relative arrives in the Brazilian territory, he/she goes with the refugee to the Federal Police to ask for the extension of the refugee condition to the newly arrived person. They send this request to CONARE, and the CONARE members decide to grant the asylum condition to the family member without the need to open a new individualized eligibility process.

Civil society organizations like Caritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo (CASP), Caritas Arquidiocesana do Rio de Janeiro (CARJ) and Instituto Migração e Direitos Humanos (IMDH), that are part of the CONARE because of their work with people facing persecution since 1970s in Brazil (Moreira 2012), among others, help refugees in the family reunification processes to fulfill the forms and put together the necessary documentation<sup>11</sup>. If the process takes too long (there are no deadlines in the normative of family reunification in Brazil) or if they face a problem, refugees usually ask for their help since they have a close contact with CONARE. Another organization that helps immigrants if they face juridical problems is the Public Defenders of Union (Defensoria Pública da União – DPU). The DPU is a public organization that offers juridical representation for free for vulnerable groups in Brazil that cannot afford it.

At first glance, the Brazilian family reunification process for refugees looks smooth with a broad definition of family and no need for a judicial process or DNA tests. However, refugees and organizations in Brazil have reported the problems they face during the process. Primarily, family reunification processes lack transparency and refugees also face problems communicating with CONARE. Another challenge is the discretion of CONARE and MRE regarding the family reunification process, especially in proving economic dependency relations.

Additionally, there is a problem in the length of family separation for refugees in Brazil. Family separation can increase trauma and harm family relationships (Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, Moreau, 2001). Studies show that family members left behind often face risks since they may be in insecure places like refugee camps and armed conflicts (Jastram and Newland 2003; Rousseau et al 2004; Haile 2005; Dench 2006). They may suffer spill-over persecution because the family member who was initially persecuted is not in the country anymore. Additionally, children and women are often more vulnerable to risks of gender-based violence. The asylum process (refugee status determination – RSD) in Brazil takes on average two years. A person has only the right to family reunification when he/she is recognized as a refugee. Besides that, the family reunification process has no deadlines nor possibilities of revision.

Finally, there was an internal change in the way the MRE processes family reunification visas in 2017 which allowed diplomats abroad to conduct interviews with family members and deny visa requests previously scanned by CONARE. Before May 2017, CONARE was perceived as the responsible authority to analyze the family reunification processes and to request for family reunification visas to the MRE. MRE would just grant the visas that were previously approved by CONARE. However, Brazilian authorities changed this understanding. Issuing visas was a sovereign competence of the MRE (and their diplomats abroad). Consular authorities had more capacity than the CONARE staff to perceive if refugees were presenting false documents or faking stories to bring to Brazil people who were not, in fact, their relatives. In May 2017, MRE authorized diplomats to conduct confirmatory examinations (including interviews with the family members abroad) to confirm the family ties between refugees and visa applicants<sup>12</sup>. After that, refugees' family members, mostly in the DRC, began having their family reunification visas denied. During the semi-structured interviews, the organizations and the refugees said they did not receive proper information as to why the visas were denied, that there was no transparency in MRE's decisions. When asked, CONARE said that this was MRE's competency. Refugees

described how their relatives had to pass through excruciating interviews which could last two hours, often asking the same things over and over and with questions designed to trick them.

*A fight for family reunification: the Coletivo political activism*

Spokespersons of the *Coletivo dos Refugiados Congolese Pelos chamados beneficiários do visto para Reunião familiar* (the Coletivo) invited me to participate in one of its meetings. They also sent me the written documents they delivered to Brazilian authorities. In the meeting I attended, the group told me that they had been organizing themselves since June 2018 because many Congolese refugees in São Paulo started to face problems regarding the family reunification visas to their family members (denial of visas with no apparent reasons and retention of passports) in the Brazilian Embassy in Kinshasa, DRC since 2017. The refugees realized that different Congolese were having the same problems and that going through traditional organizations which used to help them individually would no longer solve this problem. The *Coletivo* was a self-organized movement created by Congolese refugees to try to understand how they could organize themselves to resolve their family reunification visas' issues.

Most refugees in Brazil live in big cities like São Paulo (Lima et al. 2017; UNHCR and CSVN 2019). Big cities can be a challenge to refugees' mobilization considering long distances and transportation costs. However, Tyler and Marciniak (2013: 143) recognize that the use of new technologies like the internet and smart phones can solve those challenges. In this case study, the use of the instant messaging app WhatsApp with the creation of a WhatsApp Group for the Congolese facing family reunification problems was crucial for the communication, mobilization, and definition of strategies. Besides Tyler and Marciniak (2013), other studies considered the role of new technologies and social media including Facebook and WhatsApp in refugees and migrants' access to information and the possibility of digital activism and participation (Witteborn 2015; Nedelcu and Soysüren 2020). Some examples of migrants and refugees use of digital technologies include undocumented African migrants employing cellphones to develop strategies to obtain regularization in France (Diminescu 2002); Somalian refugees receiving support from people living abroad with the use of telephone, fax, SMS, and e-mail in the Dadaab camps (Horst 2006) and Burmese refugees in India and Thailand using virtual platforms to engage in digital activism which helped reinforce their refugee identity (Baujard 2008). This article recognizes WhatsApp as an important online social mobilization space for the Congolese refugees. In

September 2018, the refugees explained that there were around 50 families in the WhatsApp group. In November 2018, they said the number had increased to 150 families. During my fieldwork, I interviewed some Congolese refugees facing family reunification problems who thought that their issues were individualized. Once they became aware of the existence of this WhatsApp group, they wanted to connect and become part of the movement. They realized they were not alone and that there was a place to receive peer-support. I was not part of the group; however, I had the authorization of the spokesperson to give their contact to these people willing to engage in the *Coletivo*.

Besides the virtual discussions, the *Coletivo* used to meet periodically in person in the facilities of the SESC São Paulo<sup>13</sup>. The refugees were not conducting sit-ins or hunger strikes in the SESC. They were using the available space for their meetings in the same way that other people in São Paulo could use it. The refugees perceived the SESC as a space of integration which they could use to organize themselves and to develop their strategies. Refugees in São Paulo saw the SESC as a safe space they could occupy for diverse uses, including mobilization for a cause. When reflecting on the protests of migrants and refugees in Germany, Odugbesan and Schwiertz (2018) defines a self-organized movement of refugees as,

directly affected people becoming active in groups that build collective structures of support, empowerment and, visible politics. Critically, they identify issues that they consider a priority and decide how to shape and articulate demands on their own (p. 186).

The *Coletivo* is a self-organized movement of refugees fighting for family reunification through imperceptible politics. Since the group did not receive attention from big media, they tried to employ different strategies to present their claims. The refugee population in Brazil is small compared to the Brazilian population. Many Brazilians do not know that Congolese refugees live in Brazil. The first strategy was showing the situation to organizations that help refugees in São Paulo. The *Coletivo* had meetings (as a group) with the CASP, DPU, and the CONARE in June and July 2018. This was an attempt to involve Brazilian citizens and experts in asylum issues that could present their demands (they were a legitimate political voice) to the Brazilian authorities to try to solve this problem. In interviews with the civil society organizations and DPU in September of 2018 in São Paulo, I could understand that the NGOs and the DPU recognized the existence of this situation, but there was nothing they could do because the MRE is a closed and isolated bureaucracy in Brazil even to Brazilian citizens. The NGOs and the DPU were trying to help where they could but it was not enough to solve the problem. Facundo (2017) explains how organizations

involved in bureaucratic circles frame refugeehood and refugee claims, preventing the recognition of refugees' agency. However, the main problem in that case was the lack of jurisprudence on visa review and not clear appeal procedures in the family reunification visa. Besides that, the organizations saw that communication with CONARE and MRE was difficult considering this topic, because CONARE (and MRE) understood that granting visas was a sovereign competence of the MRE with its interference (Interview with CONARE Representative, Brasília, September 2018).

Since the refugees felt that the organizations that they knew did nothing to help them, they adopted the strategy of presenting the situation directly to the Brazilian authorities. Refugees adopted a lexicon of rights as a manner to keep their hope (Gallardo 2009). They wrote an undersigned letter and paid the tickets for some Congolese refugees to go to Brasília (Brazil's capital) to deliver the document to Brazilian authorities in August 2018. The *Coletivo* defended that the family reunification visa problem is a result of corruption and commerce of the visas in the Brazilian Embassy in Kinshasa<sup>14</sup>. Hence, the underlying logic of this movement is that by showing the situation to the Brazilian government, Brazil would then end the corruption in the Embassy and refugees would be able to get the family reunification visas to their family.

Odugbesan and Schwiertz (2018: 198) recognize that “many immigrant and refugee groups face difficulties to frame their claims in a way to dialogue with dominant discourses allowing them to negotiate with politicians and other authorities.” This was not the case of the Congolese refugees fighting for family reunification in São Paulo because they knew their audience; they knew how to frame the issue and they tried to use the asylum lexicon to match the narrative of the Brazilian government toward family reunification.

The undersigned letter was written in Portuguese and designed for an internal audience (authorities in Brasília and São Paulo), not the international community. It was directly addressed to the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Aloysio Nunes Ferreira, on August 24, 2018 with copies to other divisions inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs such as the United Nations Division (DNU), the Secretary General for External Relations, the Internal Inspector of Foreign Service, and the Consular Ombudsman, as well as other authorities including the General Attorney of Brazil, the General Director of the Federal Police, the representative of UNHCR, the Head of Cabinet of the Minister of State and the General-Coordinator of CONARE. The document was also copied to other authorities in São Paulo including the Commission on Human Rights of

the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo, the Municipal Secretary of human rights in the city of São Paulo, the Department of racial equality of the city of São Paulo, Representatives of civil society (organizations and individuals) of the Municipal Council of Immigrants; all groups, associations and organizations of immigrants and to support immigrants, and the Reference Center for Refugees - CASP.

These refugees knew the asylum system in Brazil. They mentioned in the undersigned letter the UN Convention on the Refugee Status (1951) and the Brazilian Law of Refugees 9474/1997 as guiding the rights and duties of the refugees in Brazil. Considering that the undersigned letter presented a claim of a corruption scheme involving family reunification visas in the Brazilian Embassy and the problem of family reunification they were facing, the refugees were smart to address the letter to people who could investigate this situation in the Brazilian state like the Attorney General, the Consular Ombudsman, and the Internal Inspector of the Foreign Service. They also addressed the letter to people who deal directly with the family reunification issue like the UN Division in MRE, the CONARE, the Federal Police, and the UNHCR. They addressed the letter to authorities in São Paulo, not because they could influence the family reunification procedure (they knew that this was a Federal law), but to make them aware of the complaints and claims that the Congolese refugees were presenting and, maybe, to gain visibility and support from the organizations and groups (connected with the human rights cause and the situation of immigrants) in São Paulo.

The initial sentence in the letter was, “The Collective of Congolese Refugees legally residing in Brazil hereby comes to you to punctuate, clarify, and obtain a resolution on the following claims” (my translation). The Congolese refugees made explicitly that they were legal residents in Brazil which entitles them to rights within the country and that the main objective of the undersigned letter was to clarify and to solve their demands. They then proceeded to explain that they knew the CONARE role and how the family reunification process worked in Brazil. After that, they provided “concerning and serious information” about a corruption scheme and visa commerce in the Brazilian Embassy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, their home country.

The letter affirmed that two employers of the Brazilian Embassy, with the support of Congolese people in the country, had created a scheme to sell visas for Congolese nationals trying to flee the critical economic and political situation in Congo. The visa could cost US \$2,500, with US \$1,000 to pay for the documents and US \$1,500 to be paid directly to the two Embassy

employers. The refugees explained that there were more than 100 people that paid those fees to receive the visa to come to Brazil and that they could give their testimonies. Besides the scheme in the Embassy, the document also described how the boyfriend of one of the female employees worked in the International Airport as an employee of the immigration service in DRC. He would be responsible for guaranteeing that people who paid for the visa could leave the country by plane. According to the refugees, one of the employers used her friends to enter in contact with the refugees before the interview in the Embassy. The Refugees put in an annex a WhatsApp conversation between one refugee applying for a family reunification visa for his wife and one of those friends. The WhatsApp conversation is part in French and part in another language, and the content included the woman asking the refugee to pay \$1,500 so the person in the Embassy could “help” with his dossier in the Brazilian Embassy. The woman explained that she could not guarantee anything since the Ambassador had changed.

The second part of the undersigned letter described their family reunification problems such as denial of visas for family members, mistreatment of the family members by the consular employees, conduction of interviews with children as young as six months old (their emphasizes), requests to the relatives to present documents showing they were facing political persecutions in the Congo (and that those documents were impossible to get), people waiting for more than six months to schedule the interview, and having to complete another form (because the visa form in the Brazilian Embassy has an expiration date of 90 days). Finally, the document mentioned, “our family members are victims of a procedural flaw in the administrative procedure” (*vício do processo administrativo*). This phrase has the objective to show to the Brazilian government that Congolese refugees have knowledge about the administrative process in Brazil and that they know the Brazilian Embassy is not following it correctly. That is another clear example of the refugees trying to speak the “bureaucratic language” of the Brazilian State to legitimate their voices and claims.

There is a connection between the corruption complaint and the family reunification problems. They explained they knew Congolese people were arriving in Brazil with family reunification visas but that these people had no relatives in the country. In the annex, they included the picture of a family reunification visa for a woman with no relatives that arrived in Brazil. According to the refugees, the woman said that she and seven other people paid each one US \$2,500 to a Consulate employee and the visa was ready after one week. The document said that all

the visa demands have to go through this specific Brazilian employee in the Embassy. The refugees told that this employee did not care about the refugee families. The document mentioned another person in Brazil who was involved in this scheme, passing the names of the people in need of family reunification visas to the person in the Embassy. The refugees wrote that they have put together audios and messages exchanged with those people.

After presenting all this information, the refugees asked for definitive, energetic, and urgent actions of Brazilian authorities against this gang (*quadrilha*) in order to initiate an administrative investigation. The refugees offered to collaborate with the inquiry and hoped those involved would end up in jail. The refugees also recognized the competency of the Brazilian consular authorities to deny visas in cases of irregularities, but they argued that visas were being denied with no further explanations and no formalization (they received no written information since the visas were verbally denied) which was unacceptable. The refugees demanded to know why their visas were being denied even when all the requested documentation was presented as well as why there were extended waiting times and what was happening in the Brazilian Embassy that was preventing the refugees from being reunited with their families. They asked if this could be an abuse of power of the consular authorities or if this was a case of discrimination or crime against human rights. They also described how some documents the Embassy requested could put the lives of their family members at risk. Further, they asked if Brazilian Consular authorities had competence and legitimacy to judge if foreign documents were false or irregular.

Finally, the refugees employed the language of human rights and human dignity<sup>15</sup> to demand a proper solution from the Brazilian Government to this problem. Their final acknowledgments were,

We want a positive resolution soon to match with the procedures of reception, orientation, and integration that are the most important for a refugee while in the host country that is his second homeland. With residence and Brazilian citizenship, the refugees have the right to an environment of peace that allows them to rebuild their lives and to be happy. We hope that our cries will reach those who have the heart to reassess the fundamental values of human beings that the world is losing today because of selfishness, imperialism, and capitalism (our translation).

Refugees framed their claims on their own without the help of citizen activists, avoiding the risk we saw previously in the literature. This was their reflection about their situation in Brazil as refugees, their rights and duties, and not some discourse framed by citizen activists or civil

society organizations. Another proxy for that is the letter has spelling errors of Portuguese that no Portuguese native speaking person in Brazil would make.

The refugees opted to use formal mechanisms of communication, presenting claims in an undersigned written letter to Brazilian authorities and organizations. They were trying to participate through official channels which could be used by other Brazilian citizens. They used a diplomatic form of pressure without closing the dialogue with the government. In that sense, their strategy was to present their situation in the same way a Brazilian citizen would do. They employed their right to association virtually through the WhatsApp group and physically in the SESC facilities. They understood themselves as right-holders and were demanding their right of family reunification in the same way Brazilian citizens would demand other rights.

The problem is that refugees are an invisibilized and voiceless group in Brazil, especially since they do not have the mediation of civil society organizations that are perceived as legitimate actors in the Brazilian asylum system (Facundo 2017). They are “subalterns” who cannot speak (Spivak 1992) and whose voices are not heard by the media, citizens, and the Brazilian government. Therefore, their strategy was not efficient to solve their problems. According to the refugees, they tried to deliver the undersigned letter to the CONARE and MRE, but these authorities did not receive it. The Federal Police received it but they were not able to talk with anybody there. The UNHCR Office in Brazil said they could not solve the problem. The refugees explained that two weeks after they delivered the letter, the MRE sent an official delegation with Brazilian authorities to visit the Brazilian Embassy of Kinshasa. However, until the time of my research, the refugees did not receive a proper answer or a solution to their problems.

There is an official attempt to delegitimize the claims of the Congolese refugees. In interviews with representatives from the MRE and CONARE in Brasília in September 2018, they classified this movement as “angry refugees with unfounded denunciations because their family reunification visas were denied based on fraud or bad faith.” Again, we see the truth of refugees being questioned by the State (Fassin 2013), creating a discourse where there are refugees' words against the official discourse. The CONARE and MRE authorities mentioned they were having many problems with fake documents and fraud concerning family reunification visas of the Congolese refugees in Brazil. Diplomats, through the implementation of visa policies, can control migration by determining whether or not to grant visas (Infantino 2016; 2019; Scheel 2019). Diplomatic correspondence from the Brazilian Ambassador in Kinshasa also cast doubt on the

political persecution faced by refugees in Brazil, calling them DRC immigrants and presenting the hypothesis of a “family reunification visas gang” with the participation of Congolese refugees in Brazil.

One telegram of the DNU/MRE sent to the CONARE in July 24, 2018<sup>16</sup> (Document Number 817) brings parts of two telegrams from the Brazilian Ambassador in Kinshasa explaining the possibility of a gang of family reunification visas acting in Brazil for the commerce of family reunification visas with the support of Congolese refugees in Brazil. He explained that all family reunification requests received in 2018 needed further consultations because of discrepancies between what was said by the refugees in Brazil and the interviews with the relatives in the Embassy at DRC. According to the Brazilian diplomat, the two main problems were: proving the situation of economic dependency and that the family member was facing political persecution in the DRC.

Considering economic dependency, the Brazilian Ambassador argued that remittances sent by the refugees had a small value and were not constantly sent to their families. Regarding the issue of political persecution, the Ambassador affirmed, “he was perplexed with the too elevated number of Congolese immigrants receiving the status of ‘political refugees’ in Brazil.” (my translation). He explained that the most refugees in Brazil arrived by airplane with tourism or business visas and that the information the Embassy received from family members indicated that the declarations given by Congolese to the CONARE regarding their political persecution were not real. The Ambassador recalled that presenting false information was a condition to have the refugee status revoked. He continued, saying, “since those flagrant violations are not objects of more rigorous follow-ups of the Brazilian public agent, the immigrant, now enjoying the refugee status, felt welcome to make false declarations and, in this way, to benefit their family members and even third people” (my translation). In this discourse, family reunification is not framed as a right of refugees, but as a prize to ‘good’ refugees who follow the rules. The Brazilian government uses the argument of fake documents and false refugees as a clear strategy to avoid the recognition of any mobilization of those ‘bad’ people that want to disguise the ‘good’ Brazilian state that granted them asylum.

## **Conclusion**

Through this paper I have analyzed the self-organized Congolese refugees' movement of the *Coletivo dos Refugiados Congolese Pelos chamados beneficiários do visto para Reunião familiar* fighting for family reunification in São Paulo, Brazil. Differently from the main literature on refugee protests, they used their rights to association discussing strategies online through a WhatsApp group and offline with meetings in person in the SESC São Paulo facilities. They employed formal mechanisms available to Brazilian citizens to present their claims and complaints to authorities who could investigate the situation and solve their problems. Their strategy to fight for their right to family reunification used diplomatic mechanisms and the same “bureaucratic language” employed by the Brazilian state. The refugees demonstrated their knowledge of their rights, the asylum system, and the administrative process in Brazil. They were able to frame their demands and strategies by themselves without the help of citizen activists or organizations which did not know how to help them, and they internalized the narrative as right holders with the right to family reunification.

Three motives may have prevented the Congolese experience from getting attention in the media. First, it was a quiet process. The Congolese refugees opted not to bring this issue to the press and to use other ways to present their claims. Second, Brazil was in the middle of an electoral race with the preferred candidate (who got elected president) openly against immigration. Among all the issues competing for space in the Brazilian newspapers, refugees facing problems with family reunification would not be the most appealing to the public. If this would have gotten in the headlines, maybe the frame could have caused more harm to the refugees' pledge than good. A discourse of 150 refugees willing to bring more people to “steal” the jobs of the Brazilians was more probable at that time (considering the polarized electoral environment in Brazil) than a narrative that could help the refugees. Third, the refugee population in Brazil is small compared to the Brazilian people. In general, refugees' issues do not receive much attention in the Brazilian media. The visa problem of nearly 150 black African Congolese refugees would not be the most appealing news for journalists willing to approach refugee issues.

Their movement faces enormous challenges. Congolese refugees have “to navigate both material and discursive obstacles – about whose crisis counts, who is a legitimate interlocutor, and who can mobilise for social justice” (Bassel and Emejulu 2017: 78). First, there are counter narratives of angry and ungrateful refugees that have their family reunification visas denied because of fraud and fake documents and those of criminal refugees with a gang of family

reunification visas. These narratives tend to delegitimize refugee's voices and complaints, mainly because the proof refugees are able to present is not enough to warrant an investigation involving the Brazilian Embassy in Kinshasa. Second, the refugees are fighting one of the most isolated bureaucracies in the Brazilian system: the MRE. There is a common understanding that granting a visa is a sovereign act of the State and a competency of the Consular authorities. Hence, even the organizations willing to help the refugees with their family reunification problems do not know precisely how to do it. There is no possibility to present an appeal in the case of a denied visa. In theory, the MRE should follow the rules and principles of the administrative process. However, there is no clear appeal or revision mechanism involving visas in Brazil.

Internationally, Brazil continues to be seen as a good example of family reunification policies for refugees, especially now with the crystallization of the family reunification right and principle in the Brazilian Migration Law. However, refugees have a hard time being reunited with their families because of denial of visas. The CONARE normative resolution 27/2018, approved in October 2018, gives more discretionary power to the consular authorities because it excludes the family reunification visa process from CONARE, making the family member outside of Brazil the visa applicant. This change prevents refugees' agency in Brazil and their possibility to ask for help from other organizations in the country.

Even if refugees in Brazil cannot be deported because of the non-refoulement principle, refugees fighting for family reunification remain a vulnerable group because the Brazilian government can change the family reunification process to make refugees' lives harder, as it did with Resolution 27/2018. It is a fact that Congolese refugees need the Brazilian government to grant their family member visas to securely enter Brazil. Their fight for family reunification (using diplomatic strategies and communication channels and not occupying public spaces or going on hunger strikes) is an attempt to negotiate with a stronger actor without the support of helping organizations and citizens' solidarity networks. Even if the Congolese refugees did not achieve success in solving their family reunification problems, they developed a self-organized structure composed of online discussions and offline meetings which could be used to continue their political activism, to present other claims, and to fight for other rights. The Congolese refugees in São Paulo were able to frame their demands using the vocabulary of their opponent (the Brazilian state) without the influence of other citizen actors. Their political activism organized in every-day moments and small activities is based on their understanding that they are right-holders that have

the right to family reunification and can fight for it. The experience of Congolese refugees fighting for family reunification in São Paulo differs from other refugee protests in Brazil and Latin America. It is an attempt of a subaltern group to speak (Spivak 1992). This paper contributes to making this invisible political activism seen in the Refugee Studies literature. Nevertheless, further studies on different refugee mobilizations in Brazil are needed considering other refugees everyday political activism, their politics of survival and adopting a gender lens.

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<sup>1</sup> The family reunification procedure for refugees in Brazil has two parts. The first is the process of applying for the family reunification visa. CONARE’s Normative Resolution 16/2013 regulated this procedure until October 2018, when CONARE adopted the Normative Resolution 27/2018. The second part is the extension of the refugee status. This procedure involves the documentation (residence permit) of the family member of the refugee that is already in the Brazilian territory. It is written in article 2 in the Law 9474/1997. A person applying for the extension will not go through the regular refugee status determination (RSD) procedure with an eligibility interview with a person from CONARE. Once this person starts the extension procedure in the Federal Police, the case will be directly analyzed by the CONARE. Since 2016, people who were recognized as refugees due to extension of refugee status cannot apply for family reunification with their family members.

<sup>2</sup> The Normative Resolution 16 was changed by the Normative Resolution 27 approved on October 30, 2018. However, the situation examined in this paper happened when the Normative Resolution 16 was disciplining the family reunification visa process for refugees in Brazil.

<sup>3</sup> The CONARE normative resolution 17/2013 created a special humanitarian visa for people affected by the armed conflict in Syria. This is a facilitated tourist visa granted for people to go to Brazil and ask for asylum in Brazilian territory. Syrian families can also apply for the humanitarian visa to be reunited with their family members in Brazil. This resolution was extended until September 2019 by the normative resolutions 20/2015 and 25/2017. Brazil grants humanitarian visas for Haitians, but Haitians are not recognized as refugees in Brazil. They receive the permanent residency on humanitarian grounds. Congolese people and nationals of other countries are not entitled to humanitarian visas.

<sup>4</sup> Even with Congolese refugees being the second largest group in Brazil, there were only 1,137 Congolese citizens who were recognized as refugees until 2018. If we consider that they are all potential family reunification applicants, this means that Brazil would have to process the maximum number of 1137 family reunification visas’ requests each year from this group. This is a small number if we consider international statistics on forced migration.

<sup>5</sup> The number of family reunification visas and extensions in Brazil is small because a) only refugees can apply for family reunification (that is, people must wait until they are recognized. The RSD procedure in Brazil can take more than two years); b) refugees pay for the costs of family reunification (e.g. tickets, visas, documents). Since Brazil is

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far away from Africa and Asia, bringing each relative is expensive. The difference between the numbers of visas and extension is because not all people who apply for visas arrive in Brazil (some people can have their visas denied or receive the visa, but never arrive in Brazil due to emergencies for example) and some nationalities like Venezuelans and Angolans for example do not need to apply for visas to enter in Brazil. In that case, when this person arrives in Brazilian territory, he/she can apply directly to the extension of the refugee status.

<sup>6</sup> The translation of the group's name to English is the Collective of Congolese Refugees by the so-called beneficiaries of the Family Reunification visa.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on refugeehood and the responsibility of States, see Owen (2020).

<sup>8</sup> There is extensive literature on the transnational political participation of migrants, however, this is not the focus of this analysis. For further information on this topic see Lafleur, J. M., & Martiniello, M. (Eds.). (2013). *The Transnational Political Participation of Immigrants: A Transatlantic Perspective*. Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> See the entire volume 20, Issue 5 of 2016 "The Contentious Politics of Refugee and Migrant Protest and Solidarity Movements: Remaking Citizenship from the Margins". Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ccst20/20/5?nav=toCList>> (accessed December 2019). See the entire volume 17, Issue 2 of 2013 of the Journal Citizenship Studies. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ccst20/17/2?nav=toCList>>. (accessed December 2019). See the Volume 1, Number 1, September 2013 of the Refugee Review: Social Movements. Available at: <<https://refugeereview.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/refugeereviewfinal.pdf>> (accessed December 2019). Finally, see the book Rosenberger, S., Stern, V., and Merhaut, N. (2018). *Protest Movements in Asylum and Deportation*. IMISCOE Research Series. Cham: Springer Open, 2018 and the book Birey, T., Cantat, C., Maczynska, E., and Sevinin, E. (2019). *Challenging the Political Across Borders: Migrants' and Solidarity Struggles*. Budapest: Center for Policy Studies.

<sup>10</sup> According to a survey from UNHCR and Cátedra Sérgio Viera de Mello (2019), most refugees in Brazil were male and arrived alone in Brazil. It is important to consider that family reunification is a gendered phenomenon (however this goes beyond this paper's scope). Studies have shown that refugee women face more challenges to achieve family reunification than men (see for example Bonjour and De Hart 2013). However, most family reunification visas requested by Congolese refugees were to male relatives. Further studies are needed on the gendered dimensions of the family reunification policy for refugees in Brazil.

<sup>11</sup> These three NGOs are the main ones which have historically worked with forced displaced people in Brazil since the 1970s (Moreira 2012). However, there are other organizations not connected with the Catholic Church that provide services for refugees in Brazil for example Instituto Adus (São Paulo), Mawon (Rio de Janeiro), Compassiva (São Paulo). There are many projects connected to the Cátedra Sérgio Viera de Mello (CSVM) Chairs in public and private Brazilian universities which also provide services to refugees, including support to apply for family reunification. For more information on the CSVM (including the universities that are part) see <<https://www.acnur.org/portugues/catedra-sergio-vieira-de-mello/>>. (accessed September 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Diplomatic documents between the MRE Headquarters in Brazil and Brazilian consular authorities abroad obtained during archival research conducted in the MRE Archive in Brasília (Brazil) in September 2018.

<sup>13</sup> The SESC (Serviço Social do Comércio) is a private institution which provides services to the people working in commerce and their families and to the general public. They have cultural services, theaters, dentists, restaurants, and sports. In São Paulo, the SESC has been in partnership with UNHCR, Senac and Caritas for more than 20 years to provide these services, Portuguese lessons, and cultural spaces to refugees and asylum-seekers. See. SESCSP. Português para pessoas em situação de refúgio, 27/03/2018. Available at: <[https://www.sescsp.org.br/online/artigo/11928\\_PORTUGUES+PARA+PESSOAS+EM+SITUACAO+DE+REFUGIO](https://www.sescsp.org.br/online/artigo/11928_PORTUGUES+PARA+PESSOAS+EM+SITUACAO+DE+REFUGIO)>. and SESCSP. Refugiados, 2019. Available at: <[https://www.sescsp.org.br/online/revistas/tag/2061\\_REFUGIADOS](https://www.sescsp.org.br/online/revistas/tag/2061_REFUGIADOS)>

<sup>14</sup> In 2015, the Brazilian newspaper "O Globo" published a story on corruption in the Brazilian Embassy in Haiti. According to the news, Haitians applying for humanitarian visas to go to Brazil had to pay extra fees to the Embassy staff. Haitians in Brazilian immigrant shelters confirmed this corruption scheme. The MRE published a note indicating they have been receiving unfounded complaints since 2012 and they would investigate the situation in the Brazilian Embassy in Haiti. See MRE. Nota de Esclarecimento. 07 de Julho de 2015 - 12h37. Available at: <<http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-BR/notas-a-imprensa/10438-nota-de-esclarecimento-haiti>>

<sup>15</sup> The refugees say: "Concerning the dignity of the human person, will our fathers and mothers be at peace away from their children and other dependents?" This is a strategy to make an emotional appeal to the people that are reading the document because they also have fathers and mothers and maybe children.

<sup>16</sup> Document accessed during my archival research in the MRE Archives in Brasília, Brazil in September 2018.