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Chapter 4

‘There Is No Family Here’: Refugees’ Strategies for Family Reunification in São Paulo



Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli

4.1 Introduction

Although 85% of forcibly displaced people reside in developing countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020), there is little research on asylum and migration policies involving South–South influxes. This chapter builds on previous work on family reunification in Brazil (Soares, 2012; Calegari, 2014; Martuscelli, 2019) and the literature on the role of family in forced migrants’ decisions (Bastaki, 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Dubow & Kuschminder, 2021) to examine the strategies employed by refugees in Brazil when making decisions about applying for family reunification. Through quantitative data on Brazilian family reunification visas and an empirical analysis of 20 phenomenological interviews with refugees in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, between August and November 2018, I demonstrate how refugees in Brazil work to maximize everyday security for themselves and their families.

Brazil ranked sixth among the countries receiving the largest number of asylum-seekers in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020), and Brazil’s refugee policy, based on Lei No. 9.474 (1997), has been called exemplary by the UNHCR (Moreira, 2010; Jatobá & Martuscelli, 2018). Unlike many countries that adopted the definition of refugee laid out in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Brazil’s policy includes people fleeing grave and generalized violations of human rights. The designation of a situation as a grave and generalized violation of human rights is a political decision. For example, Syrians and others affected by the Syrian armed conflict have been recognized as refugees in Brazil based on this criterion. Venezuelans have been recognized as refugees since 2019. However, Haitians, for example, have not been recognized as refugees. Brazil also operates with an expanded definition of family for family reunification purposes, including

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ascendants, descendants, partners and other economically dependent family members of refugees. Moreover, Lei No. 13.445 (2017), the Brazilian Migration Law, recognizes a right to family reunification for all immigrants in Brazil, including refugees. In contrast, most countries in Europe and North America guarantee family reunification only for partners and underage children (Martuscelli, 2019).

Brazil's facilitated process for the family reunification of refugees, described in Chap. 2, does not include many of the structural obstacles present in other countries, such as DNA tests, minimum waiting times or integration requirements (Martuscelli, 2019). However, many refugees face long periods of separation from their families due to the length of the refugee status determination procedure (average 2 years) and the costs associated with bringing family members to Brazil. Refugees also face other problems in family reunification; for example, administrative changes in recent years have made the process more difficult at Brazilian consulates abroad (see Chap. 2).

Refugees in Brazil have physical security in the sense that they have legal status and are removed from the circumstances that forced them to seek asylum. However, they may not feel completely safe while separated from their families. The perspective of 'everyday security' (Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016), discussed further in the next section, allows us to examine how the wellbeing of refugees in Brazil is influenced by the security of their families left behind and how this informs refugees' decision-making processes when choosing which family members to bring to Brazil first. When faced with financial constraints and the goal of maximizing everyday security for themselves and their families, refugees adopt different strategies to decide which family members they will bring first.

Previous studies (Abrego, 2014; Bastaki, 2019; Morris et al., 2020; Bonizzoni, 2015) have discussed the importance of family decisions and strategies in migration. Dubow and Kuschminder (2021) have addressed the family separation and reunification strategies of Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian refugee families on the Eastern Mediterranean route between 2015 and 2018. However, most family separation and reunification decisions are constrained by host countries' restrictive family reunification policies, including limiting the definition of family to the nuclear family. In contrast, this chapter examines refugees' strategies for selecting relatives for family reunification in a context in which the family reunification process is based on an expanded definition of family.

This chapter's focus on refugees' own decision-making draws on the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach, which views migrants as central actors who engage in political struggles over mobility (Scheel, 2019; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). AoM provides a useful framework for understanding how people navigate migration and border practices, including family reunification policies. Adopting the perspective of AoM reveals the relational dimension of everyday security and demonstrates how family reunification is used strategically to maximize everyday security for refugees living in Brazil and for the relatives who will join them through the family reunification process.

In the sections that follow, I will introduce relevant literature and previous research showing the connection between everyday security and family reunification for refugees. I will then present my interview data and methodology, followed by new quantitative data on family reunification visas in Brazil. The findings section discusses each of the selection strategies that appeared in my interviews with refugees and highlights the relational dimension of these selection strategies that seek to create everyday security for refugees and their families.

4.2 Everyday (In)securities and Family Reunification

The everyday security of refugees is connected to their wellbeing. Crawford and Hutchinson (2016, p. 7) explain that everyday security involves mundane, ordinary routines and the day-to-day discussions and practices that people engage in to manage their own safety. Indeed, it is in part through such everyday security processes that ordinary people foster security for themselves and for others while striving to live with insecurity.

Therefore, everyday security for refugees in asylum countries has material, physical and relational dimensions that are connected to refugees' family members in their countries of origin and destination (Tiilikainen, 2019). Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) argue that "everyday security" has temporal, spatial and emotional/affective dimensions' (p. 7). That is, even if refugees face no direct threats in their country of asylum, they can continue to feel insecure due to separation from their families (the spatial dimension), the duration and indefiniteness of family separation (the temporal dimension) and the lack of emotional support due to family separation (the emotional dimension).

Since families create safety for refugees, family separation affects the wellbeing of refugees in asylum countries (Löbel, 2020). Family separation can exacerbate and reawaken the trauma and depression of refugees in asylum countries (Rousseau et al., 2001; Khan, 2013; Okhovat et al., 2017). In some cases, especially when refugees have lost contact with their families, family separation can mean a loss of hope for going on living after enduring traumatic experiences (Rousseau et al., 2001). Relatives of refugees may be at risk, deprived of rights (as in refugee camps) or living among armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies (Jastram & Newland, 2003; Dench, 2006), which causes worry and stress for refugees who are safe in their destination country. Family members who were left behind may also face persecution based on their relationship with the refugee, putting their lives at risk (Khan, 2013). The persecuting agent may go after the family once the refugee is no longer in the country of origin (Jastram & Newland, 2003). Relatives may even be killed or disappear while waiting for family reunification (Tapaninen et al., 2019). In that case, family reunification can be a strategy to increase the wellbeing of refugees in the asylum country and to provide physical security for relatives who could be at risk in the host countries.

Sending money to family members left behind is a strategy to create financial security for the family abroad and ensure their survival. Sending remittances can also be a way to show affection, bolster transnational relationships and guarantee the everyday security of family members left behind (Abrego, 2014; McKay, 2007). Some refugees send as many remittances as possible to their families to alleviate feelings of guilt, even choosing to live in poverty to enable the remittances (Dench, 2006). However, sending remittances can also be a burden for refugees who feel responsible for the wellbeing of the family left behind (Lindley, 2009). Sending money abroad may impact the financial security of refugees in asylum countries, putting them in a difficult economic situation with little money to invest in themselves. Bringing relatives who are economically dependent on refugees to the host country can be a strategy to create financial everyday security for refugees and their families.

Relatives, especially parents and grandparents, support immigrant families and communities in destination countries by providing social, financial and psychological resources, professional skills, and caregiving for children and the home. Grandparents are important agents of socialization and wellbeing for immigrants and for the care of the younger generation by building a feeling of belonging, home, origin and continuity (Bragg & Wong, 2016). Therefore, bringing a relative to the host country can create everyday security for refugees by providing family support and childcare in the host country. In fact, in some cases, refugees are only able to be reunited with their children when they can bring another adult family member to care for them (Bonizzoni, 2015).

Family reunification is a strategy to guarantee the everyday security of refugees. Family reunification is a way to protect the refugee family and the refugee (Rohan, 2014), making sure that relatives are physically protected in the destination countries. The family acts as a network of economic, social and emotional support for the refugee in the host country, especially considering the refugee will have to adapt to a new culture and new social standard (Lippert & Pyykkönen, 2012; Khan, 2013). Hence, family reunification often improves the wellbeing of refugees (Telegdi, 2006; Löbel, 2020). Family reunification allows refugees to avoid having to send money to relatives in other countries (Telegdi, 2006; Lippert & Pyykkönen, 2012), creating financial security for both the refugee and their family members. The reunification of families has a positive emotional effect on many aspects of refugees' lives by removing concerns that the family left behind may be harmed or not have opportunities, as well as by providing care and family support to refugees in the host country.

Migration and family reunification policies constrain refugee family decisions about family reunification (Dubow & Kuschminder, 2021; Bastaki, 2019; Morris et al., 2020). The costs of family reunification are high, forcing refugees to choose which family members they will bring first. In cases where refugees have more than one child in the origin country, they often have to choose which child they will bring first, which generates stress and feelings of betrayal (Rousseau et al., 2001). The Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach 'makes migrants' practices the starting point and focus of any investigation and theorisation of border regimes and

migratory processes' (Scheel, 2019, p. 4), helping us to understand how refugees navigate family reunification policies and the hard decisions they have to take. AoM shifts the focus 'from the apparatuses of control to the multiple and diverse ways in which migration responds to, operates independently from, and in turn shapes those apparatuses and their corresponding institutions and practices' (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p. 895). This chapter investigates the strategies that refugees living in Brazil choose when navigating the Brazilian family reunification policy, which allows them to bring relatives outside the nuclear family. Each of these strategies highlights the relational aspects of the everyday security of refugees in Brazil that are connected to the everyday security of their families abroad.

4.3 Methods and Data

This research is based on interviews with refugees living in Brazil in 2018. In this context, a refugee is a person recognized as such in Brazil according to Article 1 of Lei No. 9.474 (1997). In 2018, there were 6654 refugees in Brazil, 51% of them from Syria. Refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were the second-largest group, with other large refugee populations originating from Angola, Colombia, Venezuela and Pakistan (Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados, CONARE, 2019). Nearly 22.9% of refugees arrived through the family reunification process (CONARE, 2015). Refugees who applied for family reunification in Brazil are a hard-to-reach population due to their small numbers and wide distribution across the large Brazilian territory.

Although Venezuelans are the largest refugee population in Brazil as of 2022, at the time of my research, Venezuelans were not yet recognized as refugees. In any case, like other Latin American refugees in Brazil, Venezuelans do not need visas to enter the country, which makes their family reunification procedure easier. Those affected by the Syrian armed conflict can apply for a special humanitarian visa, created by the Brazilian government in 2013, which offers a different entrance path for this group. It is therefore the African and Asian refugees who need visas to enter Brazil and do not have access to other types of visas who make up the main groups that apply for family reunification and are thus the main participants in my research.

Between August and November 2018, I conducted 20 phenomenological interviews with refugees who had applied for family reunification in the city of São Paulo. To recruit research participants, I employed a snowballing method. Because I had previously volunteered with civil society organizations working with refugees and asylum seekers in São Paulo, I knew refugees before initiating this project. Although I am Brazilian, white and a woman, I was able to build relationships of trust with my informants because they perceived that I was trying to help refugees in general and that I cared about their experiences. Refugees also told me they did not have many opportunities to share their views on issues that are crucial for them, like family reunification. My informants shared with me the contact information of their friends, and I conducted interviews until the saturation point, at which no new

Table 4.1 Profile of the participants

Age (years)	Nationality	Sex	Year of arrival in Brazil	Number of family reunification requests	Marital status	Requested family reunification for
35	DRC	Female	2012	1	Married	Sister
28	DRC	Male	2013	3	Single	Father and brothers
28	Mali	Male	2014	1	Single	Brother
36	DRC	Male	2014	1	Married	Children
36	DRC	Female	2012	2	Single	Brothers
33	DRC	Male	2014	1	Married	Wife and children
30	DRC	Female	2014	2	Married	Brother and sister-in-law
53	DRC	Male	2013	1	Married	Wife and children
29	DRC	Male	2014	2	Single	Brothers
27	DRC	Male	2014	4	Married	Brothers and wife
35	DRC	Female	2013	2	Married	Mother and brother
27	DRC	Male	2015	1	Single	Brother
31	Syria	Male	2015	1	Single	Parents
32	DRC	Male	2013	3	Married	Wife, mother and brothers
34	DRC	Male	2014	5	Married	Parents and brothers
31	Cameroon	Male	2013	1	Married	Wife
46	DRC	Male	2015	1	Married	Wife and children
63	DRC	Male	2009	1	Married	Wife
24	DRC	Male	2012	1	Single	Sister

information was appearing in the interviews. Most interviews were conducted in Portuguese at the homes of participants or in other places selected by them at times that were convenient for them, including weekends, holidays and after work.

My interviewees were 4 women and 16 men with an average age of 34.5 years who had lived in Brazil for an average of 4 years, 8 months. All had resided in the country for a minimum of 3 years. One interview was ultimately excluded from the data because the person did not follow the formal family reunification procedure for refugees. Table 4.1 shows the profile of the 19 refugees whose data is included in this study. Most refugees were male, married and from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Interviewees also came from Mali, Syria and Cameroon.

The interviewed refugees requested family reunification for their wives, siblings, parents and children. The 19 participants requested family reunification for a total of 64 people in 34 application processes. Most participants made only one family reunification request. One person made five different requests. The time of separation of refugees from their family members varied from 1.5 to 5 years, with the average time of 40 months. Some interviewees were still separated from their family members because their processes had not yet been successful or because they had not yet requested family reunification for some relatives left behind.

With the oral informed consent of the participants, I recorded and transcribed all interviews. I followed the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) Code of Ethics (IASFM, 2019), including procedures to avoid confidentiality breaches and to ensure the principle of ‘doing no harm’ to the refugee population. The research also followed the ethical principles of partnership, diversity, autonomy, competence and equity (IASFM, 2019).

To avoid confidentiality and privacy breaches, I conducted and transcribed all interviews myself, without the help of interpreters. The interview audio files were coded and the key with participants’ names was kept separate from the audio files during the process of transcribing the interviews, analysing the data, and writing the results. I used Atlas.ti8 to code the data, employing descriptive and emotional coding (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 261–263). I wrote coding memos during the analysis, and themes and patterns emerged from the data (Saldaña, 2009; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

4.4 Family Reunification of Refugees in Brazil

Family reunification data on refugees in Brazil is not publicly available. However, during my fieldwork, CONARE, the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees, provided me with data from all 786 refugees who applied for family reunification visas for their families between 2015 and 2018, which I have analysed and present in Fig. 4.1. Refugees from the DRC applied for 58.9% of all family reunification visas requested between 2015 and 2018. Although Syrians were the largest group of

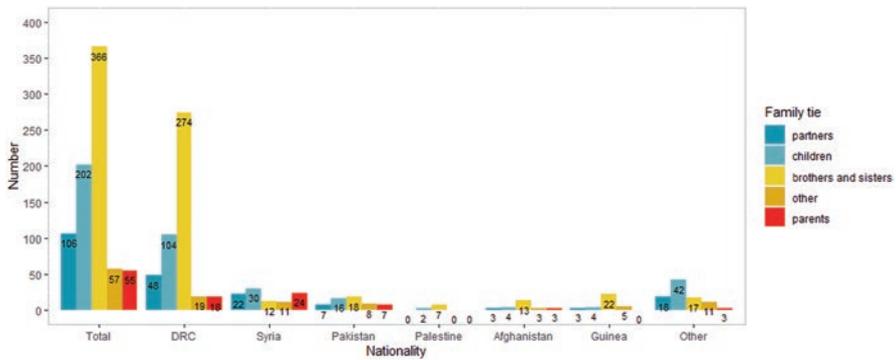


Fig. 4.1 Relatives for whom refugees requested family reunification visas, 2015–2018. (Data provided to the author by CONARE. Family reunification visas were requested for people of 24 nationalities from the African and Asian continents: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Pakistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Syria, Sudan, Togo, Zambia)

refugees in Brazil during my fieldwork (before the recognition of Venezuelans as refugees in 2019), their family members had other mechanisms to come to Brazil because they could apply for a humanitarian visa for people affected by the Syrian armed conflict. Venezuelans do not need a visa to enter Brazil. The need for family reunification visas in Brazil is therefore also based on the nationality of the refugee, with certain groups, like nationals who do not need visas and those who can access other types of visas, having more facilitated alternatives to bring their families to Brazil.

Figure 4.1 shows that most beneficiaries of a family reunification visa between 2015 and 2018 were siblings (46.6% of the total), followed by children (25.7%), partners or spouses (13.5%), other relatives (7.2%) and parents (7%). This general distribution of visas is reflected among Congolese, Pakistani, Palestinian, Afghan and Guinean refugees. For Syrians, however, most visa beneficiaries were children, followed by parents and spouses. Among 'other' nationalities, children, spouses and siblings were the most common beneficiaries of family reunification visas. This data indicates the importance of siblings to refugee families in Brazil. The 'other relatives' category includes nephews, grandchildren, stepchildren, cousins, brothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, uncles, a stepmother and a mother-in-law.

This data confirms that refugees in Brazil commonly applied for family reunification for relatives beyond the nuclear family. That is, not only do refugees in Brazil have the legal possibility to bring family members besides their partners and children, but they actually use this strategy to create everyday security for themselves and their family members. Different and mixed strategies motivate refugees when choosing who to bring first to Brazil, as will be explained in the following section.

A representative survey of 487 refugees in Brazil conducted by UNHCR Brazil and Cátedra Sérgio Vieira de Mello (CSVM) (2019) showed that although refugees were, on average, more highly educated than the Brazilian population, 68% of them were not making use of their skills because of challenges of revalidating their diplomas and accessing the labour market (for example, due to language difficulties). Refugees also had higher rates of unemployment than the Brazilian population: 20% were looking for a job, and 25% were out of the labour market. Sixty-seven per cent of refugees said that their income was not enough to cover their expenses (UNHCR and CSVM, 2019).

Despite the fact that many refugees in Brazil feel that their income is insufficient to cover even their own expenses, many also send money abroad to their families and save to pay for family reunification. The UNHCR and CSVM survey (2019) also showed that 50% of the surveyed refugees sent money abroad to their families. The study concluded that 'the survival of those who did not migrate impacts negatively the quality of life of the refugees living in Brazil' (UNHCR and CSVM, 2019, p. 11).

Finally, the survey found that family reunification was important for refugees in Brazil: 57% of the surveyed refugees wanted to request family reunification, 40% having already arrived in Brazil with their families (UNHCR and CSVM, 2019).

4.5 Strategies for Selecting Relatives for Family Reunification

4.5.1 *Financial Strategy*

Family reunification with relatives who depend economically on refugees is a strategy to create everyday financial security for refugee families and to end the need for refugees to send money to their origin countries. Refugees need to support themselves in Brazil, send remittances to their families and additionally raise the money to bring their families to Brazil, often while working in low-paid positions. Therefore, bringing family members to Brazil is a way to improve refugees' economic situation, maximizing their financial everyday security. This Congolese refugee first brought his brother to Brazil, and then his wife:

Most of us are applying for family reunification to reduce this flow of sending money and sending money [abroad]. If family members are closer, it also makes it easier for us to live together. Because I have to send them money, I have to spend even more – not only sending, but the transfer fee is high. So if the person is closer to me, then if she works, she may also be able to support herself. She may be able to make another life, and we may be able to help ourselves. (Interview, 9 September 2018)

The costs of bringing a family member through family reunification are high. Refugees have to pay for airline tickets (which they have to buy at the last minute once visas are issued due to short visa validity periods), documents, passports and visas. For example, one Congolese interviewee explained that an airline ticket from Africa to Brazil could cost 5000 US dollars, and a Congolese passport costs 250 US dollars. Since these expenses are high, refugees are generally unable to bring all their family members to Brazil at once and have to make hard choices about whom to bring first.

Most of refugees I interviewed (16 out of 19 respondents) send money to family members abroad. This Congolese man reflected on the financial situation of his wife and children in DRC:

My family pretty much depends on me because my wife does not work. My older children do not work either. They all study. I need to send them money from Brazil. I need to send the money for them to survive. However, this is not easy. (Interview, 7 October 2018)

The Brazilian government creates additional pressure to send money abroad by asking for receipts of remittances during the family reunification process to prove the economic dependency of relatives who are not ascendants, descendants or partners. A Congolese man who applied for family reunification for his children explained:

You can work, yes, [though] you earn less. You have to pay for the house, you have to do many things. Then you have to send money to Congo to prove economic dependency, but you could be saving that money to bring [your relatives] here. You cannot save money if you have to send money. (Interview, 8 September 2018)

The high value of the US dollar and the devaluation of the Brazilian real put extra pressure on refugees sending money abroad, as a male Congolese refugee noted:

‘So you have to send them money. Rent, food. You do everything. And the dollar is more expensive now’ (Interview, 6 October 2018).

One refugee man explained that he brought his brother to Brazil because he was responsible for his family’s expenses in his country of origin and was no longer able to pay for both his house in Brazil and his brother’s college fees. If his brother came to Brazil, he could work and pay his own college expenses. Bringing a family member to Brazil can lessen the strain of sending so much money abroad. Another Congolese man explained how reunification with his wife and children would change his life:

It will allow me to save a little bit from everything I earn because I send to my country almost 70% of the money that I earn. What is left I use to pay the rent and for my survival. (Interview, 7 October 2018)

This concern with financial needs was also expressed by a Congolese woman who applied for family reunification for her sister before bringing her children:

Everything will change [when my family comes to Brazil] because each time you have 300 reais, you do not have to send it there. If the whole family is here, you buy food with 300 reais for everyone to eat together. Understood? Three hundred you share there in Africa, but you also need money here. I cannot do it. (Interview, 28 August 2018)

Having another family member working in Brazil makes it easier to send money to the family left behind and helps with saving money to pay for the family reunification costs of other relatives. This strategy appeared in multiple interviews. One Congolese man applied for family reunification for his brothers and sister: ‘If [my older brother] can get here, we can work together. We can work, we can collect money to send to others, because it is harder for me alone to work and also to pay rent’ (Interview, 29 September 2018). Another male refugee from DRC recognized that his financial situation changed after the arrival of his brother:

It changed because we are both working now and then we can save money to help our brothers who are in Africa. When I was alone, it was difficult because I had to eat. I had to dress. I had to pay for the house. Yeah, it was difficult. And now with him, we are sending money [abroad]. (Interview, 8 September 2018)

Bringing family members to Brazil increases the everyday financial security of refugees because they will then have more money to spend in Brazil. It also maximizes their wellbeing because they know their families will have the resources they need to survive. Family reunification contributes to the financial everyday security of the family that will come to Brazil and be supported by the refugee’s income. At the same time, financial needs are a factor when refugees decide which family members they will bring first to Brazil.

4.5.2 Protection Strategy

As discussed in the literature section, refugees in Brazil are worried about the lives and physical security of family members left behind. Many relatives of refugees in Brazil live at permanent risk in countries at war, like Syria and Mali, or are subject

to persecution, such as in the DRC. An emblematic case among the interviewees was that of a Congolese man whose wife and children were living in a refugee camp, a particularly risky situation. Protecting one's family from violence and persecution was another goal of refugees when deciding which relatives to bring to Brazil first. The urge to protect family members is a fundamental explanation for why refugees bring their relatives to Brazil: to provide them security and increase refugees' own wellbeing by allaying their concern for their loved ones. Whether due to widespread conflicts or individualized persecution, family protection was mentioned as a concern for 16 respondents. Almost all Congolese refugees (14 out of 15) worried that their families were at risk.

Congolese refugees stated that their relatives, especially their siblings, were suffering direct persecution because the government perceived them as a threat and because of their family relationship with the refugee in Brazil. A Congolese man explained that the persecution of his brothers and sisters motivated him to bring them to Brazil first: 'One of them was persecuted by a rebel group in eastern Congo. He was captured along with three other brothers and sisters who were raped for three months in the forest' (Interview, 06 October 2018).

Two other Congolese refugees also explained that their families suffered persecution because of their relationships: 'I was wanted, and my family received many threats. I can say my family is threatened' (Interview, 7 October 2018); 'My brothers stayed there when I ran away. The police went to pick them up. My sister was raped; my brothers went to jail' (Interview, 29 September 2018). Another Congolese man decided to bring his brother because he perceived he was facing the highest risk of torture: 'Men are tortured more than women. For his protection, I brought him' (Interview, 30 August 2018).

Coming to Brazil also improves the wellbeing of refugee families. One Syrian refugee reflected on the situation in Syria and how his parents found peace in Brazil: 'It was very messy there, as I told you. After they came here, they felt peace. They felt calm. They unloaded the war they carried there' (Interview, 1 October 2018). The refugees know that in Brazil, they and their families will not face the direct harm, persecution, torture or violations of human rights that forced them to leave their countries of origin. Bringing a relative at risk from the origin country contributes to the sense of everyday security among refugees settled in Brazil because they do not need to worry about their relatives left behind. Hence, family reunification not only creates physical security for the family members who arrive in Brazil, but it also increases the wellbeing of the refugees in Brazil.

4.5.3 Health Strategy

During the interviews, some refugees mentioned the risk of never seeing family members again because of the health issues their relatives were facing. The armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies taking place in many origin countries can make it difficult to access health care. Moreover, refugees residing in Brazil cannot

go back to their origin countries, as Lei No. 9.474 (1997) states that refugees traveling to their origin countries, even to visit family, may lose their refugee status, a common condition in countries that provide asylum to refugees. Thus, health concerns for family members represent another strategy for selecting which family members a refugee will bring to Brazil first. A Congolese man whose brother was being persecuted also considered his brother's health when deciding when to bring him to Brazil: 'My brother was feeling sick. So I said, if I am not careful, the one who is there, he will die. I will lose him' (Interview, 29 September 2018). Another Congolese man was motivated by the health of his mother to bring her first to Brazil:

Will I see my mother again one day? I don't know, because many things happen. Maybe something will happen today; my mom also has a health problem. Something may happen to her, and I do not know if I will be able to see her. (Interview, 30 August 2018)

Brazil has a universal public health system (Sistem Único de Saúde, SUS), and all migrants and refugees have a right to health care in Brazil according to Lei No. 9.474 (1997) and Lei No. 13.445 (2017). Refugees decided to bring sick family members to Brazil to provide them healthcare and improve their chances of survival. One Congolese man applied for family reunification for his sick father: 'My dad's process was quick because he had a [health] problem' (Interview, 30 August 2018). Another Congolese man who had applied for family reunification for his sick brother and felt the process was taking too long explained his logic for bringing his brother:

[I have] another brother who was ill. Another had no money to take him to the hospital because you have to pay for it there. Here the hospital is free. [...] The other one is dying there with a disease in his body, and he has no medicine, nothing. Then you begin the family reunification procedure, you wait one year, two years and then the person dies, right? Then it is hard. (Interview, 8 September 2018).

A refugee may also decide to bring a relative to Brazil if a family member in the country of origin gets sick and the refugee becomes responsible for supporting the family and taking care of the sick person. Bringing the sick person to Brazil can be a way to deal with this responsibility. A Congolese man explained that he decided to bring his mother because she was sick and could no longer work: 'Then things got a little difficult, right? My mother worked as an engineer, and when she became ill too, it was difficult [for me] to support the whole family there' (Interview, 6 October 2018). The strategy of bringing sick relatives to Brazil shows refugees' concern for their families. Knowing that their families are in good health or receiving treatment also increases the everyday security of refugees in Brazil and enhances their wellbeing. Considering the relational dimension of everyday security, bringing a sick relative through family reunification will increase both the physical everyday security of the relative and the wellbeing of the refugee, who will not need to worry about the health of their loved ones in the origin country.

4.5.4 *Childcare Strategy*

Some refugees, especially women, decided to bring relatives who would help them care for their children who were already in Brazil. The arrival of a mother or siblings would allow the refugee to enter the labour market. These family members were also important for refugees seeking to bring their children to Brazil. That is, refugees first needed to have someone to take care of their children before asking their children to come. Adult relatives in Brazil also helped refugees to save money for further family reunification procedures. Such was the situation of a Congolese refugee woman who was pregnant in Brazil and decided to bring first her sister and then her other children, who were still in Congo. She could not bring her children first with no one to take care of them:

Because you know, when my sister gets here, she will help me bring my children. I work, she works, everybody works together to help. Got it? If my son had arrived first, there would have been no one to take care of him. There is no family here. (Interview, 28 August 2020)

Many refugees come from countries where extended family members are essential to raising children. Unlike the Brazilian society, in which parents are the main caretakers of their children, African refugees understand childcare as a collective responsibility of the broader family unit. Therefore, bringing relatives to Brazil, including extended family members, was necessary for raising children. This consideration appeared in interviews with both male and female refugees. One Congolese woman was upset with the delayed family reunification process for her siblings because her children in Brazil were being deprived of daily contact with her brothers, who were still in the DRC. She believed that living with uncles and cousins, as she had while growing up, was essential for her children's development in Brazil (Interview, 29 September 2018).

Another Congolese refugee reported that after the arrival of his mother and two brothers, his children were able to have daily face-to-face contact with their grandmother and uncles, improving the wellbeing of the entire family (Interview, 6 October 2018). Bringing extended family members is a strategy to increase the everyday security of refugee families and children living in Brazil because relatives provide care and family support, which also increases refugees' wellbeing. Having the support of these family members in Brazil can also allow refugees to plan to bring their children to Brazil in subsequent family reunification procedures.

4.5.5 *Securing the Future of Family Members*

Many refugees are responsible for helping their relatives improve their lives. Providing relatives with the possibility to come to Brazil and have access to opportunities such as education or the labour market is a strategy to secure future security

for the relative arriving in Brazil as well as for increasing the wellbeing of the refugee who is already in Brazil.

Brazil has a public education system and guarantees a right to education for all children. Brazil also has public, tuition-free universities, as well as private universities that charge monthly fees according to a person's income. Some refugees decided to bring their siblings to provide them educational opportunities as a way to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Bringing a younger sibling in particular shows the concern of refugees for their family members' futures. A Congolese refugee explained why he decided to bring his younger sister to Brazil: 'I called her because she was the youngest, and she needed to study' (Interview, 6 October 2018).

Another Congolese refugee decided to bring her sister to Brazil to give her the opportunity to continue her education: 'I was thinking of bringing her here to continue her studies, to study here in Brazil' (Interview, 17 October 2018). The broader family context may also influence the educational opportunities of its members. One Congolese refugee brought his sister because she could not go to university after their mother got sick: 'She was in a very worrying situation because she really wanted to go to college and my mother was sick' (Interview, 8 October 2018).

This strategy combines with age as a way to secure the future of younger siblings by providing them with further educational and work opportunities in Brazil. That was the case of this Congolese refugee who brought his younger brother to Brazil: 'He is my younger brother. He is 28 years old. He is working now. I asked him to come, for him not to be alone. You know there is war in Congo – everything is difficult, right?' (Interview, 8 September 2018). Refugees feel responsible for their young siblings, who are 'fragile' and need someone to help them. One Congolese refugee explained his decision to bring his younger brother to Brazil in these terms: 'He was young, the youngest of all, the most fragile' (Interview, 5 October 2018).

4.5.6 Security Dimensions of Selection Strategies

Family separation impacts the wellbeing of refugees in Brazil as it directly affects their sense of everyday security. Family reunification is a strategy that refugees in Brazil employ to create everyday security for themselves and their families. The relational dimension of everyday security means that the security of refugees in Brazil is connected to the security of their families abroad. The use of different family member selection strategies demonstrates how refugees in Brazil are agents of their own family reunification processes, consistent with the Autonomy of Migration framework. With their selection strategies, refugees aim to maximize certain aspects of their everyday security and the everyday security of their families, as summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Selection strategies and the everyday security of refugees in Brazil and their families

Selection strategy	Dimension of everyday security for the refugee in Brazil	Dimension of everyday security for the family
<i>Financial</i>	Financial	Financial
<i>Protection</i>	Wellbeing (concern for family abroad)	Physical security
<i>Healthcare</i>	Wellbeing (concern for family abroad)	Physical security (access to healthcare)
<i>Childcare</i>	Wellbeing (family support and care for children)	Wellbeing (family support)
<i>Securing the family's future</i>	Wellbeing (create opportunities)	Future security (educational and work opportunities)

4.6 Conclusion

Brazil presents a compelling case for examining family reunification because refugees may use family reunification to bring members of their extended families to the country. Financial constraints on refugees require them to select which family members to bring first, however. Within the Autonomy of Migration framework, refugees in Brazil are agents that navigate the family reunification procedure, a restrictive migration system, in order to maximize their security and the security of their families. This study identified five overlapping strategies employed by refugees to select family members for reunification: financial, protection, health, childcare and securing the family's future.

Together with homesickness, the search for familial companionship, and the fact that refugees cannot visit their origin countries, these five strategies appear in various combinations in the refugees' narratives. For example, some interviewees wanted to bring a relative to Brazil both to help earn money to send abroad and to protect the relative from physical harm in the origin country. Adopting the perspective of the Autonomy of Migration approach, these five strategies show how refugees navigate the Brazilian family reunification policy to create everyday security for themselves and their families.

Refugees' various strategies for making use of the Brazilian family reunification system are not an abuse of the system, as their selection strategies to maximize their everyday security are completely legal. The Brazilian definition of family unity makes this family reunification possible and is therefore important to the wellbeing of refugees settled in the country. The family reunification procedure in Brazil allows families to be reunited, creating everyday security for refugees. Brazil should work to facilitate the right to family reunification in practice by correcting problems and delays in reunification procedures, as discussed in Chap. 2, which would improve the everyday security of refugees living in Brazil and their families in need abroad.

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