Open Higher Education for Refugees to Access: Virtual Learning in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Margarita Victoria Gomez
Prof., University of São Paulo Postdoctoral researcher, Brazil, *mvgomez47@gmail.com*

The access to university and the continuation of education for people in refugee situation are investigated herein as from four initial questions: how did Covid-19 find society and this is cause displacement cases?; what is a refugee's situation in the process of the world interruption of face-to-face education?; what are the conditions for refugees to migrate to virtual education?; and what are the actions and responsibilities of international organizations (IOs) concerned with education? The qualitative research of descriptive and exploratory character, with a theoretical approach, made use of a literature survey and of IOs reports in the ambit of education to systematize and to analyze the orientations and their implications in distance learning initiatives for refugees. The importance of university actions and of refugees' participation is verified in decision-making in the context of government public policies, at different levels, bound to agreements and covenants. The emancipatory perspective of education, open to (im)migration, besides palliative policies, is made essential for their access and social integration in the digital educational governance complex.

Keywords: human rights - access to higher education, refugees, international organizations, Covid-19 - right to virtual education, open education, Brazil

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic (Coronavírus SARS-CoV-2), severe acute respiratory syndrome, recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, as well as the world interruption of face-to-face education, soon after declared by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), affect the international society as a whole, increasing the social and politically destabilization.

With the declaration of war on the virus, the expression pandemic war appears in Brazil, produced in a fabric of narratives within the scope of Operation covid-19 of the Ministry of Defense, operated by the Armed Forces, and of the Amendment to the Constitution n. 10/ 2020 (Emenda, 2020), called "War Budget", which institutes an extraordinary fiscal, financial and contractual regime to face the national public calamity resulting from a pandemic. The objective is border control, sanitary actions and screening and referral of

people with suspected contamination (Emenda, 2020). These are exceptional measures that affect the educational system, since Educational activities have migrated to cyberspace. Education and science gained momentum in the media as an act of decision and of solidarity to preserve life. Thus society is challenged to rethink its practices and a new understanding of institutions, of methodologies, of subjects and of the severe constraints to access higher education and to remain at university. In this work, we propose an understanding deriving from an analysis of the social context of students in refugee situation regarding their access and permanence at the university, also in the virtual space, along with the actions and responsibilities of the international organizations (IOs) concerned with higher education.

The theme of education and migration as an international human right was discussed by Dryden-Peterson & Giles (2010), De Wit, Leal & Unangs (2020), which presents integration policy and access of the refugee to higher Education; and Gomez (2019, 2019a), which presents actions of the Brazilian university to open education to people in refugee situation in their vulnerability. Another aspect previously analyzed on the theme is the issue of higher education in cyberspace and of virtual university, approached by the author (Gomez, 2015) in terms of equanimity and social inclusion (Teodoro & Beltrán, 2014).

The theme of this article is verified to be practically unexplored, be it in the access and permanence aspects or in the scholarship policy (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010), yet a growing interest is observed in the trend of national integration of refugees by both public and private higher education.

In the initiatives of higher education access and the consequent migration to the virtual space, as a basic humanitarian solution and as a right, refugees are protected by the International Declarations and by the United Nations Resolutions (UN) (1948); (Naciones Unidas, 2016) provided in the 2030 Agenda (Nações Unidas, 2015), in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UN, 2018) and in the Global Compact on Refugees of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), (2018). These instruments support and protect the intervention in education for lifelong learning by the actions of goal 4.3 of the 2030 Agenda (ONU, 2015), which seeks to "ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university" (UNESCO, 2019, p. 144). Also, to increase the current 03% to 15% of the total number of refugees registered at higher education, profiting from the adaptability, speed, mobility, and transportability of technology (Cf. UNESCO, 2019; UNHCR, 2019, 2020, 2020a).

In this sense, the 2030 Agenda calls for governments to promote or not to hinder the access to the Internet, in consonance with the UN Resolution A/HRC/32/L.20 from 2016, which states the importance of promoting universal access to the Internet and the protection of people in the virtual space as fundamental human rights.

The state has the responsibility of protecting individuals, with the support and the cooperation of international organizations (IOs) concerned with education, especially to individuals in refugee situation who are in the most vulnerable group. This group was

forced to leave their home country and to seek asylum in another one, for being under direct threat of conflicts, for persecution and/or severe human rights violation (Lei no 9.474, 1997).

Granting asylum is a slow process until a court decision qualifies a person as a refugee (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). In this legal situation, individuals can stay and be granted humanitarian help for years, and may conclude their higher education started in their home country or start one at the country of destination. The university, when closed, that is, focused on selecting and hosting the best students, homogenizing, conveying ready-made contents, and fostering competition and obtaining certifications that confer it internationalization, is questioned by the universal opening as an ethical-humanitarian issue (Freire, 1992; Teodoro & Beltrán, 2014), for an education in the cognitive-political dimension, which emancipates individuals, also in the virtual space (Gomez, 2015, 2019) with that which exists as a potential likely to be updated, by means of an educational act protected by international right.

It stands out that forced human mobility, which expands beyond physical borders, exposes countries with conservative governments, which erect walls (also virtual ones), making use of a national-populist policy, which securitizes refugees and treats them as enemies or rivals in the work market.

In this context, for refugees, the access to higher education lies at the end of an accumulation of disadvantages and, in principle, non-discrimination involves equal treatment to each and every citizen (Cf. UNESCO, 2019).

This is partly due to the lack of health, jobs, scholarships, Internet connection and to the loss of bond with the institution, despite all these rights being ensured in the international declarations. The refugees' situation in Brazil is even more vulnerable; although 34% of them have completed their higher education (UNHCR, 2020), they do not always have their degrees or competences recognized for leading a dignified life and for their social integration. Under these constraints, their chances for facing life as agents of social changes decrease.

METHOD

The qualitative research, of theoretical and exploratory character uses a literature survey to systemize and to analyze data starting with four questions: how did Covid-19 find society? what is the refugee's situation in the process of the world interruption of face-to-face education?; what are the conditions for refugees to migrate to virtual learning?; and what are the actions and responsibilities of the international organizations (IOs) bound to education?

The qualitative research of descriptive and exploratory character, with a theoretical review, made use of a literature survey and of IOs reports in the ambit of education to systematize and to analyze the orientations and their implications in distance learning initiatives for refugees. The theoretical review identifies some key concepts and allows choosing some that contribute to the systematization of the problem, elaborate the

research questions and gain relevant aspects that contribute to better understanding the subject.

From this conceptualization in the body of the text about refugees, open, closed, access to open education in the virtual space and the presence of IOs and of other international actors (States, Non- Governmental Organizations [NGOs], and transnational companies) as well as previous studies by the present author subsidized the analyses and the final considerations.

The premise is that there are implicit negationist postures in certain responses deriving from "an ideological position whereby one systematically reacts by refusing reality and truth" (Fassin, 2007, n.p.) of what could come to be a global human solidarity project (Booth, 1991; Linklater, 1989 in Jackson & Sorensen, 2018). Under critical thinking, the understanding of the current social-sanitary and educational situation does not admit to scientifically deny the gravity of the facts or of the constraints imposed on refugees. It is considered that the access to regular or distance higher education offered to individuals in refugee situation will contribute to dignifying them, to individual and government decision-making and to their consequent qualified integration.

FINDINGS

An open-door society for refugees - situation during the covid-19

The current Covid-19 pandemic is causing a forced displacement of populations and paradoxically damming people at borders and suspending rights. According to Daniyal, 2020 (in Rodrigues, Cavalcante & Faerstein, 2020, p.1) in India, the prime minister ordered a sudden blockade, triggering reverse migratory flows of thousands of workers and their families, who walked hundreds of kilometers to return to their villages, causing chaos, famine, deaths, in addition to deepening Islamophobic policies.

According to UNHCR - with 70 years of actuation in the protection of these subjects, the so-called "refugees' humanitarian crisis", involves 79.5 million people in forced displacement situation in the world, of whom 26 million are refugees. About half of these refugees are under 18 years old and most are between 18 and 59 years old (UNHCR, 2020). In the world ambit, higher education hosts 40% of the total population, having intensified debates and opened higher education programs for refugees, aiming to increase the current 3% rate to 15% of the registrations for this public up to 2030, following a global protection warrant based on strategic solutions (UNHCR, 2020, 2018).

In Brazil, a continental country with 211,755,692 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2020), 43,000 refugees are estimated to exist, 88% of whom are Venezuelan (Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para Refugiados (ACNUR), 2019, 2020). With their displacement, they exposed a situation of calamity, of public disaster and of the weak local infrastructure, aggravated by Covid-19 and by the discriminatory behavior, close to xenophobia by Brazilians against Venezuelans in the border town of Pacaraima.

The contrasts of social-economic inequality presented on the site of the Brazilian National System of Information on Sanitation (SNIS) are explicit in the health and education areas. In turn, the *2019TIC Household Research* of the Nucleus of Information and Coordination of the BR Point (NIC.br) (Núcleo, 2020), shows that 74% of the population of over 10 years old had access to the Internet, present in 71% of the households counting on Internet connection. According to the *TIC Covid-19* research with the theme *Distance learning and telework* (Núcleo, 2020a), "82% of the Internet users aged 16 or over that go to school or university attended remote lessons or activities" and "36% [...] presented difficulties for lack of or low connection quality", the mobile phone being the most widely used device, especially in the D and E classes (Cf. Núcleo, 2020a, p. 6).

The *Higher education institutions monitoring* conducted by the Ministry of Education (Ministerio da Educação, 2021), in April 2021, reports that none of the 69 federal universities had their activities suspended in undergraduate courses, and, of the 63 post-graduation courses, 4 conducted partial activities and 2 conducted their usual activities, although 64% of the universities showed to be against continuing by distance learning at the beginning of the pandemic for not counting on social-technological-pedagogical conditions and for fearing to discriminate students; the greatest concern was to keep the student feeding service and the Portuguese course for foreign students (Simões, 2020). At least one state university invested a million reais (ca. UsD 200,000.00) to purchase and to deliver Internet kits containing a "chip for mobile or a portable modem with USB interface, enabled for 20 GB and a minimum of 100 class-hours/month to undergraduate and post-graduate students with social-economic needs, offering student lodging." (Universidade de São Paulo, 2021, n.p.)

In this situation, the State decreed the start of its modernization (Decreto n. 10.609, 2021) bound to the rush for technological innovation of fifth generation (5G) led by technology companies such as Huawei and Ericsson, among others. For this, a multilevel digital governance for meeting these goals implies stable, efficient and fast connection that does not prevent taking virtual boundaries together with multilateral actors (cf. Sisconare, the digital platform to claim asylum in Brazil), once the physical ones keep restricted by Directive n. 518 (Portaria n. 518, 2020) which controls the exceptional and provisional entry of foreigners in the country, as per the recommendations of the Brazilian National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA).

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, a growing number of Venezuelans came to Brazil to escape from the serious and generalized violation of their human rights, making the country revise the legal migratory support and implement the Operation Shelter legally based on Law n. 13684 of June 21, 2018 (Lei n. 13684, 2018) which provides "on emergency assistance measures for hosting individuals in situation of vulnerability deriving from the migratory flow caused by humanitarian crisis". The Brazilian Federal Constitution (CF) (1988) and the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB) n. 9.394/96 (1996), Law n. 9474/1997 (1997) and Migration Law n. 13445/15 (2017) state that both natives and refugees have the same rights ensured, except for voting. CF Art. 5 (1988, n.p.): "All are equal before the Law, without distinction of any

nature, ensuring the Brazilians and the foreign residents in the Country the inviolability of the right to life, to freedom, to equanimity, to safety and to property" [free translations].

The migratory regularization of individuals who apply for having their refugee condition in Brazil follows explicit procedures in the Operation Shelter (Operação Acolhida, 2018), of civil-military character, which congregated different Ministries for border ordination actions; law enforcement, documentation, hosting, shelter and interiorization by establishing a screening center in Pacaraima (Brazil-Venezuela border). Pacaraima, specifically, counts on centers of: Reception and Identification (PRI); Hosting and Advanced Care, where individuals are oriented about the norms to be observed for them to receive: vaccination card, refuge request protocol, CPF (stands for: individual taxpayer ID number), digital social security card and family grant aid at the place they will reside, which is bound to CRAS (stands for: Social Assistance Reference Center).

Venezuelans' individuals and families manage to enter the Single Registry of Social Assistance (CadUnico) at that Center; in the other cases, the refugee should seek the offices that render that service at the place of destination. Venezuelan immigrants are sent to a provisional shelter and may resort to interiorization, that is, be sent to another state in Brazil on the government expenses, in a cooperative action with: UN agencies, private sectors, organized civil society, religious institutions, along with states and municipalities.

The major protector of the population rights and safety, as an international standard, is still the State. The lack of humanitarian protection, of health and of public education constitutes a threat to the population. This is questioned by the critical theory of political sciences (Jackson & Sorensen, 2018), which observes that, in weakened States, or anti-states, the conditions are so poor, so adverse to human wellbeing, that people are led to flee to neighboring countries to seek safety. They are compelled to become refugees; moreover, the degraded life condition of a large number of men, women and children in those countries puts their credibility in check and, sometimes, even questions the legitimacy of the States system (Jackson & Sorensen, 2018, p. 33).

This tension in the States that host refugees in the international ambit reflects on education and on the actions of different government levels that seek to alleviate pressure on countries", "enhance refugees' self-reliance", "to expand access to solutions of third countries" and "support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity", following the Global Compact on Refugees (UN, 2018).

The interruption and the national integration of refugees by higher education

Brazil, as a State, makes commitments and contributions; even before the COVID-19, it was among the 85% of developing countries that hosted part of the total world refugees (UNHCR, 2020) and one that integrates them in higher education despite the serious limitations.

Cities in countries of the northern hemisphere, such as the United State (U.S.) and in Europe, took on the Sanctuary City Policy to build an image and a culture of hospitality
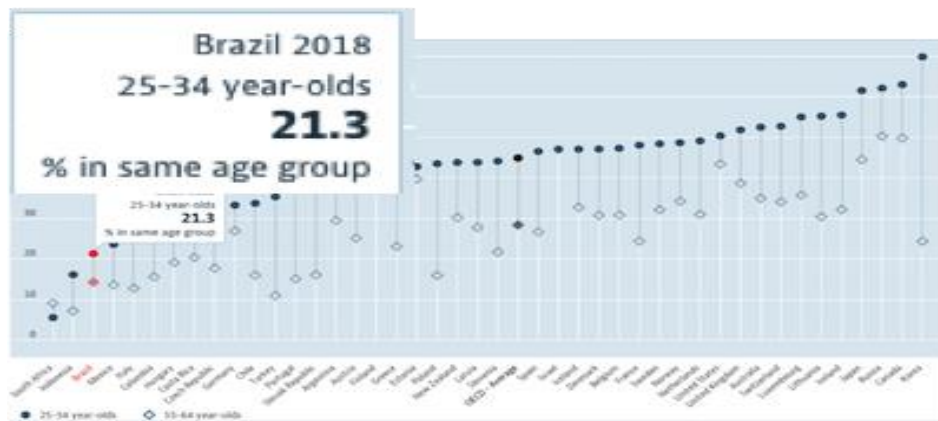
to people in need of refuge. The Sanctuary Movement (Krogh, 1985), started in the U.S. in the 1980s, contested the centrality of the federal migratory legislation that hampered asylum to people from Central America. In the United Kingdom, The City Sanctuary (2021) Movement among cities currently promotes hospitality and a greater social participation of migrants and refugees. In this context, the Sanctuary University emerges with good practices to release the pressure on States as well as the constraints imposed on refugees, offering scholarships at associated universities, such as the *University of Essex* and the *University of Sheffield*.

Solidary University is another action conducted at the University of Coimbra, of the Global type. As from 2019, it hosts students in humanitarian emergency situation in a partnership with the government, such as the Coimbra Group and with the *Global Platform for Syrian Students*. (UNESCO, 2019).

Another complementary action to access higher education is offered by the *Safe Third Country Agreement* (STCA) (European University Association, 2019), which provides that those recently arriving present the refuge request and stay in another country or waiting zone until the approval or not by authorities. The time and the protection particularities of each program, movement or agreement for refugees abide by international conventions. However, for no longer belonging to the country they fled or to that they requested refuge, these people may be unprotected, and face the possibility of being repatriated by their countries governments. These are initiatives that release tensions and facilitate the integration of refugees by the access to higher education, yet they have to be revised since they do not solve the constraints imposed.

The national integration of refugees by higher education is a complementary alternative provided by the IOs and founded on Pacts, Agreements and Programs that effect the global narratives and the 2030 Agenda. For this, the multilevel governance is activated, bound to municipalities, states, international organizations, and disseminates from the local to the global (Hooghe & Marks, 2003), affecting even the political-pedagogical action and curricular proposals of educational institutions in countries that assume this governance in integration. Nevertheless, in countries where the access to university is still a privilege (Cf. Gomez, 2019), the integration of refugees by higher education keeps being a structural problem, a manifestation of serious constraints by the state to protect this and other rights.

According to the UNHCR Report (UNHCR, 2020), of a total of 26 million people in refugee situation in the world, 63% attended basic education, 24% reach secondary education and 3% are registered at higher education. The world average of registered students is of 40% and, in Brazil, it was 21.3% in 2019, as stated by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020).

Figure 1
Brazil. Population with tertiary education. Education at a Glance 2020.

UNESCO recognizes the importance of providing higher education to refugees. Al-Hawamdeh and El-Ghali (2017 apud UNESCO, 2019) state that this provision is only discussed when the situation keeps over time. During the Covid-19 pandemic, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition (UNESCO, 2020) to remotely keep on, strengthen the existing distance experiences and develop other actions.

Some ongoing initiatives for the equative and equalitarian access of refugees to regular and distance higher education are presented in the UNESCO Report (2019), which shows that immigrants registrations vary both in rich and in developing countries. The Report considers one country in each region of the world and selects other countries by: 1) hosting large numbers of refugees: Ethiopia, Australia, Turkey, Canada and Brazil, and 2) having reliable registration data available (except for Brazil, with registration data unavailable).

Some initiatives are: Alternative credential evaluation schemes; Host language-learning initiatives; Scholarship schemes (DAFI, RHEP); Claudette Claro Refugee Women's Scholarship (Aust); GWI'S Hegg Hoffet Fund; SYE for Syrian students; UNESCO-My University Jami3ti – online database (2015); STAR scholarships to study in British institutions (Sanctuary City and Sanctuary University); 3d. Refugee peer-to-peer initiatives (Young Syrian entrepreneurs).

Among the proposals for combined online and face-to-face instruction are: 3e. Online and blended higher education for refugees - Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC), directed by the UNHCR and by the University of Geneva, convening different institutions as listed in Table 2:

Table 2
Connected learning in crisis consortium members (2017)

Australian Catholic University	Open University UK
Arizona State University	Opening University for Refugees
Centreity	Purdue University
INASP	Southern New Hampshire University
Institute for International Education	UNHCR
Jesuit Refugee Service	University of British Columbia
Jesuit Worldwide Learning	University of Geneva-In Zone
Kenyatta University	University of Nairobi
Kepler	University of Ottawa – Community
Kiron	Mobilization in Crisis
MIT	World University Service of Canada
Mosaik	York University

Source: UNESCO 2019.

In the last thirty years, the university education initiatives regarding face-to-face, blended-learning or on-line for refugees were supported. The *World University Service of Canada* (WUSC), is a project devised by students for refugee students, with private sponsorship; others receive support/funding from international organizations (UNESCO, 2019), such as *The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative* (UNHCR.DAFI), Freie Universität Berlin and Kiron Open Higher Education (Berlin).

DAFI, managed by the UNHCR for 28 years acts by supporting youth education in 54 countries with study and research scholarships, as it believes higher education enriches learning, academic life, social and financial cohesion, self-confidence and motivates youth to exert their rights. In 2019, 8,347 students, majorly Syrians, applied for DAFI scholarships, and 1,063 completed their courses (Cf. UNHCR.DAFI, 2019).

The @FUBerlin program of the Freie Universität Berlin, supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and by the Berlin Senate, offers students language courses and courses preparing for entering the FUBerlin, besides offering the TánDEM Program (linguistic association) of mutual interchange, in which a student is a native speaker of the language another student wants to learn.

Kiron Open Higher Education, it's not a university recognized by the state, it is a platform, a startup, non-profit organization headquartered in Berlin. Kiron launched the Bologna Digital (Kiron Open Higher Education, 2018; Ryabova & Cherkasova, 2020), following the European Union disposition (1999), to participate in the European niche of higher education in the hybrid learning mode, due to the arrival of over 40,000 students in refugee condition in the country. Kiron, in a partnership with UNHCR and companies acting in the education ambit, such as the Coursera Platform, offers two modalities of studies, by face-to-face or *blended learning* which alternates moments of face-to-face and online learning: free courses in the MOOC mode (Open On-line Courses and Massive Open Online Course) (Aljaraideh, 2019) and courses granting credits for refugees and asylum applicants to continue their studies in partner

universities. The 2018 student demographics show their country of origin, the one they reside in and their gender, as presented in Table 3:

Table 3
Kiron student demographics (2018)

Number of students	Total	Male	Female
	3.300	2,739 (83%)	561 (17%)
Majors			
Business and economics	30.00%	28.73%	36.08%
Computer science	36.74%	38.88%	26.46%
Mechanical Engineering	9.15%	10.12%	4.64%
Political science	10.51%	10.87%	8.93%
Social Work	13.60%	11.41%	23.88%
Country of residence			
Germany	38.31%		
Turkey	12.71%		
Jordan	9.10%		
Indonesia	6.33%		
Kenya	5.70%		
France	5.67%		
Other	22.19%		
Country of Origin			
Syrian Arab Republic	41.43%		
Afghanistan	9.21%		
Somalia	6.06%		
Iraq	3.56%		
Sudan	3.56%		
Note: Data by country of origin and residence by gender was not made available.			

Source: UNESCO 2019.

These are initiatives that effect the 2030 Agenda goals (ONU, 2015) and integrate actions in basic, secondary and higher education, including education oriented to people with disabilities, with gender diversity or those demanding differentiated protection in the sense of the Manifesto for Inclusive University (UNHCR, 2020b) launched in Italy. Yet the opportunities of access to university education for migrants and refugees, not necessarily with international support, have historically existed in the world, also in the distance modality, as in the works by Manuel Moreno, Ramón Encontrela, P.R. Ramanujam, Yoram Kalman (Cf. Gomez, 2019; Burke, 2017).

In the present global emergency context, the university opens to national integration by the equative access of: those seeking asylum; those with a refugee status; those under humanitarian protection; those with provisional residence that have a family reunification visa or is a member of the family; or those who are part of a family granted with humanitarian protection (Cf. UNESCO, 2019).

National integration by the access to higher education with a scholarship or research grant may help, but can also legalize constraint, economic and academic policies, disregarding previous professional knowledge. Therefore, keeping in the social policies

agenda the historical conditions of the students and displaced researchers receiving grants, aims to claim the right to education in the host communities, as a political and citizenship exercise (Central European University, 2021), along with the humanitarian perspective (De Wit, Leal & Unangs, 2020).

International right, the United Nations conventions and national legislation ensure humanitarian and/or financial help for refugees to access education, even if living in a refugee camp. The issue is that this camp is the biopolitical space "opened when the state of exception becomes the norm", "out of the law", according to the controversial author, Agambem (1998). These openings are complex and demand responsibility, cooperation and solidarity in the actions developed with individuals in this ambit.

(Im)migration to virtual space and the subjects of rights

Access to higher education and to connectivity seem distant from individuals by the closed and competitive university system, despite being an inalienable and non-transferable right, also of individuals in refugee situation. As provided in the Brazilian Federal Law n. 9474/1997, of July 22, 1997, which "defines mechanisms for implementing the Refugees' Statute of 1951". In its Art. 1, it specifies that refugee is every individual that "due to founded concerns of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinions is away from his/her home country" and cannot or does not want to be hosted by the protection of that country; due to the serious and generalized violation of human rights, the individual is forced to leave the home country to seek refuge in another country.

Protecting life, safeguarding against persecution of an imposed penalty, or even of social-environmental calamity, or preserving rights are encompassed by this definition.

Refugee, for Agamben (2010, p.130), goes beyond, referring to a limit-concept:

> [...] which causes a radical crisis to the fundamental categories of the State-Nation, of the nexus birth-nation to that individual-citizen, and thus allows unblocking the field for a category renovation, currently unpostponable, in view of a policy in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted in the state ordination, not even by the human rights character [free translation].

This author considers the decline of the political system of the modern state-nation when the nexus between a certain location (the territory) and a certain ordination (the State), "[...] mediatized by automatic rules of life inscription (birth, or the nation), enters a lasting crisis, and the State decides to directly take on the cure of the biological life of the nation." (Cf. Agamben, 1998, p 7, the author's free translation). Thus, the right of man separated from the right of the citizen clearly emerges with the Refugee as a "Man of rights" (H. Arendt) "divested of the citizen's mask" [...] "that [...] covers him", becomes a "character difficult to be politically defined." (Agamben, 2010, p. 128) [free translation].

Moreover, human rights (education, migrating, living, water, connectivity), are not privatizable assets. It can be perceived that the decision power of the state by the privatization of rights, by the securitization of the refugee, by the judicialization of the

process and by the technological hypervigilance of the borders and of life, as an exception, disconnects man from citizen and therefore the State-Nation that cannot provide adequate responses is delegitimized, again, before the right to connectivity.

Conditions for (im)migrating to virtual education in Brazil

(In)Adequate responses are given by an already weakened State, even before the pandemic, with budgetary constraints, with low rate of completed higher education - 21.3% of the population between 25 and 34 years of age, when other countries in the region have a 40% average, according to the OECD (2020).

Despite this situation, to keep the system working, sanitary actions for preventing COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) and educational-pedagogical actions were oriented by Law n. 13979, of February 2020, which provided on measures to face the international public health emergency, besides providing other legal dispositions. Additionally, the Brazilian National Council for Education, on April 28, 2020, published guidelines for all the basic and higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education (Ministerio da Educação, 2021) also accelerated the co-validation of medical degrees, of both Brazilians and foreigners, and anticipated the granting of degrees to physicians, nurses, pharmacists and physical therapists from public and private institutions.

Yet public education had already been affected by Constitutional Amendment PEC 95/2016 (Emenda, 2016), with constraints to the Federal Constitution (CF) (1988), establishing a limit to public expenditures for twenty years, and also to the Brazilian National Council of Research and Development (CNPq) which cut investments in scholarships and research grants. Besides the contingency plans, the growing privatization of higher education reached 75.8% of registrations in undergraduate courses in 2019, as reported by the Higher Education Census of the Brazilian National Institute of Studies and Educational Research (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2020). The country has no conditions of offering public education for all or for internationalizing higher education, acting as a service provider in the transnational market (UNESCO, 2019; Rama, 2006), under a neoliberal perspective.

> The Brazilian tertiary education system is one of the least internationalized of all OECD and partner countries. Only 0.2% of tertiary students in Brazil are foreign, compared to the total of 6% mobile or foreign students across OECD countries. Between 2010 and 2017, the share of international or foreign students increased in nearly all OECD countries, but remained stable in Brazil. Moreover, only about 0.6% of Brazilian tertiary students are enrolled abroad, less than half the OECD total of 1.6%. (OECD, 2019, p.3).

They are small numbers, in Arjun Appadurai's sense, which cause fear and intensify the debate of inequalities in the access to education by Brazilians and foreigners. Of the total de refugees in Brazil, 88% are Venezuelans and, out of these, 34% (ACNUR, 2019) are expected to have completed their higher education, but present social-economic difficulties for integration, according to the World Vision NGO; a situation bound to the high local unemployment, to the pandemic, to the delay of bureaucracy and

for revalidating degrees or certifications for a qualified insertion in the legal work market with social security, according to agreements between countries (Cf. Gomez, 2019a).

Under these conditions, Brazilian universities, especially those that signed a Term of Reference of the Cooperation Agreement with UNHCR Sergio Vieira de Mello Chair (CSVM) (ACNUR, 2020), for their autonomy and based on the international right of refugees, perform extension, teaching and research actions, namely: procedure for especial (re)insertion and transference, continuity of the Portuguese language learning, scholarships, free legal assistance, guidelines for facing possible discriminations, specific disciplines, research groups, distribution of guideline books and healthcare kits; internet kits and guidelines on Covid-19, virtual assistance via Facebook, Whatsapp and e-mail, obtaining documentation for requesting emergency economic aid from the Federal Government, in occasions such as intervention of the Federal Office of the Public Defender (DPU), as well as guidance on procedures regarding the closure of boundaries, which prevents them from leaving, continuing in, or returning to their country. They have to organize their domestic space for attending distance lessons, socializing, being connected, and daily feeding.

The Chair is integrated by 27 Higher Education Institutions de (IES) of 10 states plus the Federal District-DF, and 339 refugees and/or refuge requesters are estimated to be registered in one of those covenant universities, making use of part of the 383 places available (ACNUR, 2020).

Previous researches (Gomez, 2019, 2019a) systemized issues faced by refugees in Brazil to access and to continue higher education, which in a way correspond to the data in IOs reports and in the international literature (UNESCO, 2019; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010):

. Virtual migratory regularization (Sisconare), personal documentation, access to services, work, housing, healthcare and education; reinsertion or transference of a course started in the home country; conditions for applying to the common university entrance exam; being able to use specific selection processes in one of the 14 universities; translation and certification of personal and education-related documents – when necessary; proof of having concluded secondary education; Portuguese Language Proficiency Certificate for Foreigners (Celpe-Bras); National Exam for Certifying Youth and Adult Competencies (Encceja);

.Payment of fees, university degree, academic transcript, syllabus, faculty curricula, institutional information of the University, Certifications and Revalidation of degrees at accredited public universities– by the Carolina Bori platform or or by *Revalida* for physicians;

.Insertion of fee payments or recognition of Situation of Lack of Funds (Cf. Organização Internacional para as Migrações – Brasil, 2018) and exempt from the translation of certain documents;

.Recognition of degree obtained from on-line education (in Brazil, it has to be accepted); Lack of a federal revalidation public policy.

.Obtaining UNHCR mediation and from other public organizations and of the civil society to guide the procedure.

Source: Gomez, M.V. (2019); and Gomez, M.V. Curso Nupri/USP (2020)

The potential of the Brazilian higher education experience is related to what some authors recognize as good teaching, research and extension practices (Gediel & Friedrich, 2020) and the effort and personal commitment of professionals/faculty members and refugees. The data confirm the importance of higher education to teach international right to refugees (Mahlke, 2017), especially regarding refugees' strategic decision-making to access and to continue higher education and their social integration (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010).

Actions, responsibility and influence of IOs and partners for virtual education

Historically, UNESCO is the one that dictates the educational norms and principles and, in the Regional Higher Education Conferences (CRES) for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO.IESALC, 2018, n.p.), declares that " higher education is a social public asset, a human and universal right, and the States duty". Therefore, "the access, use and democratization of knowledge ensure basic human rights, indispensable to coexistence".

Due to Covid-19, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition (UNESCO, 2020) to palliate the situation of about 1.6 billion children, youth and adults, in over 190 countries, that still in March 2021 were not regularly attending school and/or university. The orientation of continuing remote activities or the distance modality in emergency character implies forming teachers, students and transferring the responsibility to parents, the use of technologies, printed material, radio, open TV and connection. For this, governments are oriented to obtain and to provide individuals and institutions with: Media Centers, sponsored Internet, the GSuite, which, in a partnership with Google and *Foreducation EdTech*, offers cloud computing devices (Google Cloud), Google Apps, Google Classroom, Hangouts Meet, Google Drive, Youtube, as well as Facebook, Whatsapp, Zoom, among other social media, exceptionally.

UNESCO asks states to adhere to the coalition and thus declares its support to poorer countries "in expanding their best distance learning practices with innovative solutions, sensitive to the context to reach children and youth, who run a greater risk", mixing high-technology, low-technology and no-technology approaches based on the multilevels of educational governance. UNESCO and its partners - World Bank (WB), World Trade Organization (WTO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), among others – create a view of the world which is taken as their own by the communities that receive their subsidies.

Jackson & Sorensen (2018, p. 411) state that the WTO, by means of cooperation, represents a type of governance that is increasingly "distancing from the confinement to the context of national governments towards multilevel governance in different arenas interconnected and overlapped" [free translation]. Undoubtedly, the action and influence of supranational organizations and interdependence of countries integrated to a transborder educational community are under questioning (Cf. Jackson & Sorensen, 2018) and should be analyzed in the ambit of education.

DISCUSSION

The pandemic world context reflects in Brazil and admits an updated understanding of the current boundaries of knowledge which expand beyond the physical world by multiple virtual platforms at different levels, delimiting a private educational space for learning and challenging public education.

Education as a global public asset, likely to be negotiated, from the WTO perspective, sees the university as a transnational and transborder, on-line and distance educational service provider (Rama 2006, p. 18) and students as users of services and applications of public and private providers, besides loans, as from the Santander Bank, with the risk of placing users in serious default, as per David Harvey, depoliticized and immobilized by debts they cannot pay.

Corporations that provide technology, education and credit are motivated, in the UNESCO (2019) sense, by philanthropy and stimulated by profit involving the trademark image, tests, innovations and even new market. Therefore, IOs and partners, besides service providers, are international actors that devise and transform higher education under the risk of converting it into content provider and quick certifications (for example, Google proposal) to their users – students – (Cf. López & Gaibar, 2021), following an exceptional political decision that increases educational and digital inequality and promotes social exclusion.

Hence, solving problems (Cox, 1999) or obtaining exceptional lasting solutions is not enough for a change in quality public education for refugees (De Wit, Leal & Unangs, 2020). Under Booth's (1991) and Linklater's (2004) perspective, the (in)accessibility to higher education, low-quality education, privatization, digital gap, political oppression, as well as the sanitary collapse can still be said to be constraints to be emancipated from. Citizens' education and international safety involving all types of social organizations, would allow solving "long-living emergencies" (World Bank, 2000) that prevail and avoid legitimizing new ones.

International norms of society (Finnemore, 2017) affect identities and interests, and are extended to States by international organizations (Finnemore apud Jackson & Sorensen 2018, p. 300), which are bureaucracies that promise to meet the goals desired by others, but that may knock down interests, both of States and of citizens, which they should promote (Barnett & Finnemore, 2005, p. 184 apud Jackson & Sorensen, 2018, p. 306).

Higher education, when taking refuge in cyberspace, accepted the support of corporative actors for distance learning regarding emergency distance learning and hybrid modes, *blended learning.* On the part of the state, this implies an important human and economic digital investment in capacity-building, in protection to cognitive-organizational work, of *home office* (remote work) and in policies that provide transparency to what is public and to what is private in the ambit of education.

Hedley Bull (1995) considers the world political system as "a universal network of interaction" involving different actors and that one of the "trends in the contemporary world politics" is the growing presence of transnational organizations and corporations

in the society of states, supported on international right for, among others, to manage "an ever connected world by means of advanced technology, such as electronic communications" (Bull, 1995 apud Jackson & Sorensen, 2018, p. 223) [free translation].

The influence of international organizations, be it directly or through institutions that supervise the order and assisted governments (Cox & Jacobsen, 1975), involves economic, cultural and intelligent persuasion, the *soft/smart power* (Nye, 2004). Society thus takes on responsibilities *and* justifies its not being indifferent to the situation of individuals, or to the political-pedagogical proposals being oriented/implemented, such as the use of emergency distance learning and educational material packages.

Even though institutions avoid being indifferent and keep sanitary and educational activities, the feeling is that it is a very particular state of exception. Therefore, the refugees' access to higher education should be kept under discussion without disconnecting the humanitarian from the political aspects of their lives, because the extreme stage of detachment between the rights of man and the rights of the citizen would explain the bankruptcy of committees and organisms such as the UNHCR whose "activity cannot have a political character, but rather solely humanitarian and social [...] and for this reason unwillingly keeps a secret solidarity with the forces it should fight" [free translation]. (Agamben, 2010, p. 130).

Although IOs have great responsibility for society and for the lives of individuals, they cannot be reduced to servants of States, corporations or donors; they are autonomous actors that could exert power in their own right, build and influence other social worlds from cooperation, choices and decisions (Cf.Barnet and Finnemore, 2005, p.161 apud Jackson & Sorensen, 2018, p.304-305).

The politization of refugees' situation is key for (re)inventing education and citizenship (Freire, 1992; Cox, 1999) as regards the knowledge/power ratio. Des-politization halts some rights within those communities besides those historically halted, leading refugees to an enemy situation and making their lives killable, vulnerable, since they are not protected by public policies.

CONCLUSION

The analysis under the four initial questions allows a current understanding of the pandemic world context under the influence of international organizations (IOs) and its reflection on Brazil as regards access and the opening of educational instances for keeping refugees at university.

An education and migration are great narratives with the potential and the responsibility of mobilizing others within them to go beyond with the voice of more vulnerable individuals, devising public policies that neither restrict themselves to solving problems to keep the *status quo*, nor palliative, compensatory, emergency or provisional policies, but rather those that emancipate from the restrictions imposed by an unbalanced society, and also by Covid-19.

The State and the IOs concerned with the (in)security of citizens, of protection, are co-responsible for human mobility and cornered, questioned and rethought due to the intervention of nationalist/conservative/negationist governments. Complementary, pacifying, emergency public policies implemented with subsidies from governments, from IOs and from donors, greatly contribute. However, they do not solve the lack of access and the permanence of refugees in higher education.

The situation of refugees in the in the world process of halting face-to-face education was even more weakened when disconnected from the humanitarian dimension of politics, since, as historical subjects, with previous knowledge and rights, require this connection to be integrated by socialization, education and scientific research that empower them, which free them from the oppression of constraints.

In this sense, learning the (country's) language is an essential path to citizenship, according to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1992). Learning the language, as well as the virtual surroundings and hybrid modes of education allow migrating to the distance learning modality; this happens to be an exceptionally decentralized multiscale decision, which proceeds with the 2030 Agenda goals. Besides the resonances these actions may find in the local culture in the short term, the observance of the initiatives and their reach have to be kept, as well as the international actors' actions reconstructed in the space of digital power, with a philanthropy and profit bias, involving the multilevel educational governance.

Networked open education makes sense when considering life from the situation of individuals and incorporates constraints in the learning process to elaborate them, to take a position and claim for rights. Open and/or closed, as a political space of constraints and of possibilities, education is under debate in the public university and the focus is preventing that, in the name of science, instrumental to certain power sectors, the university may come to adhere to corporative educational proposals that again exclude the most vulnerable.

The option for educating according to universal solidarity, critical awareness, boldness and emancipation does not only admit technology alone or justifies the rights of refugees to higher education, but means to protect them, since in the Bobbian sense, it is not a philosophical problem, but rather a political one, bound to these and to other rights that shall be further investigated in future works.

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