

The Diversity of Contemporary Migrations in Brazil Through Migrants' Memories (Sapiranga, Rio Grande do Sul)

A diversidade das migrações contemporâneas no Brasil através das memórias de migrantes (Sapiranga, Rio Grande do Sul)

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Abstract

The article analyzes contemporary migration in Brazil, focusing on the municipality of Sapiranga (Rio Grande do Sul), highlighting the diversity of migration trajectories and the importance of migrants' memories as a research source. The study addresses migration within the context of globalization, characterized by international flows driven by economic, political, social, and environmental factors. The methodology employed is oral history, which enables the recording of individual and collective narratives of contemporary migrants who have moved from different regions of Brazil and Latin America, thereby valuing the experiences of historically marginalized groups. The research includes interviews conducted at the Adolfo Evaldo Lindenmeyer Municipal Museum in 2023, which reveal aspects of migrants' daily lives, economic integration, cultural and religious practices, as well as the challenges they face, such as labor precariousness, bureaucratic barriers related to documentation, and xenophobia. The results show that migrants contribute to cultural diversity and to local socioeconomic development, although they still face obstacles related to integration and social recognition. The study concludes that valuing migrant memories is essential for building a more plural, democratic, and inclusive history, reaffirming Sapiranga as a space of reception and of multiple identities.

Keywords: Migrations; Oral history; Memory; Rio Grande do Sul.

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Resumo

O artigo analisa as migrações contemporâneas no Brasil, com foco no município de Sapiranga (RS), destacando a diversidade de trajetórias e a importância da memória dos migrantes como fonte de pesquisa. O estudo aborda o fenômeno migratório no contexto da globalização, caracterizado por fluxos internacionais motivados por fatores econômicos, políticos, sociais e ambientais. A metodologia empregada é a história oral, que permite registrar narrativas individuais e coletivas dos migrantes contemporâneos, que migraram de diferentes regiões do Brasil e da América Latina, valorizando assim, experiências de grupos historicamente invisibilizados. O trabalho inclui entrevistas realizadas no Museu Municipal Adolfo Evaldo Lindenmeyer em 2023, que revelam aspectos do cotidiano, da inserção econômica, das práticas culturais e religiosas dos migrantes, bem como desafios enfrentados, como precarização do trabalho, burocracia documental e xenofobia. Os resultados evidenciam que os migrantes contribuem para a diversidade cultural e para o desenvolvimento socioeconômico local, ainda que enfrentem obstáculos de integração e reconhecimento. Conclui-se que a valorização das memórias migrantes é fundamental para uma história mais plural, democrática e inclusiva, reafirmando Sapiranga como um espaço de acolhida e de múltiplas identidades.

Palavras-chave: Migrações; História oral; Memória; Rio Grande do Sul.

Introduction

Contemporary migrations in the 21st century are among the most striking phenomena of globalization. The dynamics of migration involve the displacement of millions of people, who move in search of better living conditions, security, job opportunities, fleeing persecution, and even environmental crises. Especially in recent decades, migrations have become increasingly international, related to global economic networks and increasingly influenced by certain migration policies. More recently, they have been seen as a result of socio-environmental catastrophes, which end up causing mass human displacement and provoking profound changes in the dynamics of the societies in the places where these migrants arrive.

According to the International Organization for Migration¹, there are over 280 million individuals living outside their countries of origin. Developed countries such as United States, Canada, Germany and United Kingdom are their main destination. Developing countries have also received a growing

¹INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). **World Migration Report 2023**. Geneva: IOM, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.iom.int>. Access on: Jul 10, 2025.

number of migrants. In Brazil, for example, most migrants arriving in the last decade come from neighboring countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia.²

The reasons that explain this intense migratory flow of recent decades are diverse. Among them are economic factors, such as unemployment and low wages; political factors, such as persecution and authoritarian and dictatorial regimes; social factors, such as discrimination based on race and inequality; and environmental factors, such as socio-environmental disasters and climate change. A significant number of cases can be observed in the contemporary world where these factors are found and motivate people to leave their countries of origin, such as the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, the conflicts in Haiti and the several wars in Middle Eastern countries.

The Brazilian history is marked, at different times and contexts, by the migratory dynamics, of different groups, origins and destinations. From the colonial period, migrations have been part of the country's populational formation. The forced movement of the traffic of enslaved African individuals and migratory movement from Portugal who crossed the Atlantic to occupy the new lands of the Portuguese empire in America, for example. The 19th century witnessed the arrival of large groups of European immigrants coming from Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain, alongside Asian groups including Japanese, Lebanese and Syrian. Later, in the 20th century, groups coming from Latin America started to arrive and still come to Brazil.

Over the last decade, Brazil has played an important role as an international migration destination, receiving an increasingly significant number of vulnerable groups arriving due to humanitarian crises and extreme poverty in their countries of origin. As a result, Brazil has received migrants of diverse nationalities, with very different contexts and motivations.

One example of this is Haitians³, who after the environmental catastrophe occurred due to the 2010 earthquake in the country, Brazil created a program of humanitarian welcoming for those affected, which allowed the legal entry of Haitian immigrants in the country, mainly through the states of the north region such as Acre and Rondônia. From that region, many Haitians followed to the states of south and southeast, such as Rio Grande do Sul, seeking better life conditions and starting to occupy job positions, mainly

² BRASIL. Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública. **Relatório Anual de Imigração e Refúgio no Brasil – 2023**. Brasília: MJSP, 2023.

³ SILVA, R. M.; COSTA, J. F. da. Migração e trabalho: a inserção dos haitianos no mercado de trabalho brasileiro. **Revista Brasileira de Estudos de População**, São Paulo, v. 38, n. 1, p. 1-22, 2021.

in construction and industry, as is the case in Sapiranga, where the Haitian presence is noticeable⁴.

In the south of the country, a significant presence of Senegalese people is noticeable. The arrival of this migratory group is mainly explained by economic factors and the search for better living conditions. In this context, it is worth highlighting their presence in the footwear production chain, as in the Vale do Sinos region, for instance. A different example appears when we refer to Syrians, who, due to the war in their country, led Brazil to grant humanitarian visas to immigrants interested in emigrating.

The Migration Law nº 13,445/2017 approval replaced the Foreigner Statute of 1980 and sought to promote advances to facilitate the entrance of foreigners into the country. However, many challenges remain in ensuring the effective realization of migrants' rights, as elements such as bureaucracy hinder access to documentation, such as obtaining a CPF (Brazilian taxpayer identification number), a work permit, and housing. Furthermore, xenophobia and racism, which manifest mainly against Black and poor migrants, such as Haitians and Africans become hurdles in the construction of a more egalitarian society, leading to the search for strategies to address inequalities in access to public policies, such as healthcare, education, and social assistance⁵.

The research scenario: Sapiranga, Rio Grande do Sul

This research seeks to analyze a regional space, aiming to identify and deepen the discussion on historical factors that constitute a region – in this case, Sapiranga, in the Vale dos Sinos region of Rio Grande do Sul. This, in turn, allows for a broader view of the regional dynamics, as well as its social actors, who constitute the trajectory of the formation of that regional space. Through a micro-spatial analysis, which uses a more limited spatial scope, it is possible to understand the process of space formation in a more complex and in-depth way, considering its origins, singularities, and references⁶. In such perspective, Gevehr⁷ proposes an investigation of the regional space, using

⁴ SECRETARIA DE JUSTIÇA, CIDADANIA E DIREITOS HUMANOS DO RS. **Plano Estadual de Políticas para Imigrantes e Refugiados**. Porto Alegre: SJCDH, 2021.

⁵ CUNHA, M. I. A. da; MENEZES, M. G. de. **Imigração e refúgio no Brasil contemporâneo**. São Paulo: Ed. UNESP, 2022.

⁶ VAINFAS, Ronaldo. **Micro-história: os protagonistas anônimos da história**. Rio de Janeiro: Campus, 2002.

⁷ GEVEHR, D. L.; VENDRAME, M. I.; BASSAN, D. S. Pensando o desenvolvimento a partir de uma redução de escala: o método da micro-história. **Revista de História Regional**, [S. l.], v. 26, n. 2, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://revistas.uepg.br/index.php/rhr/article/view/17131>. Access on: Oct 10, 2025.

the micro-history method⁸ as a means to understand migrants' narratives in that regional space, identifying and reflecting upon aspects of migration that in a macro-spatial analysis would not be properly identified and inquired.

In fact, Rio Grande do Sul has a trajectory of great visibility regarding migrations. The occupation of that territory, where there have been already native peoples for around 12 thousand years, is deeply transformed from the start of the European colonization, marked by the presence of Portuguese and Spanish immigrants, who came to America to occupy and colonize lands disputed by the two Iberian crowns, namely, Portugal and Spain. In the 19th century, the occupation process in Rio Grande do Sul underwent deep changes with the arrival of German and Italian immigrants, among other groups in smaller numbers, among which Polish, Austrian and French individuals.

The presence of such migratory groups in the 19th century is still noticeable in communities of several municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul, where architecture, language, cuisine, religion and other features inherited from the immigrants' culture play an important role in the tourism and economy of those communities. Currently, Rio Grande do Sul remains a relevant destination for many contemporary migrants who arrive seeking a better life, and finding jobs in industries and other activities. For instance, Haitians, Senegalese, and Venezuelan people who are now residents in the Vale dos Sinos.

Sapiranga, a municipality located in Vale do Rio dos Sinos – where this research was developed – has a history marked by migrations, which started long before the arrival of Europeans. Native peoples lived there and were also inserted in the migratory dynamics of that territory since the territorial disputes of the colonial period up to these days. Sapiranga can be considered a city with migratory profile, which in turn, reveals the heterogeneity, diversity and plurality of its people, thus sheltering a mosaic of cultures.

In such migration scenario, Sapiranga witnessed, in the 1970s and 1980s, an intense migratory flow, with people coming from other regions of Rio Grande do Sul, mainly the northeastern part of the state. That migratory dynamics was mainly motivated by the fast development of footwear industries in the municipality, which increased significantly the job opportunities in the local industry.⁹

⁸ VENDRAME, Maíra; KARSBURG, Alexandre. **Micro-história, um método em transformação**. São Paulo: Letra & Voz, 2020.

⁹ GEVEHR, Daniel Luciano. A História do Desenvolvimento Regional no Vale dos Sinos: o caso de Sapiranga

To better understand the discussion proposed, one must consider the geographical space trajectory over time. Sapiranga used to be the 5th District of São Leopoldo – a municipality in Rio Grande do Sul which is considered the birthplace of German immigration in Brazil, due to the creation of the German Colony of São Leopoldo in July 25, 1824 – in the period between March 28, 1890 and December 15, 1954, when the state governor, Ernesto Dornelles, approved the law creating the municipality of Sapiranga.

Figure 1: Map locating Sapiranga (RS) – Brazil



Source: Retrieved from: http://imguol.com/2012/06/28/mapa-brasil-sul-rio-grande-do-sul-sapiranga-1340913042953_300x300.gif. Access on: Sep 18, 2025.

Between 1960 and 1990, Sapiranga experienced significant industrial growth linked to an increase in job opportunities in the municipality. Considered a municipality with significant growth in Rio Grande do Sul, Sapiranga attracted many people from other regions of the state, especially from the 1970s onwards. Linked to this context of economic development, there was a significant increase in population and, consequently, an increase in activities developed in the urban environment. However, as the population

e seus percursos no tempo. *Redes*, v. 21, n. 1, p. 56-83, May 6, 2016.

grew and its economy developed, new social problems emerged, such as violence and public safety issues.

Through the local press, it became possible to follow the problems that arose with the industrial growth of the municipality. Headlines highlighted issues such as lack of housing and the poverty that plagued these new families who were settling in the municipality daily. From the 1970s onwards, the number of editions in which photographs of people identified as “bandits” and “murderers” and perpetrators of various types of crimes were published became impressive. Headlines depicting crimes and acts of vandalism were a constant in the press from that point on. An example of this can be found in the headline published on November 5, 1982, whose title, in bold letters, is a striking example: **MIGRATION REMAINS A PROBLEM IN SAPIRANGA**. In that same edition, an article was published called **THE DEMOGRAPHIC GROWTH**, drawing readers' attention to birthrate control and disorganized growth in developing countries (O Ferrabraz, Nov 05, 1982, cover).

The municipality of Sapiranga has an area of 137.759 km², with a population density of 554.31 inhabitants/km² (IBGE, 2025). According to the Sapiranga City Hall, the economy is based on industry (footwear and metallurgy) and the service sector (Sapiranga City Hall, 2025). Table 1 summarizes the main socioeconomic indicators of the municipality of Sapiranga.

Table 1: Economic and Social Indicators – Sapiranga-RS

Population	2022	2025 (estimates)
	75.648	77.935
HDI MHDI	2010	2010
	0,806	0,711
GDP	2020 (R\$)	2021 (R\$)
	3.183.264	3.615.584
Per capita GDP	2020 (R\$)	2021 (R\$)
	39.772,41	44.906,27
Schooling – 6-14 years old	2010	2022
	97,60%	99,45%

Source: IBGE, 2025

The data presented (Table 1) reveals a 13.5% increase in total GDP, which reveals and a 12.9% *per capita* GDP, representing significant growth in just one year. Regarding HDI (Human Development Index), a measure used for countries, and the MHDI (Municipal Human Development Index), a direct comparison is not possible, as the MHDI is adapted to local realities. What can be observed is that these indicators classify the municipality of Sapiranga as having high (0.711) and very high (0.806) human development. This data can be validated by one of the components of its calculation, namely, education, which in Sapiranga had excellent rates, reaching close to 100% in 2022. The IDEB (Basic Education Development Index), which is calculated from school approvals, varies between 0 and 10, but the government's goal is to reach 6. Regarding the IDEB of the municipality of Sapiranga, in 2023, for the initial years of elementary school in the public network it was 6.4, while the final years obtained 5.4, thus reaching the target set by the government with the need for improvement in the final years.

Oral history recording the migrants' memory

Oral history methodology is an extremely important tool for recording memory and valuing the lived experiences of different social groups. Oral history plays an even more important role when the objective is to record the memory of historically marginalized groups, such as Afro-descendants and contemporary migrants. Regarding these two groups, "official" documents do not record a large part of their trajectories, which contributes to the silences, erasure, and invisibility of Afro-descendants and contemporary migrants, who end up not having their stories told, as happens with other groups, who are praised and highlighted.

When seeking to record and listen to those individuals' life stories, oral history breaks with a traditional view of written history, which often overvalues written documents and the perspectives of elites. Oral history allows for the construction of a more plural, diverse, inclusive, and sensitive narrative regarding voices silenced over time.

It seems relevant to emphasize that oral history is not merely collection of testimonies. The historian Janaina Amado¹⁰ is one of the leading figures when it comes to the methodology of oral history in Brazil. For her, attention must be paid when working with the memories brought to light, to the

¹⁰ AMADO, Janaina. O grande mentiroso: o depoente na história oral. In: ABREU, Regina; BESSA, Jorge (org.). **Memória e patrimônio**: ensaios contemporâneos. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2006. p. 119-129. p.119.

selectivity of recollections, and to the subjectivity of the narrator. In his classic text on “the great liar”, Amado¹¹ discusses the trend of disqualifying interviewees, due to possible inaccuracies or exaggeration in their speech, reinforcing that in oral history the most relevant is not the “factual truth”, but rather what she calls symbolic truth – which is revealed by means of gestures and meanings subjects ascribe to their own experiences.

Therefore, it is crucial to consider the contributions of the English researcher Paul Thompson¹² when he states that oral history democratized historical knowledge production by creating spaces for the voices of the past and of those who were excluded from official narratives. Also in Brazil, there are renowned authors when oral history is discussed. Some of them are Meihy and Holanda¹³ and Verena Alberti¹⁴. Meihy and Holanda¹⁵, for example, address oral history as an ethical and transforming tool, while Alberti¹⁶ highlights its role as a political instrument of memory preservation.

When the proposal is to record trajectories of migrants in the specific context of one municipality such as Sapiranga, in Rio Grande do Sul, the question that immediately emerges is “which history” is to be recorded? After all, history is related to the sources used, the versions of the past to which we have access, and our own perceptions and the places from which we view the past. In this sense, Maia proposes an important reflection on this process, questioning, “How do we find the stories of the city that have not been told?”¹⁷ According to that author’s analysis, it is necessary to “listen to” the different voices that live in the city, so that the history of that place is told by different subjects, who are many times silenced as a result of process of racialization [racism], social exclusion [voices from the peripheries], xenophobia [prejudice towards immigrants] and other several mechanisms that disregard and erase the memory of the different groups that coexist in the city.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² THOMPSON, Paul. **A voz do passado**: história oral. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992.

¹³ MEIHY, José Carlos Sebe Bom; HOLANDA, Marieta de Moraes Ferreira. **História oral**: como fazer, como pensar. São Paulo: Contexto, 2007.

¹⁴ ALBERTI, Verena. **Ouvir contar**: textos em história oral. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2004.

¹⁵ MEIHY, José Carlos Sebe Bom; HOLANDA, Marieta de Moraes Ferreira. **História oral**: como fazer, como pensar. São Paulo: Contexto, 2007.

¹⁶ ALBERTI, Verena. **Ouvir contar**: textos em história oral. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2004.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p.07.

Giving voice to migrants is guaranteeing what David Harvey¹⁸ calls the right to the city, reaffirming history commitment to democracy and plurality, recording and sharing the memories of the different groups living in Sapiranga. The right to the city, in this context, seen in the possibility of migrants and African descendants to tell others about their trajectories and experiences in the city where they live, thus showing they are part of it, the same way the city is part of their existences.

From a project that aims to record the subjects' voices, it is possible to understand how they elaborate their own identities and face contemporary challenges. This is the results of some research work carried out by the Municipal Museum Adolfo Evaldo Lindenmeyer in 2023, which included residents from Sapiranga, who were willing to tell and share their life trajectories. In this specific case, we sought to register migrants' experiences. Those were individuals who have arrived in Sapiranga in the last few decades, coming from other regions of Rio Grande do Sul, from other states and even other countries. The research project was developed at the Adolfo Evaldo Lindenmeyer Municipal Museum, in 2023 and was named "Retrato das migrações: imagens da chegada dos migrantes do século XX em Sapiranga" (A Portrait of migrations: images of the arrival of migrants in Sapiranga in the 20th century) and included 13 residents of the municipality.

Interviews were carried out throughout the first semester of 2023 at the Municipal Museum, which provided access to those individuals' life testimonies, which revealed how the presence of migrants – arriving from different places and traveling different paths – is part of the local community. The interviewees were selected using the snowball sampling technique, where the first interviewee indicates the next participant, and so on, until a point is reached where the responses are repeated, which is called saturation point.

The research methodology is structured from a clear research project consisting of an investigations problem, an intentional sampling (13 participants – 11 migrants, and 2 migrants accompanied by their children), saturation criteria (when information starts to repeat and do not produce new data) and an ethical protocol, which considers the interviewees' consent, that is, they all signed a Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE, Brazilian acronym for Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido) and the possibility of anonymization. Another aspect is that in the context of oral history research

¹⁸ HARVEY, David. **Cidades rebeldes**: do direito à cidade à revolução urbana. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2014.

using interviews with migrants, it is relevant to consider that many times such displacements are marked by forced movements, cultural and linguistic barriers and vulnerabilities. Therefore, adopting a critical and reflective posture for ethical and sensitive listening is crucial (Alberti, 2004; Meihy and Holanda, 2014). The research developed is part of an investigation process that analyzes the presence of contemporary migrants in the region of Vale dos Sinos and Paranhana. It was approved by the Research Ethics Committee with opinion CAAE: 02040318.1.0000.8135, available at the *Plataforma Brasil*.

The interviews were carried out using open questions, which allowed the register of life narratives. They were recorded, transcribed and their content duly authorized by the interviewees, with academic purposes, considering the analysis of the document corpus in the research project. Regarding the analytical treatment of sources, the research resorted to a critical reading of narratives and later theme codification, according to the good practices in research, which include thorough transcription [marking pauses and relevant intonations], checking with the interviewees [feedback] and preservation of the printed document and signed TCLE.¹⁹

Oral history, memory and diversity of migrations

The narratives describe internal migrations (within Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil) and international migrations (Germany, Argentina, and Venezuela), articulating family memories, work trajectories, and different personal memories and experiences. The proposed analysis is organized around two axes: (1) presentation of the interviewees—name, origin, and age (when provided), reasons for migrating, difficulties faced, biographical traits, and elements that reveal their feelings about living in the city; (2) a cross-sectional analysis that seeks to compare patterns and singularities identified among the interviewees. Based on the proposed analysis, Table 2 provides a brief presentation of the migrants interviewed.

¹⁹ FERREIRA, Marieta de Moraes; AMADO, Janaina (org.). **Usos & abusos da história oral**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 1996. Retrieved from: <https://editora.fgv.br/produto/usos-e-abusos-da-historia-oral-1827>. Access on: Set 19, 2025.

Table 2: Interviewee's characteristics

Identification	Origin	Age and gender	Reason for migrating	Average distance traveled (Km)
1	Porto Alegre (RS)	55 - M	affective and family	60
2	Seberi (RS)	45 - M	work	390
3	Frederico Westphalen (RS)	40 - F	work and family	410
4	Herval Seco (RS)	55 - M	work	430
5	Taquara (RS)	66 - F	work	20
6	Mata (RS)	50 - F	work and family	260
7	Paraná	NI - F	work	700
8	Maquiné (RS)	46 - M	work and family	95
9	Argentina	NI - M	work	1150
10	Palmeira das Missões (RS)	55 - F	work	330
11	Venezuela	37 - M	work and safety	6000
12	Venezuela	49 - F	work and safety	6000

(M: male; F: female; NI: not informed) Source: Research data, 2023).

We observed that most migrants came from different places, mostly being over 40 years old, and that one of the main reasons for their displacement was the availability of work in the municipality. Thus, it is clear that among the migrants interviewed, the predominant reason for migration is related to the search for job opportunities, but there are also subjective and affective reasons that influenced the displacement and permanence of individuals in the city of Sapiranga.

Interviewee 1, for example, is the son of German parents, spent part of his childhood in Brazil, and lived in Germany during his schooling and part of his adult life. He demonstrates affection for Brazil as follows: "Initially... I feel good here in Brazil, Sapiranga... this joy of the people, of Brazil, suits me better." Interviewee 1 returned to Brazil in 2005 and moved to Sapiranga with his Brazilian wife and two daughters. The return to Brazil was motivated by reuniting with his family and seeking a life project with his wife, making clear his affection for Brazil and the municipality of Sapiranga: "...we returned to Brazil to live here in Sapiranga." Upon returning to Sapiranga, due to his technical training in mechanics and experience as a firefighter and paramedic in Munich, he obtained a position in industrial maintenance at the company Verallia, where he has worked for 16 years.

However, he faced difficulties such as the language and Brazil/Germany cultural differences. He had to learn Portuguese. He also realized that in Brazil access to culture is limited by cost, and the German historical heritage is not appreciated. Interviewee 1 stated that "In Germany... [museum] tickets are very cheap, but here they cost a fortune". Despite all difficulties and differences found by the interviewee, he feels he belongs to the place he and his family chose to build their future, "I feel good here... this people's joy... suits me better" and that they intend to remain in Sapiranga, "for now, we don't want to go back to Germany". His speech reveals a strong feeling of belonging to the place they chose to live.

Therefore, from interviewee 1's narrative, we observed some factors marking the migratory process: his birth in Brazil, his moving to Germany (European socialization process), his professional qualification outside Brazil, his distance from family network, combination of technical-professional capital, the Brazil/Germany cultural comparison (national memory x individual expectations), his belonging to the local everyday life, his stable job, home, and his daughters studies ended up weighing more heavily than the "German historical density." Finally, it is clear that Interviewee 1 is satisfied with his choice to belong to Brazil and to Sapiranga, a place of quality of life, work, and welcoming atmosphere, as he stated:

Then, for now, we don't intend to go back to Germany to live there. Only if a win the Mega Sena (Brazilian lottery), then we might think about that, otherwise no. To visit, spend the vacation in Germany, that's possible, but not live there, for a while, this is not a plan for us.

The life story leading Interviewee 2 to migrate to Sapiranga is the reality of many migrants, that is, poverty, lack of jobs, precarious housing, “great deprivation”, as he emphasized: “Seberi was an extremely poor place... Sapiranga [had] a lot of jobs”. These factors made him and his family, flee from Seberi in the 1980s, looking for a place to survive. They were attracted to Sapiranga due to the offer of jobs, as reported “you would go out to look for a job, and started to work immediately, would already work overtime on the same day”. He started working in the footwear industry, next moved to the metallurgy industry, and finally became a civil servant, working as a guard in the Immigrant Park.

For Interviewee 2, his identification with the city of origin was weak, “it is a city that has no identity yet... there are some points of tradition and others totally dispersed”. However, currently he experiences this feeling of pride, mainly to see the return, after the pandemic, of the Immigrant Park. For him, the park represents a place of memory and sociability since at the same time it was a point of support during the pandemic (Covid Tent)²⁰, it also resumed its relationship with society by means of events and festivities held there. Their moving from Seberi to Sapiranga faced many challenges that still persist such as the traditions that for the interviewee are still quite dispersed. There is predominance of the German tradition in Sapiranga which in combination with other traditions make it difficult for him to identify with the city and reduces his feelings of belonging.

In the 1980s and 1990s, buying a house in Sapiranga was extremely expensive. The PT federal government program *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (My house, my life), made it a bit easier. Currently, the city is different from what it used to be, Sapiranga was basically about the shoe industry. Most people would work only for the shoe factories. Either you manufactured shoes or their components and accessories. Nowadays, it diversified. The metallurgic industry grew a lot. There is a lot... footwear is no longer the city’s focus. But it is a city where tourism hasn’t really taken off, hasn’t progressed. Traditions occupy a very small portion of our population. It’s a city that still doesn’t... doesn’t have an identity, a homogeneity of thought. It’s very... There are pockets of tradition and others completely scattered,

²⁰ Covid Tent is a set of facilities that were implemented in the Municipal Immigrant Park to assist individuals seeking urgent care to treat the COVID-19. Tents were put up in a provisional way in 2020 and 2021.

and they don't yet understand the city as a city of German immigration. They don't... And also, people who don't embrace, don't integrate into that way of thinking.

Interviewee 3, came to Sapiroanga as a child to help her sister who needed to work, "I came with my sister... she needed to work and brought me here to help look after her kids". Her trajectory started very early, she was 14-15 years old and already got a job in one of the shoe factories, next in the food industry, and finally, she rendered outsourced work to the Sapiroanga Park.

Interviewee 3's initial conditions were modes, her life had "ups and downs" as she report, the difficulty to find daycare for her children impacted her search for work and maternity. Despite the adversities in the job market and surviving strategies, for this migrant, the city means joy, recognition and love, "Sapiroanga is my city at heart"; the park "a marvellous place like this great park... Sapiroanga's history is here". Interviewee 3 recognizes the park as a symbol of civism and place of professional self-esteem.

Despite the difficulties reported by Interviewee 3 to start her trajectory in Sapiroanga, she made clear that there is a relationship of love and belonging with the city, as reported below.

I live in the São Jacó neighborhood. I've always lived there since I came here. Back then it was called Vila São Paulo, and now it's São Jacó, but I've always lived there. It's a very good neighborhood to live in, where I had my daughters. They, how can I say it, grew up there, and they made excellent daughters, so... I don't even know what I'm saying... [Pause]. So, I stayed, I live, I continue to live in the same place, but things aren't always easy, you know, sometimes things happen in a more difficult way, better for some, not so much for others. I've had many ups and downs in my life, but thank God everything has worked out for the best, and I only have to thank this city for welcoming me, because it's a wonderful city. For me, there's no better city, because I'm originally from Frederico, but my city at heart is Sapiroanga, it always has been and always will be. I wouldn't trade my city for any other.

Interviewee 4 arrived in Sapiroanga in 1979, when he was still a child, like Intervieww 3. I came to Sapiroanga with my father and brother who were looking for Jobs in the footwear industry. Our migration occurred in steps, the

family came gradually forming a support network. He started to work when he was 12 years old, “spreading glue”. He noticed some prejudice against workers who came from other cities, preference was given to those who were already dwellers of that region, “we noticed that some companies would favor those who belonged originally to the region...”. When he arrived there, the city’s conditions were fragile, it was rather poor and it lacked urban infrastructure in the periphery.

Well... we spoke differently. Here we said “*leiti*,” outside we said “*léite*.” Here it was *chimarrão*, outside it was mate (referring to both different accents and different words used to name the same thing). So we had that difficulty. When we went to the supermarket to get something, here it was *aipim*, outside it was *mandioca*. If we were going to buy salami, here it was *linguiça*. It was totally different. So, we had to enter another culture and adapt to this new environment we were in today. We even came here because outside, where my father worked, work was slow. And someone mentioned the region, someone mentioned Sapiroanga. And my father got some money and came here to see the place. He stayed somewhere and immediately started looking for work and bringing the rest of the family, you know...

Although there was initially a cultural shock, he also reports environmental and historical memories such as going fishing, the streams, the Mucker’s War²¹ history at the Ferrabraz Mountain, peaking in civic pride, “now I am proud of living in Sapiroanga”. Interviewee 4 realized some hierarchical system in the city, some preference for the locals. However, that was a learning process (“learning the city”), going from a moment when people were labeled to a moment of affirmation “we are workers just like you are”, this was only possible with the time spent in the city, with neighbors’ support and recognition in the workplace. The struggles faced in the different aspects of the migrant’s life were revealed in the language, traditions, behaviors, and identification with the place, but nothing that would not be adjusted over time, thus transforming the reality and making migrants belong to their destinations.

Interviewee 5 already lived in the region, Taquara, Novo Hamburgo, and finally, Sapiroanga. She sought that city for professional reasons, looking for a

²¹ Mucker is a proper name, only singular. The term means religious fanatic, a kind of unofficial saint, it was used to name a social-religious movement that occurred in Sapiroanga between 1868 and 1874, led by Jacobina Maurer and João Jorge Maurer.

job in the footwear industry, to work in large and well-known factories. Her trajectory in the footwear industry started with her father, who was “sander” in a shoe factory. The interviewee remembers her routine, going to work by bicycle, the peasants’ fair and the handcraft circuits. Those are memories that marked this migrant’s and her daughter’s trajectories. Although, the footwear industry work was developed in episodes of interruption and returns, the migrant does not complain, but feels proud and keeps good memories. According to the Municipal Traffic Secretariat, there are currently around 40 thousand bicycles in the city, which makes Sapiranga to be also known as “city of bicycles”.

Currently, Interviewee 5 works with handcrafts and participates in a group that exhibits in Praça da Bandeira. Her narrative reveals a feeling of affection, pride, belonging, and family memories of the neighborhood and the industrial world. The pair of migrants declare, “I am very proud to be from Sapiranga.” Interviewee 5’s narrative reveals that even in the face of some difficulties, there is affection for the city of Sapiranga. Memories kept in her mind of the city’s daily life demonstrate a pride in belonging to this community.

[...] I’m from Moro Alto, interior of Taquara. From there I moved to Novo Hamburgo and from Novo Hamburgo I came here. It’s been over forty years I’ve been living in Sapiranga. There were some factories such as Paquetá and Ibane. I started working for Paquetá. I worked five years there, and then I stopped working, stayed at home for some time, then I took up handcrafting. Life was more or less tran... Not exactly tranquil, but yes, somehow tranquila. Okay... what I remember is that there were not many factories. That’s it.”

Interviewee 6 arrived in Sapiranga as a child, as did interviewees 4 and 5. Her move to the city was due to family reasons and mediated by Lutheran networks. Her father moved to Sapiranga seeking work and a livelihood for the family, in rented housing. Interviewee 6 began her working life very early, at age 12, working in a shoe factory. In addition to her work, she helped care for the family’s children, and had an intense community life in the neighborhood where they lived, the neighborhood called Operária.

Housing conditions were precarious at the time of the “railway” since water and basic sanitation were scarce. The interviewee had to walk long

distances to wash the family's clothes, in a place which is no longer used. Even facing difficulties, Interviewee 6 has a strong feeling of belonging, "I cannot see myself living anywhere else... I'm very happy living in Sapiranga and in Operária".

Interviewee 6 has affective memories, recalling the bridges, streams, railway and schools. Religious links reinforces morality and belonging and the neighbors represent part of the family built by bonds of friendship and affection ("we became close friends").

Yes, from the Catholic church in Sapiranga. [Pause]. And nowadays I can't imagine living anywhere else but there in Operária. I'm very happy where I live. I'm very friendly with all the neighbors. Everyone... We've all become close friends around here. So, we wake up in the morning already saying good morning, asking how the other person is doing. That, for me, is very important. So, I can't imagine living anywhere else. I'm very happy living in Sapiranga and in Operária there in... at Amaral Ribeiro.

The story is repeated in the narratives of the interviewees so far; Sapiranga has become a place to which they belong and identify. Interviewee 7's journey, however, involved several paths before arriving in Sapiranga. Born in Iraí (RS), she lived in Dionísio Cerqueira (SC), then Foz do Iguaçu (PR), São Leopoldo (RS), and finally, Sapiranga (RS) to be closer to her children. The move to the city was due to work and proximity to her family and children. Interviewee 7 worked in a shoe factory, doing extra shifts to meet the family's needs. Her daughter started working as a child to help with household expenses, "she worked a whole month making *enfiadinha*²² to buy me a set of plates".

Interviewee 7 faced many difficulties, including poverty, living in a favela with open sewers, insecurity, and serious accidents. As she recounts, "it was a small favela... sewage ran along the edge of the street." Interviewee 7 and her daughter, who also participated in the interview, told a story of great deprivation and struggle for survival. They faced challenges with precarious housing, exhausting work, and a high-risk motherhood. Change occurs, the

²² A popular term used by residents of the region to describe the work of braiding leather threads [hence the expression "enfiadinhos/as," which refers to threading, placing] onto the pieces used to produce the upper part of women's shoes, manufactured in footwear factories. This work was commonly carried out by women in their own homes, in an informal work capacity.

city becomes more civilized, but the human cost of this change remains etched in the collective memory.

Then, we arrived in Sapiranga, we suffered here in Sapiranga, we could not find a house to rent. We rented a small house, two rooms only, when it rained, there was more water inside the house than outside. We were cramped inside the house. Next, we found a house that was a bit bigger, and we stayed there. Then, the days passed, everybody found a job. At that time, 12 years old, I think my girl was 12, 13 years old, Sérgio was 16, they both found jobs.

Then I started working at Flama, it was also opposite. Then, we all worked. So, we managed to buy a small house by the railway. There, we stayed. After some time, we sold that house and went to São Leopoldo. But our children stayed here, so we came back again. We bought another house by the railway, and then Marlene arranged it, started dividing the land. Then, we went... went to João Goulart. We lived there, it was there, in a very good place at the João Goulart. After that, all the children got married, I went back to Dionísio Cerqueira, stayed there for a while and now, it has been five years that I'm back here. The kids are all here, you know. So, we want to see them, be close to them. But I have a grandson, who's like a son to me too, who's in Dionísio. And we worry, you know, because we wanted him to come here, but the others don't want to, you know, and that's how it is. But, thank God, everything is more or less okay. The tracks, where the train and the tracks used to pass, there was only one street. It's there, where September 20th is now. There at... You go that way to...

However, today she perceives a significant change in the city's landscape, a transformation that has generated relief and pride. Interviewee 7 witnessed the transformations that occurred in the city and feels grateful to reside there: "Thank God, how beautiful it is now... those who didn't know it wouldn't believe it." As Interviewee 7 reported, "It was a small shantytown... there was sewage running through it... thank God, how beautiful it is now." According to Gevehr²³, the migratory flow to the city of Sapiranga occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, coming from different parts of Rio Grande do Sul, motivated by the growth of the footwear industry in the city, envisioning job opportunities in local industries, as highlighted by the interviewees.

²³ GEVEHR, Daniel Luciano. A História do Desenvolvimento Regional no Vale do Sinos: o caso de Sapiranga e seus percursos no tempo. *Redes*, v. 21, n. 1, p. 56-83, May 6, 2016.

Interviewee 8's life story in the city of Sapiranga also reveals urban problems encountered at the time of migration, urban conditions of "dirt roads," polluted streams. He arrived in the city at age 19 and has lived in Sapiranga for 46 years. He migrated to be closer to relatives, worked in shoe factories, but found his passion in construction, "I'm passionate about construction." For Interviewee 8, acceptance is the central value, and he felt this upon arriving in Sapiranga, "where you are well received, you don't leave." For the migrant, the city is an extension (construction site) of his home, a space for work and friendships. For him, belonging to the destination is directly related to acceptance, to being "well received."

Oh... What I have to say is that it's been nothing but joy, nothing but joy in my life, and I only have gratitude for everything that has happened, the people welcoming me, giving me advice, and always putting God first, participating in the community, you know? And getting to know each other. So, that's why I ended up coming to Sapiranga and liking Sapiranga. I like it. And the thing is, I spent a year at a company with a formal contract, and then I started working in construction, in construction, you know, and I ended up liking it because it was more or less my style, you know? We who come from the countryside, like, I, in the footwear industry, I only worked for a year with a formal contract, and then I continued in construction and ended up liking it, and I'm still here today, and I'm passionate about construction. I'm passionate about working in construction. So, I came to Sapiranga because I started going out, working, and making a lot of friends, and what I have to say is, where you are well received, well treated, you will never forget it, you will never leave. And that's why I'm still in Sapiranga today, because they welcomed me, the people welcomed me, like, with open arms, giving me everything I needed. So, this is very important for anyone coming to Sapiranga, because the people are amazing and that's all I have to say, nobody will regret it, just come and see.

Interviewee 8's account shows how important and impactful it is in a migrant's life to find a welcoming environment and feel a sense of belonging. The result is a prosperous life. We live in a globalized world where displacement occurs between different nations, regions, states, and municipalities. Sapiranga, on this route of displacement, received Interviewee 9, who came from Buenos Aires (Argentina). His arrival in the city was due to

a job offer and to try to overcome the grief of losing his mother, which had discouraged his life plans, “leaving behind... all that glamour... because my mother had passed away.”

As most of the interviewees, he also had faced difficulties, famine, expensive rental, which made him change homes several times, initial feeling of displacement, and a reality that was different from that of Buenos Aires and the most shocking included bullying episodes, as he reports, “it was the first time I’d suffered bullying”.

Interviewee 9 works as a beauty professional with a network of female clients. And, despite all the difficulties faced, he did not give up on his project, “In this city I will be a reference...”. Over time he has built various friendships, without prejudice, “I don’t care about social status”. Although he has received international job offers, he chose to stay in the city out of loyalty to the people who welcomed him, “it would be disrespecting the people here if I left”. Interviewee 9 began his professional career very early in Buenos Aires, migrating to several countries, 15 in South America, as he himself recounts. This experience is closely related to global mobility, in which people seek a place to live and belong in different parts of the world.

[...] Well, I was born, I don’t know, there, some years ago, I’m not going to talk about birth date, because it doesn’t matter, but... more than one would like to have my identity here, but they’ll not get it. [laughs]. And all that stuff. I was born in Buenos Aires, in Argentina, my work started when I was 13, then my career started, when I sought a job, I sought a job when I was 13, and then I started to work in Buenos Aires, and from Buenos Aires I never stopped until now. Well... in fact... going, going, going, going, I’ve already been to 15 countries in South America, twice in Europe. At first, the city was very cold, a really cold city, but after I started working here and got to know all people ... Ah! I have to thank God for women, without women I wouldn’t be who I am, I wouldn’t... I like working with women a lot. Then, because of that my cell phone only got women in contacts. And well, all the marvelous things that happened here, here, there aren’t ugly things to talk about, only that woman that is now memory, she was only on my mind, but not now, never more, it is different. [interviewee’s comment in the background: Of course, that thing is different]. [Interrupted audio].

Finally, prejudice experiences left marks in the in Interviewee 9's life, at the beginning of the migration process, he found a "cold" and prejudiced city, but his dedication to his professional career and the relationships with people, were ways of overcoming the initial difficulties. Cultural integration and the rewards he started to receive from local networks strengthened his desire to stay. Prejudice against migrants is still an obstacle in the idealization of fairer society. For Cunha²⁴, inequalities only decrease when the migrant is allowed access to health, housing, education, and social assistance with dignity.

A rather difficult migratory journey represented the arrival of Interviewee 10 in Sapiranga. She was born in Palmeira das Missões and came to Sapiranga to find a job, firstly as a maid in family homes since she was a single mother who had to support her child. She also sought an affective bond by means of marriage, since she came alone to that city, "I came with nothing but my face and courage". I worked in the footwear industry, in daycare, looking after about 23 children, I shoe "enfiadinho" at home, all to provide for myself and my daughter. At a certain point, out of necessity I had to leave my child with her granddaughter. I had an urban disorientation, "I was left by the tracks... and I was lost all day long".

But not even all difficulties made Interviewee 10 to give up living in Sapiranga, where she has been for 35 years. Community bonds, neighbors' support, the grandparents help looking after and providing for her daughter and the everyday joy were responsible for strengthening her bonds with the city o auxílio dos avós com os cuidados e sustento da neta e a alegria cotidiana foram responsáveis pelo fortalecimento dos vínculos com a cidade, "I really like this place... I have 11 grandchildren... and I intend to remain here until the end of my life". According to Interviewee 10, Sapiranga is the extension of her home, she expresses a feeling of community and belonging that is clear in the excerpt below.

I'm very happy today, because I know everybody, and I love Sapiranga, and I don't intend to go anywhere else. Then, when I came to Sapiranga, then I worked at Calçados Nuqui (a shoe factory), you see? After that, I worked for Potira, a year and three months. And then, when I left the factory, I babysit at home, I had a daycare at home. I worked for SESI long ago, and looked after up to 23 children... I took care of them. Then, there was

²⁴ CUNHA, M. I. A. da; MENEZES, M. G. de. **Imigração e refúgio no Brasil contemporâneo**. São Paulo: Ed. UNESP, 2022.

also a time I made shoes at home, it is called *enfiadinho*, you see? There was a kind of workshop in my house, and I managed to provide for myself. And these were my jobs here in Sapiranga. Then, here Sapiranga, I built a family... I had three children, two girls and a boy, you see? The boy is the youngest. And also, there are my friends, I wake up early in the morning and say 'good morning', I shout to my neighbors "good morning, come have some mate!". I'm always happy, don't want to go back to my birthplace, I cannot get used to that place anymore, I like it here a lot, Sapiranga, and I think that's it. Also, here in Sapiranga I have 11 grandchildren, you see? I'm very happy here, and want to stay in Sapiranga until the end of my life.

We observed that the migrants arriving in Sapiranga identified with the city and were welcomed by the community, which always took into account each individual's life story. This confirms David Harvey's²⁵ words about the right to the city, it is a way of these migrants telling others about their trajectories and experiences in the city they chose to live in, showing that at the same time they are part of the city, the city is included in their individual experiences.

Finally, Interviewees 11, coming from Venezuela, a country that has been going through a humanitarian crisis, arrived in Sapiranga in 2019 looking for better life conditions, work and safety. At first, they worked in tourism, construction, distributed leaflets and looked after old individuals, until they could work in their own areas of qualification. Interviewee 11 has a degree in Marketing and currently works in her area "now I am really practicing my profession".

In general, the difficulties faced by the couple were also addressed by other immigrants: housing insecurity, the cold, the lack of support networks (family, friends), broken job promises, and, as is already a reality for many migrants, labor exploitation, "they want to take advantage of the other's need." However, overcoming this phase was only possible with the help of local people and churches, "the doors remain open." Little by little, the couple rebuilt their lives and acquired some basic material goods, such as a refrigerator, stove, bed, among others.

Then, the way we could, we managed to save some money, right, and arrived here in Sapiranga. But here, the locals, in

²⁵ HARVEY, David. **Cidades rebeldes**: do direito à cidade à revolução urbana. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2014.

comparison with people from the north, they are really serious, top. I have nothing bad to say, I only have words of gratitude until now, always smiling... Like, “Good, do you like Saporanga?!”. Many, many things, you know? It’s very different from the north, because in the north, while here people donate things, in the north we had to buy and it was hard to buy anything, very expensive. Also because there is the border, and on the border, you know, everybody arrives and there are no jobs for everyone, there are no companies, or industries, only commerce, and usually informal, that’s it. Luckily, I have no plans to return to my country. Because unfortunately, the situation is from worse to the worst there. But my mother is still there, and I also have siblings there. And... But, unfortunately, they won’t come here. Anyway, I try to help them when I can. And, look, nothing is bad for me. Only gratitude for all people of Saporanga. Thanks.

Upon arriving in the city of Saporanga, the couple had to start from scratch; they were typical everyday refugees that Brazil has been receiving in the municipality of Roraima. Language was a difficulty they had to overcome, as was employment, a situation different from what they experienced in Venezuela, where they worked in their professions. As other migrants who participated in the research have already stated, Saporanga is a welcoming city where moral recognition preceded bureaucratic recognition. For this couple, it was no different; they had to rely on solidarity to rebuild their lives, valuing each small achievement (a bicycle, a mattress, a contract) and gradually building a sense of belonging to the city.

Interviewee 11 clarifies that since he arrived in Brazil up to the migration to Saporanga, they faced hard times to adapt.

We arrived here in Saporanga. First we took a bus to Manaus, because it was the cheapest we could find. Boa Vista, we left in the morning, arrived in Manaus at night. Manaus, we left at midnight, and arrived in São Paulo at seven in the morning, and arrived here at five in the afternoon, that is, in Porto Alegre. Saporanga, we arrived at six in the afternoon, but it was quite an adventure getting here in Saporanga, because we didn’t know the place, we didn’t have internet, and the woman who was supposed to help us wasn’t at the apartment either; it was another person who rescued us. We only lived there for three days, in that house. Those three days were tough for us, because September was freezing for us. We were coming from the intense heat up north, 40 degrees, feeling like 50... [Laughs] Exaggerated,

right, but it's hot, it's very hot. And here it was 7 degrees those days, very cold. We walked all those three days in Sapiranga, we got to know the center from walking so much there. Every day we went out, we woke up at 5:30, and by six o'clock we're on the street, looking for work. But back then, it was difficult for us to find a job, very difficult.

However, despite the language barrier, the couple is currently grateful to the city that welcomed them, saying, "the hospitality of the people here is excellent." Today, their plans include owning their own home and a venture in the food industry, perhaps opening a café. With this, they conclude that staying in Sapiranga is certain and there are no "plans to return," meaning no return to Venezuela.

Final considerations

Although distinct, the 11 stories converge on some key themes: work as the driving force behind mobility; family as a network of support and decision-making; the city as a simultaneous space of opportunities and hierarchies (material and symbolic); and memory as a way of narrating dignities and pains, of establishing belonging and projecting futures. One of the factors that leads people to migrate is family and a network of supporting infrastructure. In the stories presented, the family and acquaintances are clearly fundamental elements in the migratory process. These are cases where a sibling arrives first, the father brings the other family members; the sister brings another sister, still a child, to care for her nephews and nieces; the cousins, the wife, and the father-in-law prepare the housing infrastructure. In this context, ecclesial networks (churches) were important in migrations, and furthermore, when there was no presence of relatives and family members, clients, neighbors, and the community appeared as a substitute network.

When it comes to memories, the presence of some aspects of the city's heritage was observed, such as: the train tracks (representing the presence of the railway that passed through the city, built in the 19th century); the September 20th celebrations; the shoe factories, many of which no longer exist but were important sources of employment; and the Immigrant Park, which highlights a sense of community, work, and celebration. In addition, the city's natural aspects, such as rivers, streams, and fishing, evoke fond memories. Although the development of the city contributed to improvements in urban

conditions, which were precarious, environmental degradation also occurred, exacting a high price from the environment.

For the interviewees, welcoming by the city was an everyday factor, however, prejudice also appeared, as the preference for workers from the region, racial, gender and ethnic bullying, exploitation of poor migrants, the cold weather, the city without an homogeneous identity, the presence of German descendants and other ethnic groups. However, despite so many adversities, the routine with the neighborhood, clientele, and friendships made those newcomers feel accepted by the community.

Therefore, most of the migrants interviewed want to remain in Sapiranga, the city that chose them. Some speeches express feelings of belonging and the desire of a future project in the city: “I intend to remain here until the end of my life”; “, we don’t want to go back to Germany”; “I am proud of living”. For those migrants, their life project is in Sapiranga, their own home, a business, traveling but coming back without being away from their beloved city. Finally, for them, belonging is finding a place where they can have a dignifying work, a neighborhood that many times play the role of family, and building up histories and memories of the place that is now their “home”.

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