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Migration and Reception of the Warao Indigenous People on the Northern Amazon Border: Operation Welcome and the Cases of the Janokoida and Waraotuma A Tuaranoko Shelters

Migration And Reception Of The Warao Indigenous People In The Northern Amazonian Frontier: Operation Acolhida And The Cases Of The Janokoida And Waraotuma A Tuaranoko Shelters

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Summary

This article analyzes the migration process of the Warao indigenous people to the northern Brazilian Amazon border, in the context of the worsening Venezuelan humanitarian crisis, as well as the institutional, social, and cultural challenges related to the reception policies implemented in Brazil. The study focuses empirically on Operation Welcome, created in 2018, with emphasis on the experience of the Janokoida shelter in Pacaraima and the Waraotuma a Tuaranoko shelter in Boa Vista, both primarily intended for the Warao indigenous population. The research adopts a qualitative approach, based on documentary research, normative analysis, and field research, articulating institutional data, official reports, and empirical observations. The results indicate that, although Operation Welcome represents a significant advance in the state's response to the migratory crisis, the Warao indigenous people have specific demands that go beyond the conventional migratory condition, requiring public policies sensitive to ethnic, cultural, and territorial dimensions. It is concluded that welcoming this population constitutes a permanent challenge for the Brazilian State, demanding the expansion and improvement of inter-institutional actions aimed at protecting indigenous rights and promoting dignified and sustainable social integration.

Keywords: Indigenous migration; Warao; Operation Welcome; Public policies; Amazonian border.

Abstract

This article examines the migration of the Warao indigenous people to Brazil's northern Amazonian border region in the context of the worsening Venezuelan humanitarian crisis, as well as the institutional, social, and cultural challenges related to the reception policies adopted by the Brazilian State. The empirical focus is on Operation Welcome (Operação Acolhida), established in 2018, with particular emphasis on the Janokoida shelter in Pacaraima and the Waraotuma a Tuaranoko shelter in Boa Vista, both primarily designed to host the Warao population. The study employs a qualitative approach based on documentary research, normative analysis, and fieldwork, integrating institutional data, official reports, and empirical observations. The findings indicate that, although Operation Welcome represents a significant advancement in Brazil's response to the migration crisis, the Warao people present specific demands that go beyond conventional migration frameworks, requiring public policies that are sensitive to ethnic, cultural, and territorial dimensions. The article concludes that the reception of Warao indigenous migrants remains an ongoing challenge for the Brazilian State, calling for the expansion and continuous improvement of interinstitutional actions aimed at protecting indigenous rights and promoting dignified and sustainable social integration.

Keywords: Indigenous migration; Warao; Operation Welcome; Public policies; Amazonian border.

Introduction

Migration is a phenomenon that many people around the world face, and the Indigenous peoples make up the majority of the affected communities. This article aims to explore migration of the Warao indigenous people to the northern Amazonian border and the complex challenges



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associated with the welcoming process.

With the intensification of the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, the Warao people began to migrate. mass migration, resulting in a reception operation as a response to the Venezuelan migration crisis. by the Brazilian government with the creation of Operation Welcome in 2018. In particular, in the case of the people Warao, from the creation of the Janokoida shelters in the city of Pacaraima and Waraotuma to Tuaranoko in Good View.

Getting to know the Warao indigenous people and the reasons for the worsening migration crisis.

According to anthropologist Alvaro Antonio García-Castro, the Warao indigenous people are originating from the northern part of Venezuela, inhabiting the banks of the river since time immemorial. Orinoco, with emphasis on the Delta Amacuro state, as well as the states of Bolívar and Sucre.

Etymologically, the term Warao means "the people of the canoe" in the native language, given their relationship with the traditional way of life linked to the riverside tradition (García-Castro, 2000).

Over time, with the insertion of new agents into their environment, they had to... adapt to another reality by having to learn to deal with the influence of commerce, livestock farming, and... wage labor, missionary work, and the advancement of local businesses in their territory (García-Castro, 2018).

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the main reasons for The mass migration of the Warao indigenous people to Brazil is a consequence of:

- Deterioration of natural living conditions;
 - Progressive invasion of lands by farmers,
 - Actions of Creole cattle ranchers, oil workers, and drug traffickers;
 - Growth of populated centers due to job opportunities,
 - Food and sanitation resources; • Lack
- of public policies for indigenous populations (UNHCR, 2021, p. 4).



Image 1 – Warao Indigenous people living on the streets, before being sheltered.



Source: ISA, 2018.

Like the entire population of the neighboring country, the Warao indigenous people were also affected by Venezuelan chaos. As a survival strategy, many migrated to Brazil, on a journey of approximately 1,000 km, and there is a shelter in the city of Pacaraima (border) and another in Boa Vista (230 km. starting from the border), with fluctuating populations, each with approximately 500 people. There were another one in Manaus, however many indigenous people migrated to Santarém and Belém, which reduced the The Warao population in that capital. In Boa Vista, the Warao indigenous people live in an urban shelter, with The management of the NGO Fraternidade Internacional, in partnership with UNHCR and the Brazilian Army, through of the operation welcomed (Conjur, 2019, p. 1).

In this sense, "The Warao indigenous people represent a legal, sociological, and political challenge." This is because they transcend the status of immigrant and require specific legal protection as indigenous people" (*idem*, Conjur, p. 1).

The creation of Operation Welcome and the Brazilian response to the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis: legal aspects of the current legal framework.

Operation Welcome was created by Provisional Measure No. 820/2018, converted by National Congress in Law No. 13.684/2018, which deals with emergency assistance actions for reception of people in vulnerable situations resulting from migratory flows caused by humanitarian crisis.

Following this, the Federal Emergency Assistance Committee was established, regulated by Decree No. 9,970 of 2019. In addition, Ministerial Directive No. 3/2018 was established, which authorized the... execution of Operation Welcome, and EMCFA Instruction No. 1/2018, which determined the establishment



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from the Humanitarian Logistics Task Force (FT Log Hum) of the Brazilian Army (EB).

EMCFA Instruction No. 4/2019 defined the strategic concept, military structure, and governance. and command and control of Operation Welcome, while Instruction EMCFA No. 5/2019 replaced the IN No. 3, addressing decentralization of resources, governance, internal control and monitoring of logistical support. Furthermore, Ministerial Decree GM-MD No. 1,223/2021 established the Executive Secretariat of Coordination of Emergency Assistance Actions (SECAAE), and EMCFA Ordinance No. 3,448, of 23 In June 2022, the operation of SECAAE was extended.

Border management and reception measures for the Warao people: actions at the Janokoida shelter.

With the increase in migratory flows, due to the worsening crisis plaguing Venezuela, Managing the border between the two countries has been a priority for the Brazilian government. And Operation Welcome, led by the Brazilian Army, plays a key role in this. In that sense, Operation Welcome offers basic health services, temporary shelter, and assistance. legal and social support, as well as support for the integration of immigrants into Brazilian society (Silva Filho, 2024).

The Brazilian Army is one of the main entities responsible for coordinating the Operation. Welcome, working together with other government authorities, organizations international organizations and NGOs. Their role is crucial in the logistics and security of the operation, ensuring the Transporting supplies and protecting migrants and humanitarian aid teams. Furthermore, The army conducts patrols along the border to curb illegal activities and ensure national security. (Silva Filho, 2024).

The patrols are carried out jointly with the Federal Police, the Federal Revenue Service, and others. security agencies are effective in preventing transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking. and arms smuggling. However, Operation Welcome faces major challenges, especially with regard to the capacity to deal with the growing number of immigrants, refugees and, especially, Indigenous peoples. Brazil has encountered difficulties in providing adequate services and infrastructure. sufficient to meet the needs of immigrants, above all, in health and education. In addition Furthermore, the political and economic crisis in the country affects the government's ability to deal with the issue (Silva Son, 2024).

Due to the difficulties described above, some measures concerning indigenous migrants Venezuelans were adopted within the framework of Operation Welcome, especially those related to indigenous people. of the Warao ethnic group. This involves the construction of a shelter in the city of Pacaraima, bordering the city Venezuelan woman from Santa Elena de Uairén, in order to properly welcome them, as can be observed. below:

In Pacaraima, the Warao occupied an open, vacant lot next to the Rubens Cabral de Macêdo Bus Terminal and the adjacent streets, in

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The conditions were extremely precarious. Their stay was temporary until they could obtain financial resources through the sale of handicrafts and begging, allowing them to move on to the city of Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima, about 220 km from the border area. As one group moved to Boa Vista, others arrived continuously. Furthermore, it was only in November 2017 that the “Janokoida” shelter was created in Pacaraima, a word that, in Warao, means “house” (Cirino, 2020, p. 128).

In addition to UNHCR, there is support from other international organizations, such as the Organization International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency Assistance-ADRA and the Orinoco Project: waters that cross borders, coordinated by Diocese of Roraima, through Cáritas Brasileira (Silva Filho, 2021).

The issue of Venezuelan migration brings with it a mixture of concern and action on the part of public authorities and society. While Operation Welcome has managed to bring together the Armed Forces and the main international humanitarian agencies, on the other hand, a whirlwind of collateral effects is still noticeable in the most diverse areas of Roraima society, such as the overload in the areas of health and education, in municipal and state networks (Silva Filho, 2021, p. 6).

In this context, it is observed that the impacts of Venezuelan migration, especially in what referring to the Warao indigenous population, they go beyond the emergency humanitarian dimension and reach... The field of local and regional public management. The increased demand for basic services, coupled with The historical structural limitations of the state of Roraima highlight the need for policies. articulated and permanent public initiatives, capable of addressing both the cultural specificities of Indigenous peoples in relation to the operational capacity of federative entities.

Image 2 – UNHCR Volunteers: Janokoida Shelter, Pacaraima-RR



Source: Jéssica Oldrey Fernandes (2023).

Despite the efforts of volunteers from collaborating agencies, since 2018, right from the start...

Regarding the operation, the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office of Roraima is closely monitoring the indigenous issue, because by means of a recommendation sent to the Humanitarian Logistics Task Force of Operation Welcome, which, among other measures, emphasizes healthcare for sheltered indigenous people, especially those of the Warao ethnicity.³

In response to this request, FT Log Hum released a press statement on the 6th.

June 2018, where it was reported that:

[...] there are 9 (nine) shelters in full operation, 8 (eight) in the municipality of Boa Vista and 1 (one) in the municipality of Pacaraima. These facilities house 4,175 immigrants who were removed from vulnerable situations on the streets and squares of the municipalities. Of this total number of sheltered individuals, approximately 500 are in the Janokoida shelter, which exclusively receives indigenous people, mostly of the Warao ethnicity, originating from Venezuela (FT Log HUM, 2018, p. 1).

In the same statement, the Army also reinforced the measures taken:

Since May 24th, a multidisciplinary health team, equipped with appropriate hospital supplies, has been providing daily basic care at the Janokoida shelter. The Task Force has provided an ambulance to carry out the necessary transfers of shelter residents and the general population of the municipality.

Up to June 5th, 277 medical consultations were carried out, 128 of which were pediatric and 149 adult (FT Log HUM, 2018, p. 1).

Over the years, the humanitarian crisis has worsened and there has been an increase in demand migratory. Consequently, this event also triggered a greater demand for shelter, especially for indigenous people, as we will see below.

Intensification of the migration crisis in Roraima: the increase in indigenous demand and the construction of the Waraotuma a Tuaranoko shelter.

As we saw earlier, from the year 2108 to the present, there has been an increase in demand indigenous people seeking shelter. In this sense, a readjustment of the Brazilian Army was necessary to deal with this situation, more shelters were built in the city of Boa Vista, in addition to those already in place. That already existed in the Jardim Floresta and Pintolândia neighborhoods, with an emphasis on the construction of a shelter specific to the Warao ethnic group.

Image 3 – List of shelters in the cities of Boa Vista and Pacaraima



Source: Operation Welcome.

The shelter in question is Waraotuma a Tuaranoko, which in the Warao language means "A place of rest until they can leave for another." It is the largest shelter for refugees and migrants. Indigenous peoples of Latin America, and it was inaugurated on March 14, 2022.

The site has features that meet the diverse specific needs of the indigenous population, such as double dwellings with exhaust fans for better air circulation, structures for hammocks; communal kitchens with wood-burning stoves; a recreation area for children, volleyball and soccer courts, among others (UNHCR, 2022, p. 1).

The relocation process involved the indigenous communities that previously resided in the shelters Nova Canaã, Tancredo Neves and Pintolândia. Despite several interventions in recent years Over the years, these places have been unable to accommodate the indigenous refugee and migrant populations who They needed protection in Boa Vista (*Ibid.*, p. 1)



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Currently, the city receives refugees and migrants mainly from the Warao and Eñepá ethnic groups. The relocation process was developed with the participation of the leaders of each ethnic group, respecting their cultures and customs. The move to the new shelter was voluntary, relying on widespread participation from the indigenous population. In just one week, 819 indigenous people were already living in the shelter. The new shelter, which has capacity for 1,440 people, is currently housed in Waraotuma a Tuaranoko, a population of 1,092 people (*Ibid.*, p. 1).

Image 4 – Waraotuma a Tauranoko Shelter



Source: Silva Filho (2023).

Final Considerations

The migration of the Warao indigenous people to the northern Amazonian border of Brazil constitutes a phenomenon directly associated with the worsening humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, revealing complex challenges that go beyond traditional approaches to migration and refuge. When displaced from their original territories, the Warao carry with them ways of life and practices, cultural and specific forms of social organization that require specific state responses, based on the recognition of their rights as cross-border indigenous peoples.

In this context, the creation of Operation Welcome in 2018 represents a milestone in the response. Brazilian institutional response to the Venezuelan migration crisis, demonstrating an unprecedented effort at coordination between the State, the Armed Forces, international organizations, and civil society organizations. The experience of the Janokoida shelters in Pacaraima and Waraotuma a Tuaranoko in Boa Vista, demonstrates significant progress in providing minimum conditions of dignity, safety and meeting the basic needs of the Warao population, in addition to incorporation, even if partial, of cultural elements specific to this ethnic group in the welcoming spaces.

However, the research results indicate that the acceptance of the indigenous population



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Warao cannot be understood merely as an emergency humanitarian action. It is a process that highlights structural tensions between short-term policies and the need for lasting social, territorial, and institutional integration. The overburdening of public services, especially in the areas of health and education, coupled with the historical limitations of state infrastructure. In Roraima, it reveals the limitations of a model focused predominantly on emergency management without the consolidation of permanent public policies focused on the specific needs of indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, the legal and sociopolitical status of the Warao people challenges normative categories conventional, since these subjects do not fully fit into the classical notions of immigrants or refugees. Their presence in Brazilian territory imposes the need for recognition of differentiated rights, in accordance with international instruments of protection for indigenous peoples, such as Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization. In this sense, the experience of Operation Welcome demonstrates both institutional and gaps in the implementation of migration governance that is sensitive to ethnic diversity.

In summary, this study contributes to the debate on cross-border indigenous migrations by to demonstrate that welcoming the Warao people on the Brazilian Amazonian border requires an approach integrated, which articulates humanitarian responses, structuring public policies and respect for rights. Cultural and territorial aspects of these peoples. The continuity and improvement of inter-institutional actions. These will be fundamental in facing future challenges, ensuring that acceptance is not limited to... mitigating the crisis, but rather constituting a process guided by dignity and social justice. and for the recognition of indigenous diversity in the Amazon.

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