

**INTRODUCTORY NOTE: RESIGNIFICATIONS OF
FESTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY IDENTITIES**
**NOTA INTRODUTÓRIA: RESSIGNIFICAÇÕES DA
FESTA E IDENTIDADES COMUNITÁRIAS**

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“It’s ours!” cry the *Bugios*, or Christians, at the São João Festival in Sobrado, leaping joyously. It is unclear what they are referring to – the image of Saint John, for which they are fighting the *Mourisqueiros* (Moors), or the festival itself. Whichever it may be, we can say with certainty that the festival is experiencing a period of affirmation, bringing with it the challenge of redefinition. Just as important as the festival itself, its symbolism and ritual, are the groups that take part. Therefore, the study of festivals today requires us to immerse ourselves in the communities that observe them, for whom “*their*” festival is not merely a *tradition*, but a statement of identity and a community celebration, to which considerable resources (materials, time and money) are devoted.

Globally and throughout history, festivities, in all their exuberance and diversity, have emerged as a universal element of culture, connected by three points: the sacred, the collective and time. Derived from the Latin *festus*, a holiday devoted to religious celebration, festivals are, directly or indirectly, associated with the sacred. From pilgrimages to fertility rituals, to Christmas and Easter celebrations, festivals are a means of commemorating and giving thanks to the Gods and garnering future blessings. And because the very notion of sacred is connected to that of secular, as the two terms are defined by the opposition existing between them, the secular festival also brushes with transcendence by hypostasizing the group taking part. Émile Durkheim (1985/1912) suggested analysing celebrations in terms of the collective effervescence they generate. By this, he meant the inebriation resulting from the togetherness of a group that prays, dances, sings and makes music together, acting in unison, its component parts dissolving into the whole. This is a process of actualisation for the community which, according to Durkheim, worships itself when it worships its *totems*. In other words, in its unity, it makes itself sacred. If we accept this conclusion, the sacred is not absent from secular celebrations; on the contrary, it exists in the exaltation of the group, in the emotional exaltation that festive rituals generate.

In this sense, the sacred is, sociologically speaking, inseparable from *communio*, fellowship within the group reflecting fellowship between the human and the sacred. As an extraordinary moment in which time, rules and hierarchies are suspended and the everyday order of things is replaced by ritualistic order, festivals constitute a time and a space that may only be experienced together, and, for this reason, they reinvigorate the collective. Today, as in the past, in many spheres of public life, there is a clear need to be and to act together, to forge the spirit of togetherness achieved through mass events and gatherings (Maffesoli, 1988). This is also the purpose of festivals: to forge a community through the subtle movements of those who sew costumes; the skill of those rehearsing music, chant, dance and drama; the honesty of fundraisers; the pleasure of sharing a table; the figure of the saint carried, and the fulfilment of the promises made to it; the complicity in rule-breaking and transgression; the emotion of sharing moments of work, play, pleasure and pain. The festival also marks the symbolic boundary between insiders and outsiders. It is a marker of identity that strengthens the sense of belonging to a place, a group, a nation, a religion (Leal, 2016).

A third connection is between festivals and time. If we consider time to be cyclical, festivals are the axial points that mark its repetition: the seasons, natural and agricultural cycles, holidays, holy feasts and anniversaries. While festivals are inherently cyclical, they also exist within chronological time and possess historical depth. As such, they are now analysed and experienced as cultural heritage and protected for their traditional value (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995; Guiu, 2008). Many more recent festivals, in particular, which are almost always secular, are dedicated to evoking the past, its myths, heroes, resentments and ways of life. This is the past as created in the present, almost always through re-enactment or simulation, offering countless opportunities for the burgeoning memory, cultural heritage and leisure “industries” (Baudrillard, 1991; Gillis, 1994). These pasts, some remote, others still in collective living memory, are used in the present, be this to forge a sense of belonging and identity, to erect a barrier against global culture (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2010), as a show of resistance by minorities and repressed groups, or, more commonly, as merchandise.

This gives rise to one of the most challenging issues in contemporary festive studies: the opposition between tradition and modernity (Canclini, 2003; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1997). When tradition is evoked in the present day, we know from the outset that it is a reinterpreted version. In other words, tradition becomes the legitimising discourse for a myriad of expressions with origins in popular culture, which, as they do not belong to the canons of modern rationality, are justified reflexively. The technological, economic, social and axiological systems having changed, the *praxis* of tradition now serves only as a symbolic counterpoint to modernity, a vestige of an “authenticity” threatened with extinction or contamination. According to Jean Pouillon (1975, pp. 159-160), tradition is a

retro-projection: we choose what we say we are determined by; we present ourselves as the heirs of those we have made our predecessors. (...) to define a tradition we must go from the present to the past and not vice versa.

(...) the march of tradition goes against the biological hereditary principle but is often modelled on it. In fact, tradition is an inverted filiation: the son in this case begets the father, and that is why he can endow himself with several fathers.

As a result, contemporary festive studies focuses less on symbolic substance. Instead, it is primarily concerned with the way in which festive occasions are used to social and political ends (Testa, 2019). What do we do with festivals? How do we recycle them to make them work in the present day? How do communities handle the redefinition of their festival, both by internal forces and external pressures? When it is a “tourist product”, or an example of “cultural heritage”, is a festival just a festival? If a festival maintains the same costumes, music, prayers and dances, does it remain unchanged, even when its performers no longer live as their ancestors did, and view “their festival” through a lens that comes from outside?

It would be easy to believe that in this day and age, festivals are condemned to become diluted or disappear, devoured by instrumental rationality, the logic of productivity, or the ‘normalisation’ of consumerism and leisure. Despite these uncertainties, festivity, whether it takes the form of ritual, ceremony, carnivalesque farce, religious feast or celebration, not only prevails, but also exhibits substantial capacity for adaptation and reconfiguration (Fournier, 2019).

Far from being a hollow suggestion, the view put forward by Durkheim (1985/1912), who sees the festival not only as an experience through which a community presents and represents itself, but also as a heuristic means of understanding social life as a whole, remains valid. It therefore seems appropriate to apply Mauss’ concept of “total social fact” – understood not so much as condensing the whole into the part, but rather as concentrating and condensing certain traces of social life (Mauss, 2012/1925).

In this sense, studying a festival by focusing on the community that observes it, and studying the community, deepening the understanding and reach of its festivals, are two complementary aims, which mutually enrich one another. In festivities, we can see the reflection of some of the major dichotomies and questions of society: the present and the future, life and death, continuity and change, commerce and giving, *pathos* and *logos*. We continue to need them as a means of invoking and expressing the solemn and the carnivalesque, the sacred and the secular, *gravitas* and the picaresque. In them, we encounter processes of socialisation and learning; the crossroads at which individual and group identities are forged; the interplay between identity and otherness; the dialogue between various ways of appropriating, understanding and experiencing time and space; the inequality of resources and capital, and its impact on social relationships.

It could be said that none of this is specific, let alone exclusive, to festivals, and this is true. However, to study a festival without such a perspective would be like performing an autopsy on a corpse, disconnected from social life, its vast array of meanings concealed within. Indeed, even popular festivals that have been handed down through the generations, often along with the firm belief that they have “always been this way” and

must remain unchanged, are just as susceptible as any other to transformation, if not more so, not only in terms of their practices and realities, but also their meanings and levels and forms of participation and enthusiasm. It is hard to see how it could be any other way, given that the people and communities celebrating them in each time and place make them their own, contributing to and reconstructing them.

Today, some of the challenges associated with studying the phenomenon of festivity stem from factors in wider society. One example of this is the heritage movement and the debates surrounding it, affecting both those most strongly involved in the festival, and the communities, as guardians of this cultural heritage. Another is the impact of the mass media and major cultural events, which often exert pressure in an attempt to influence festival schedules and locations, and force it to submit to their market logic (Boissevain, 2008).

Far from remaining a continuous representation of the past, festivals renew themselves in conjunction with their setting and community, creating new meaning for all taking part. Therefore, like any other community practice, they tend to become disconnected from traditional ways of life and, today, they are understood and experienced, both by participants and visitors or attendees, through the lens of a hazy notion of cultural (intangible) heritage. The process of heritage construction, mediated by specialists and local organisations, has presented an opportunity to recognise the value of these cultural expressions, and even to safeguard them, through anthropological, sociological and historical research. It has evidently had the effect of strengthening their centrality to community identities, boosting participation among the younger generations. However, we must also stress the pressures placed on communities, who feel that they are losing control of their traditional cultural practices, and are torn by the risks and benefits of tourism and media exposure for their cultural heritage. Perhaps for this very reason, communities appear more attached than ever to their festivals. Transformed into markers of identity and assigned new meaning, festivals offer those who participate in and study them the certainty of something that is human, and therefore eternal.

This edition of the Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies, dedicated to “Resignifications of festivities and community identities”, is published as part of the research project “Festivity, cultural heritage and community sustainability. Interplays between research and communication: the *Bugiada e Mouriscada* of Sobrado case”, involving a team of researchers from the Communication and Society Research Centre of the University of Minho. The project aims undertake an in-depth study of the *Bugiada e Mouriscada* festival in Sobrado, in the Valongo municipality, which takes place on 24 June each year. Its central objective is to develop a critical framework for recording, analysing, interpreting and disseminating findings on regularly occurring popular festivities, and their relationship with local cultural identities. Coincidentally, this issue, dedicated to festivals, is released in the same year that the open access peer-reviewed *The Journal of Festive Studies* was launched. This is a sign of the vitality of this emerging field of study, which is asserting its position within the Social and Human Sciences.

The first article in this edition, on “New non-religious festivities in Spain”, by Demétrio E. Brisset, looks at festive rituals in Spain, and reflects on the multiple transformations they have undergone since the early decades of the 20th century. This exhaustive survey of secular festivals in the country, with a particular focus on Galicia, highlights the modernisation and promotion of festivities, largely through intervention by the national, regional and local authorities, and the proliferation of festivals based on historical commemorations, economically valuable local produce and Pagan rituals.

The article “Moors versus Christians: from the difference explaining war to the cultural encounter”, by Luís Cunha, analyses the festival of São João in Sobrado, in Valongo municipality (Portugal), looking at its various layers, which interweave to form a complex symbolic web. Falling into the category of “Moors and Christians” festivals, the Sobrado event is analysed through comparison to similar festivals, particularly in Spain. This helps us understand an event about which scarce historical documentation exists, while highlighting the particularities of the *Bugiada e Mouriscada*, in particular with regards to the complex relationship between identity and otherness.

The article “Insights for the analysis of the festivities: carnival seen by Social Sciences”, by Carmo Daun e Lorena presents an in-depth critical review of theoretical perspectives on carnival-type celebrations, in particular within the field of Anthropology. Rather than merely compiling theoretical contributions, the paper discusses the weakness of viewpoints which, focusing entirely on the festival itself (theories of inversion, *communitas*, etc.), neglect the multifaceted nature of such festivities – naturally including carnivals – evident in the intense relationship between communities and their celebrations, as well as the ways in which such events are used for political, social and identity-building ends.

The paper “The Blocódromo is out: the market takeover and the street parades in Rio”, by Tiago Luiz dos Santos Ribeiro and Felipe Ferreira, analyses the proposal, by the municipal authorities, to set up a “blocódromo” to host the procession of carnival blocks in Rio de Janeiro. Though still at the planning stage, this proposal has been widely debated, arguments against it denouncing it as an attempt to appropriate, domesticate and commodify for tourists a street festival originally by and for the masses. This is viewed in the wider context of growing tensions between those who make the carnival and those who commodify it.

Emília Araújo, Márcia Silva and Rita Ribeiro tackle the major implications and challenges presented by the “touristification” of religious and popular festivities in Portugal for the local community, in their paper “Time of the community and time of tourism: notes about two festivities”. Focusing on the festivals of São João in Sobrado and *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) in Braga, they discuss the tendency towards commodification for the purpose of tourism, and the way in which communities simultaneously experience increased appreciation and recognition of their cultural expressions, and the risk of identity “loss”.

The article “The production of meaning in the dialectic of historical reconstruction of ‘Congado’ in Uberlândia”, by Gerson de Sousa, embarks on an analysis of *Congado* celebrations, focusing on their significant role today in reinterpreting historical, social

and political aspects of the conflicts and racial tensions resulting from slavery in Brazil. At the intersection of religion and popular culture, this secular event plays a strong role in self-affirmation of identity and social resistance, pushing back against the marginalisation of the memory of historically subjugated social groups.

In “Terno de Reis: between tradition and an update on identity in the Quilombola community of Nova Esperança”, by Cledineia Carvalho Santos, the Reis Festival, which takes place in Wenceslau Guimarães municipality, in the state of Bahia (Brazil), is analysed as a significant factor in the affirmation of local identity, at a time when social transformations affecting society are being reflected in this event, changing its meaning, especially among the younger generations.

In the Varia section, the article “Venezuelan migration in *Jornal Nacional*”, by Valéria Marcondes and Moisés de Lemos Martins explores the tenor of coverage of Venezuelan immigrants/refugees in Brazil by the *Jornal Nacional*, a news bulletin broadcast on Rede Globo. It concludes that televisual discourse pushes a narrative that emphasises the political and social superiority of the host nation and depicts these population flows as a threat to the normality and stability of the country, while excluding and silencing immigrant voices.

Closing this edition, Sharine Machado C. Melo presents her article “Cultural policy as a governmental field: entrepreneur artists”. Drawing on the contributions of authors such as Tony Bennet, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, the author analyses processes of governmentality in the sphere of arts and culture, at a time when the latter is in the grip of neoliberal market doctrine and entrepreneurialism.

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