

RESISTANCE¹, RELIGIOSITY AND ETHNICITY AMONG THE TERENA FROM THE BURITI VILLAGE/ MS: NOTES ON THE PROMISE THAT BECAME 'TRADITION'

DOI
10.11606/issn.2525-3123.
gis.2022.185782

DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,
PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS.

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ABSTRACT

The Terena people of the village Buriti (Dois Irmãos do Buriti/MS), accomplished São Sebastian's Party there is more than ninety years, being this composed by several stages and rituals. They are Sebastian it was

1. In this article, the idea of resistance expresses the connotation, and usage, of the term given by the *Terena* interlocutors: forms of existence! Concerning to Amazon peoples, Bruce Albert points out that "... several authors have developed a relevant criticism of the ethnographic reductionism of a certain "*resistenciocentrismo*." (Olivier de Sardan, 1995,p.69) which, paradoxically, tends to overshadow, with its rhetoric, the specificity and subtlety of the social actors' own logics and forms of "*agência*"(Kilani,1994,p.55-6; Ortner, 1995; Brown,1996). (ALBERT.2002,p.14). Here the intention is to ethnographically show the "... specificity and subtlety of the logics and forms...", the "action" of the involved social actors, in this case the Terena from Buriti village (*Dois Irmãos do Buriti / Mato Grosso do Sul*) and the Feast of Saint Sebastian, (co) living in a context that for decades has been rooted in agribusiness, 'weed', and in which they put themselves as agents, protagonists of their own history.

KEYWORDS
Afro-religiosity;
Candomblé; *Escolas*
de samba, Carnival,
Ogum

re-signified and considered patron of the village Buriti turning her “traditional” among Terena of Buriti. Being inspired by the concept of “structures performative” of Sahlins (1990) it is possible to think São Sebastian’s Party as element that is already part of that society. That Party was begun starting from the decade of 1920 as a promise accomplished amid an epidemic of yellow fever that the area. Front to this theme, unavoidably comes across “traditionais” / “occidentals” religious aspects, but also with organizations and political that reflect relationships intra and interethics. São Sebastian’s Party contributes to the ethnic reworking of Terena of Buriti, pointing a fertile field to contemplate on their notions as “tradition”, re-significs and ethnicity.

INTRODUCTION

This article was inspired and thought by its authors based on the obtained data through field researches which were carried out among the *Terena* people from *T. I. Buriti*, more specifically at *Buriti* village belonging to *Dois Irmãos do Buriti* county, in the state of *Mato Grosso do Sul*. This village is mostly considered as catholic, so that the evangelical churches as a whole are not welcome there.

This village celebrates the feast in honor of Saint Sebastian every year. That was the main issue of this research project, at the master’s level of the author, with its co-author’s scientific guidance, leading to the thesis *Os Terena de Buriti e a Festa de São Sebastião: da promessa à tradição: a Festa de São Sebastião como estratégia de resistência entre os Terena da aldeia Buriti – Mato Grosso do Sul* (The *Terena* from *Buriti* and The Feast of Saint Sebastian: from the promise to the tradition: The Feast of Saint Sebastian as a resistance strategy among the *Terena* from *Buriti* village – South Mato Grosso (2019).

The Feast of Saint Sebastian is celebrated by the *Terena* from the *Buriti* village, and it happens in mid-January every year. The *Terena* celebrate such a feast systematically and meticulously, respecting the various stages and rituals that make up their social organization.

During the process of the research and through many dialogues between the authors and the *Terena* interlocutors (and friends), it’s clear to figure out that Saint Sebastian is engaged in a territorialization process and contributed /contributes to an ethnic redefinition of the group. The territorialization process, according to Oliveira Filho (1998), has been a result of a certain adaptation of the social organization and of the *Terena* culture towards a new historical and political-administrative situation, related to life in an area quite smaller if compared to the 30.000 hectares they have occupied since the beginning of the 20th century; nowadays, with the retaking of the traditional lands, it’s a 17.200-hectare area. FUNAI/

Campo Grande has shown the latest population data of *T. I. Buriti* referring to the year of 2010 and stating there are 2.543 inhabitants.

This Feast is one of the most important events of the *Buriti* village; there's another one named *Oheokotí*, a *Terena* traditional ritual in which they celebrate the beginning of a new cosmic cycle, the beginning of the harvests.

Moreover, just as an observation, a necessary one though, it is also important to state that the *Oheokoti* has been the main celebrated ceremony up to now at *Terena* villages in South *Mato Grosso*, and its main character is the *koixomunetí*, the *Terena* shamans, known in Portuguese Language as *purungueiros*, due to some instruments they used, the *purunga* (the maraca) and the emu feather plume; the *Oheokotí* and such instruments are found in this people's mythology; it is worth highlighting the *purungueiros* declare themselves as Catholics, unlike the "*koixomunetí*", for instance, known as shamans, who may define themselves as evangelicals and may also be recognized for that (Acçolini, 2018). At *Buriti* village the male and female *koixomunetí purungueiros (as)* actively take part of The Feast of Saint Sebastian as devotees.

The Feast of Saint Sebastian updates the alliances between the *Terena* from *Buriti* and other ethnic groups, including non-indigenous groups. The current status of the *Terena* from *Buriti* and The Feast of Saint Sebastian, as an element that is already part of this society, seems to fit in a certain way to the concept of 'performative structure' by Sahlins (1990).

In short, such structures are defined when related to circumstantial events, the inevitable encounter either with practice, or with empirical risks that are posed to cultural categories. In performatively structured societies, those circumstantial events are valued for the difference with which they present themselves facing the constituted system, while the prescriptively structured ones value such events, based on the similarity facing the existing social arrangement.

In the encounter with practice, the events are interpreted by the community of significance and precisely because of this community they are valued or not, prescriptively or performatively. This interpretation, based on the meanings provided by the cultural order, becomes an event and gains historical significance.

It can be noticed that in this context this "event" wields great power of intra- and inter-ethnic influence / relationships, over decision-making and articulation of the political movement in the *Buriti* Indigenous Land, being responsible for building up alliances and identities. The *Terena* from the *Buriti* village as well as those from the *T. I.* and (indigenous and

non-indigenous) region consider this village as an emblematic one for celebrating the Feast of Saint Sebastian for over 92 years, because of the promise made for the numerous deaths due to the yellow fever epidemic in the 1920s; the Feast is recognized as the “traditional Feast of Saint Sebastian of the *Terena* from *Buriti*”.

Also, in the ways of Sahlins (1990), the event is the relationship between an event and the structure, “...the phenomenon closing in itself as a meaningful value, to which its specific historical effectiveness follows...” (1990, p.5).

Sahlins (1990) continues his argument stressing that, even though culture is understood as an order of meaning, meanings are at risk in the action, “meanings are reassessed when carried out in practice”, with culture being historically ordered, “where historical subjects creatively and dialectically reproduce their culture and history through processes of functional re-evaluation of categories” (1990, p.13).

Like the event, these improvisations, or the functional reassessment of cultural categories in the face of the empirical, do not happen randomly, but are based on the possibilities of meaning given by the cultural order, as observed by Sahlins (1990, p. 11): “it follows then that different cultural orders have their own means of historical production”.

If the *Terena* from *Buriti* recognize Saint Sebastian as the patron saint of the Indigenous Land of *Buriti*, this is possible, because the *Terena* society seems to present itself with a performative structure. The relationship of Saint Sebastian and its symbology among these *Terena* seems to synthesize their view of the world, which values and inserts what is seen as “different” in relation to their social structure:

Meanings are ultimately submitted to subjective risk when people, as they become socially capable, stop being slaves of their concepts to be coming their masters. “The question is” said Alice, “whether you can make one word mean so many different things.” “The question is”, said Humpty Dumpty—, “who will be the master— and only that” (Sahlins 1990, p.11)

In this article, the Feast of Saint Sebastian will be presented based on data, contacts, and interactions that took place in the *Buriti* village between the months of November 2017 and January 2018.

For this purpose, the article will start with reporting the “origin” and the historical aspects of the Feast of Saint Sebastian held in the *Buriti* village, based on the village elders’, as well as young *Terena* researchers’ information, continuing with a brief contextualization of the indigenous

area and the articulation of the Feast with territorialization process and socio-political organization inside and outside the village.

In this sense, some theories, such as those of Marcel Mauss (1950/2013) and particularly Marshall Sahlins (1990, 1997), will be used in order to support field data.

Next, the text will approach the actors involved in the organization of the Feast, like those who play the role of the *festeiros* and the *folieiros*. This organization begins in the month of November with the departure of the Flag of the Saint that will travel along the region near the Indigenous Land, with the aim of mobilizing and collecting donations for the festivities that precede the great Feast in devotion to Saint Sebastian, on January 19.

BEGINNINGS OF THE FEAST OF SAINT SEBASTIAN

In January 2018, the *Terena* elder Juscelino Bernardo Figueiredo, the main *festeiro* of Saint Sebastian at *Buriti* village, explained that, in 1920, many of the *Terena* from *Buriti* were dying due to the yellow fever epidemic; a lot of them, sometimes more than five a day. His father, José Figueiredo, who was a *koixomuneti* / *purungueiro* (*Terena* shaman) and son of Joaquim Figueiredo (one of the first *caciques* of the *T.I. Buriti*) was responsible for making the Feast of Saint Sebastian official. He told us that it was for a dream that his father José started his relationship with Saint Sebastian.

According to Mr. Juscelino, in his father's dream, someone told him that a person would arrive at the village, bringing something, and that he was supposed to do whatever he felt it was supposed to be done. After a few days, a farmer who lived in the region and who had a positive relationship with the *Terena*, and also had spiritual counseling with Mr. José Figueiredo, arrived with the image of Saint Sebastian and gave it to him as a gift.

According to Mr. Juscelino, at that very moment, his father felt deep in his heart that he should make a promise to the saint that he had just met. His promise was that if the deaths stopped, he would make a feast to Saint Sebastian every year and, even after he died, his children and grandchildren would keep on performing it.

The elder Noel Patrocínio, born in the 1930s, remembers hearing from his parents that time was one of the worst times they had ever lived through, because many *Terena* would die every single day and it was for the promise of Mr. Juscelino's father that the deaths stopped. He also explained that at that time no one knew what the yellow fever epidemic was, and people died without knowing the cause of such deaths.

Each Feast of Saint Sebastian of the *Terena* from the *Buriti* village is not an ordinary event. As mentioned, this Feast is an “event” (Sahlins, 1990), because its importance is given by the interpretation of the group.

The *Terena* teacher / researcher and Mr. Juscelino Figueiredo’s granddaughter from the *Buriti* Village, also festeira of Saint Sebastian, discusses the *Terena*’s exchanges with other peoples:

Creating a space for interaction, the *Txané-Guaná* were used to negotiating with other peoples and, thus, they acquired knowledge of these cultures and adapted them to their way of being or to their reality, bringing into the community other knowledges which started to take part of their culture (Farias 2015.p. 24).

We can think that the *Terena* from *Buriti* have had proper ownership of the Feast of Saint Sebastian according to their cultural organization and it is through the way this Feast is held that it has got a historical significance that seems to be preserved to all generations.

Concerning the religious incorporations in *Terena* territories, Acçolini states that:

We want to emphasize with this that we believe it is not possible to classify as inauthentic cultures those that coexist and adapt (adapt and not become) to cultural orders that are different from their own, reconstructing their otherness in the change, even if marking it out, according to the context, with western indigenous signs. For us, the *Terena* demonstrate the liveliness of cultural interactions and exchanges among the peoples, including there their relations with the national society and the incorporation of religions which are now part of their sociocultural system (Acçolini 2015, p. 23/24).

Eder Alcântara Oliveira, a *Terena* teacher and researcher, explained about the influences of different religions in the *Buriti* village and the re-signification of Saint Sebastian, stating that:

We have adopted Saint Sebastian in the *Terena* culture of *Buriti* as the patron saint of the *Buriti* village, there are records of nuns who lived in the *Buriti* village and that here there is a Catholic predominance. Influences of afro religions are also being introduced in the *Buriti* village, in addition to the various evangelical churches throughout T.I. But even so we keep practicing the traditional *Terena* religion. (Caderno de campo 2018).

Still thinking based on Sahlins (1990, p. 192): “all praxis is theoretical. It always starts with the actors’ concepts and their existence objects, in the cultural segmentations and values of an *a priori* system”.

THE CONTEXT OF *T.I. BURITI*

Overpopulation causes clashes and makes it difficult for village leaders to live together. This is one of the reasons why the *Terena* from the *Buriti* Indigenous Land fight for their old areas, which are necessary for their physical and cultural reproduction. We know that these areas are contested for economic interests. That goes back to the 1920s, the beginning of the intensification of farming establishments in the region.

Studies which were carried out in the 2000s certify that the *Terena* occupation in the territory that today is *Buriti* Indigenous Land, took place quite before the titling of lands in favor of private individuals, what was intensified after the war between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance (Oliveira, Pereira 2012).

Another time cut that is very much highlighted in the statements of the *Terena* from *Buriti* dates back to the period when the Indigenous Protection Service (*SPI*, from the Portuguese name) began to operate the policy of villages and maintained it, causing several violations concerning to indigenous peoples, such as loss of territories, genocide and use of labor in the exploitation and extraction of riches in the region for the benefit of development.

According to Oliveira Filho (1998), the territorialization process has led to an adaptation of the *Terena* social organization and culture to a new historical and political-administrative situation related to life in a much smaller area than the 30,000 hectares they used to occupy until the beginning of the 20th century.

Furthermore, the *Terena* had to face the official indigenist agency members' and the national State expansionist group representatives' attempts of domination and oppression. The State has managed the violence and that triggered a historical plundering process of the Indigenous Lands in Brazil, which still happens at present.

The *Terena* from *Buriti*, throughout the time, from being real victims, they started organizing themselves and creating a permanent resistance, using different strategies and that has given rise to the retaking of traditional lands.

According to Fonseca (2017), three territorialization processes occurred in the *T.I. Buriti*. The first took place during the Paraguay War (1864 to 1870) with intense *Terena* participation; the second happened between the 1910s and 1930s with the implementation of an official settlement policy, being implemented by the *SPI* public agency. It is worth mentioning that during this period the Feast of Saint Sebastian was originated, and the

third moment (and current process) began in the 2000s, and it represents the situation of retaking the traditional territory.

The Feast of Saint Sebastian in the *Buriti* village is important for many reasons, among them, it is a day to remember the yellow fever epidemic, the beginning of a territorialization process, and, according to Oliveira Filho (1998), a change in the *Terena* social and cultural organization to a new historical situation, directly related to hunger due to the steep loss of their traditional territory.

The *Buriti* Indigenous Land is located in the current counties of *Dois Irmãos do Buriti* and *Sidrolândia*. In 2013, the *T.I. Buriti* was divided into eight villages: *Córrego do Meio*, *Água Azul*, *Recanto*, *Oliveira*, *Lagoinha*, *Barreirinho*, *Olho D'Água*, and *Buriti*. After the homologation of the claim for expanding the traditional territory, since 2018, the *Buriti* Indigenous Land has had 15 villages. The process of occupying the full extension of the territory which is in the process of demarcation was a strategy.

The *T.I. Buriti* is mostly inhabited by the *Terena* ethnic group, due to intermarriages among other ethnic groups, so it has had a small population of *Kadiwéu*, *Kinikinau* and *Purutuye* (*Terena* word for non-indigenous people).

Even if the *Buriti* village celebrates Saint Sebastian, a Christian / Catholic saint in its origin, these *Terena* are aware that such an event does not make them less *Terena*. It's the other way around, the recognition as *Terena* from *Buriti* includes Saint Sebastian in their cultural framework, as a sociocultural and cosmological element. This recognition flows even when observing all the complexity of the national / regional society to which they belong and, as subjects, they also play the leading role in their history by taking the world of the "other", included and including them.

During the *Terena's* Feast of Saint Sebastian in the *Buriti* village the explanation of ethnicity is stressed in each rite, when preparing it and during the feast itself. During the Feast, it is possible to observe the vitality of shamanism even in the face of Catholicism, the distribution of duties between men and women over the food preparation for the saint and the attempts of explaining the histories about their own territory and giving a new meaning to them. From that point, it is possible to notice the *Terena* political long struggle for their traditional territory.

The Feast of Saint Sebastian consists of several steps, marked by devotional rituals. It was possible through this Feast to observe various spheres that make up the life in the *Buriti* village, its social organization, the political articulations and social relations with other indigenous and

non-indigenous people that affirm the ethnic identity, a moment of excitement for the entire *Buriti T.I.*

The Feast of Saint Sebastian of the *Buriti* village is an expression of faith, and it seems that faith without hope does not exist. It is through it that the community of the *T.I. Buriti* preserves its characteristics, ensuring the preservation of symbols, values, and the hope for decent living conditions related to land, health, and education. The Feast turns into a great religious celebration, remaining in the memory of those who were there, reinforcing social ties and the feeling of belonging; it provides spaces for socialization and enables the construction and conservation of the *Terena* identity from *Buriti*.

Upon the concept of “culture” and “tradition”, we also turn to Cunha, when the author argues that:

[...] Thus the construction of ethnic identity extracts from so-called tradition cultural elements which are apparently identical to themselves, hide the essential fact that, outside the context in which they were created, their meaning has changed. In other words, ethnicity turns the tradition into an ideology, when making the other pose as the same; and it turns the tradition into a myth while the cultural elements that have become “others” by the rearrangement and simplification to which they were submitted, precisely to become diacritical, are for this very reason overloaded with meaning. (Cunha 2009, p. 239).


The *Terena* from *Buriti*, throughout time, have organized themselves and created a permanent resistance through strategies, and the Feast can be thought of as one of them. Therefore, it seems possible to think of the concept of “agency” along Terence Turner’s lines, the indigenous peoples’ ability for historical action:

Terence Turner defended an instrumental and historical view of culture, against current conceptions that would make it a self-determining symbolic order, disconnected from its genesis in social action and human intentionality. For Turner, culture is precisely “the system of meaningful forms of social action,” thus, “it must be understood essentially as the way by which people define and produce themselves as a social entity concerning its historical situation in transformation...” (Turner 1987 apud Sahlins 1997, p. 122)

THE PROMISE THAT BECAME ‘TRADITION’

Here we will outline the actors that are part of the Feast and its steps, which begin in the month of November and have its apex on January 19th, the day of Saint Sebastian, in the village of *Buriti*.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when the process of “villages” and the indigenous people’s withdrawal from their traditional territories began, the *Terena* from the *Buriti* Indigenous Land were impacted by the process of



interaction with the National State: deaths, caused by the yellow fever epidemic, hunger caused by the dramatic loss of the traditional territory and the advent of capitalist exploitation related to the pressure of production systems on their territory (speculation on indigenous lands) and intensification of the use of indigenous workforce.

The “modern” presented itself in such a cruel way that those negatively impacted have managed new strategies (action) and the promise to Saint Sebastian can be thought of as one of those, besides being noticed as a generational marker.

The Feast of Saint Sebastian is one of these moments of celebration, but also of political articulation. Many people organize themselves in convoys from other villages in the state of MS (South Mato Grosso), with many non-Indigenous as well. The Feast is made up of several stages, defined by devotional rituals where people look for blessings and keep their promises.

One of the actors involved in the celebration is the *festeiro*. *Festeiro*, as an emic category, is the person responsible for the feast days that precede the main feast that occurs on January 19; each day of the feast is held by a family called *festeira*. The *festeiros* are people who do not go on the pilgrimage that starts in November, getting donations for the annual celebrations.

The current *festeiro* Juscelino Figueiredo (born in 1941) explained that the Feast of Saint Sebastian in the *Buriti* village first started between the 1920s and 1930s due to many deaths caused by the yellow fever epidemic. He said that the Feast of Saint Sebastian was the answer of a promise that his father made to the saint. At that time there was no doctor, no medicine, only roots and *benzeção* (blessing prayers). His father didn't dealt too much with the medicines made with roots, but he had a chapel and believed in his power with God.

On the day of the dead, November 2, a set of rituals and a pilgrimage begins, with the aim of getting donations for the Feast, and is marked by a Mass.

Also on November 1, 2017, they joined efforts to help with cleaning up the village and the cemetery in the *Buriti* village. At eight o'clock p.m. on that same day, a rosary was recited in the chapel of Saint Sebastian, which was built next to Mr. Juscelino Bernardo Figueiredo's house, where there is also the collective kitchen built “by” the Saint and “for” the Saint. During this rosary saying, several elders from the *Buriti* village gathered in, and the devotees of Saint Sebastian would make requests to God and thanks to God would come out with each “Our Father” prayer.

Reciting the rosary means the intention of remembering the dead, driving the evil spirits away and blessing the *folieiros* in their sacrifices, aiming the collection of gifts in order to have a rich Feast of the Saint. During the rosary saying there is the presence of the *folieiros* and, consequently, they remember the yellow fever epidemic, and many *Terena* who died. Afterwards a dinner was served in the collective kitchen, which was built in the village for the donations in tribute to Saint Sebastian; that kitchen was built next to the shed both used for the feasts and for big meetings and that kitchen was also built next to the chapel of Saint Sebastian; it is mainly used during the Feast of the Saint.



FIGURE 1
Reciting the rosary
on November 1,
2017. Beginning
of the *folieiros*
pilgrimage.
Source: Personal
File, 2017.

On November 2, 2017, at eight o'clock in the morning, a large gathering was held in the chapel; among the devotees of Saint Sebastian that gathering is the beginning of the pilgrimage of the Saint Sebastian's *folieiros*.

The fireworks signal the departure of the image and the flag of Saint Sebastian. This flag has a very strong symbolism for the *Terena* from *Buriti*, because it has been with the Figueiredos' family since the beginning of the Feast of the Saint in 1920, from time to time it is restored by the *Terena* from *Buriti* very carefully. This is a very touching moment, when all present people's emotions surface through cries, prayers, promises and songs. The hymn of Saint Sebastian is the most important one:

Na sua casa chegou
Na sua casa chegou
A Bandeira de São Sebastião
que ele vem trazer alegria saúde e felicidade.

Senhor e dona de casa,
Senhor e dona de casa
Dá licença pra chegar
Quem despos tiver na casa
Quero lhe cumprimentar

E também tirando a esmola
E também tirando a esmola
No dia do seu festejo
No dia do seu festejo
19 de janeiro

This task, the pilgrimage, is carried out by the *folieiros*, another emic category, which generally consists of people who have made some promise. Their role is to walk a specific path outside the village, passing through the region's farms, with the flag of Saint Sebastian, singing, playing and praying in each house, such a task is called *pouso* by them, and that is for collecting donations for the saint's festivities.

The *folieiros* receive several different donations such as pasta, rice, cassava, vegetables, even whole cows, money; each donor offers what he can afford. The mobilization during this first step goes beyond the *Buriti* Indigenous Land; we can notice the great number of people who are involved with the feast and who contribute to it. This event can be characterized as a 'total' social phenomenon (Mauss 1950/2013), because in the first place it is not a simple exchange of goods among individuals, but a collective exchange. Despite having a voluntary characteristic at first, deep down it is strictly mandatory. About the clans, tribes, families, Mauss states that:

Furthermore, what they exchange is not exclusively goods and riches, assets and property, economically useful things. What they exchange is, above all, kindnesses, banquets, rites, military services, women, children, dances, feasts, fairs... In short, these benefits and considerations are established in a mostly voluntary way, as delights, gifts, although they are strictly mandatory, under penalty of private or public war (Mauss 1950/2013, p.191).

Thus, we can notice how important the role of the "*olieiros*, who are also devotees, is, they play a key role as historical agents; the pilgrimage enables young people to learn about the past of their territory and their ancestors, they also learn about the region's flora and fauna, and that is a complement to the teaching- learning process of the *Terena* knowledge itself.

When outlining that the *folieiros* of the Feast of Saint Sebastian can be considered historical agents, that is explained by their interaction with

the history of the *Buriti* village. They influence the younger generations through their speeches and their developed action, which makes them historical figures of the Saint Sebastian Feast.

The number of the *folieiros* isn't the same, it varies every year. They go to each house carrying the Flag and singing three songs. The first song announces their arrival, and that's when the dweller in the house makes a request to receive the Flag. The dweller receives the Flag with the image of Saint Sebastian and in a short period of time he takes the Flag to all the rooms of the house. Besides that, the dweller says a prayer to Saint Sebastian for protection, happiness, and health.

When the second songs starts, it announces the farewell time. At this moment, the dweller goes back to the room where the *folieiros* are, usually in the living room if there is no porch, and he brings the Flag back to them. That is also the moment when the dweller formalizes the donation in front of everybody, so that he can cooperate with making the Feast happen.

Right after the second song the third one starts, it is specifically sung to the house family that is being visited and the dweller, who had received the Flag, kneels and says the last prayers.

After that ritual, the *folieiros* go to the other houses and keep on with the same ritual. They go on pilgrimage until January 19, when the Flag returns to the *Buriti* village, then the beginning of the Feast and Saint Sebastian's day are announced.

It is possible to observe that it is not only the moment of the Feast in which the intra and interethnic alliances are kept; the pilgrimage is a complex moment that revitalizes pre-existing relationships. It is a gift to receive the Flag and the grace of Saint Sebastian at home. It's a prestigious moment among the devotees and a donation is intended as a fair return for the Saint's Feast. We can think of reciprocity, the act of giving, receiving, and reciprocating compared by Mauss (1950/2013):

[...] two essential elements of the potlatch itself are clearly attested: one of the honors, of the prestige, of the "*mana*" given by wealth, and another of the absolute obligation to reciprocate the gifts under penalty of losing this "*mana*", this power, this magic charm, and this source of wealth which is the authority itself (Mauss 1950/ 2013, p.195).

At first, the donations of the previous year are reciprocated with the grace of the saint and the visit of the *folieiros* in the current year; the current donations will be reciprocated in the coming year, this way the alliance is maintained and is also renewed every year, a period of time is required to reciprocate; the saint does not receive as a debt, but as a credit.

The comparison made by Mauss (1950/2013) has to do with the given and reciprocated gifts along with the purchase and sale system. The gift system is complex for him, despite taking into consideration the religious, it's a system of an extra and highly developed home economics. The gift implies the idea of credit and interest. "Time" is required to perform any consideration. It is a system of law and economics in which considerable wealth is constantly consumed and transferred.

There is a promise to make bigger donations to the saint in the coming year if the requested graces are achieved and this new gift is paid in the following year, which will already be the fair return of the saint's old gifts and the hope of getting new ones. As Mauss (1950/2013, p. 193) states: "the most important of these spiritual mechanisms is clearly what obliges one to repay the received gift".

Going back to the *festeiros* and their role as fundamental as *the folieiros*, the latter are the greatest hosts on the return of the Flag of Saint Sebastian to the *Buriti* village. The *Festeiros* are in charge of the celebrations, the feasts that precede January 19, the day dedicated to the saint and when the whole cycle of the Flag's journey through the region and its return to the chapel ends.

The fireworks and the hymn of Saint Sebastian singing congratulate the arrival of the Flag. The Feast changes the scenery of the *Buriti* village and the routine of its dwellers too; the yards are cleaned, the houses get decorated, and there is always some food or drink the owners of the house serve to the devotees who take part of the pilgrimage. The flag represents the connection between heaven and earth, creating a bridge-building between the *Terena* from *Buriti* and their devotees along with the patron saint, Saint Sebastian.

As Mr. Figueiredo declared: "the Feast of Saint Sebastian is not three days, three years, it is 94 years of Feast. From November to January the *Buriti* Indigenous Land celebrates these moments of faith". (2018)

THE FEASTS AND THE FEAST OF SAINT SEBASTIAN

The 94th Feast of Saint Sebastian in the village of *Buriti* started on January 15, 2018. The feast of Saint Sebastian can be thought of as "an asset" of the *Terena* from *Buriti*; the idea of assets is associated with the idea of markers of a social process as a whole.

The assets are used to mark, in the sense of classification categories, they are endowed with values by the others' agreement and by the community. The Feast is a moment of physical and psychic experience, the food and the beverage give support to the physical body, the prayer, the songs,

the wailings, the mass, and the pilgrimage give the spiritual support. According to Douglas, all assets are meaningful, but none of the mere meaningful by themselves:

This movement breaks up the Cartesian dichotomy between physical and psychic experience. The assets that serve physical needs - food or drink - are no less meaningful than dance and poetry. We have put an end to the well-known and mistaken distinction among the assets that maintain life and health and others that serve the mind and heart - the spiritual goods... just as a word used in a poem, in another context, has no poetry, so a physical object has no meaning in itself, it doesn't even make sense to ask why it is valued. The meaning is in the relations among all assets, just as music is in the relations that are marked by sounds and it is not in any musical note alone. (Douglas, 2006, p.121).

Due to the emotions and exchanges, excitements, donations not only in the *Buriti* Indigenous Land, but in the entire region, the Feast of Saint Sebastian seems to be a moment of mixes. The large number of involved people who contribute with donations (mainly food) and other duties for holding this Feast is not an ordinary event since it can be characterized as an event that provides a "total" social phenomenon. First, it is not a simple exchange of goods among individuals but among families, making the dinner to Saint Sebastian possible, an event to which everyone is invited.

As a matter of fact, it's all about mixing. Souls are mixed into things -things are mixed into souls. Lives are mixed, and thus people and mixed things leave their own sphere one by one and mix together: which is precisely contract and exchange (Mauss 1950/2013, p.212).

Saint Sebastian has no meaning by itself, and it doesn't even make sense to ask why it is valued. Previously mentioned, the meaning lies in the relationship of the *Terena* from *Buriti* with Saint Sebastian that had begun due to a difficult epidemic period; the Feast of Saint Sebastian of the *Buriti* village is so important in the region that it is included in the official calendar of the city of *Dois Irmãos do Buriti*.

Talking to some political, religious, and educational leaders, they mentioned a wish of registering the Feast of Saint Sebastian in the *Buriti* village as a cultural heritage of the *Buriti* Indigenous Land. About the listing of a cultural heritage, Oliveira claims the need for the group's awareness regarding the asset.

Therefore, before determining that an asset is a cultural heritage of a place and a society, we should check up on how the social group, which owns the asset, sees it. Only after analyzing that the asset represents the culture of its social core, full of meaning and values, we'll be able to identify it as those people's cultural heritage (Oliveira 2015, p.30).

The feast seems to meet all the aforementioned requirements, and, mainly, it represents the cultural identity of the *Terena* from the *Buriti* village. The *Terena* identity of the *Buriti* village is involved in the valuing that the group granted to the Feast of Saint Sebastian, which is looked upon as a cultural asset among the *Terena* from *Buriti*.

The 94th Feast, previously mentioned, began on January 15, 2018, with the Gabriel family as its hosts. The *festeiros* Mr. Angelino and Mrs. Estelfina Gabriel were in charge of that day.

The procession began at 4:00 p.m., then the Flag of Saint Sebastian went past six houses, the relatives' who live near the *festeiro*, responsible for the day's festivities. After the procession and the prayer, dinner was served: barbecue, rice, cassava, noodles, cabbage and tomato salad. The dance started around 9:00p.m, with Thauanne Castro's and Danilo harmonica and band's entertainments. The dance went on until dawn. It is important to emphasize that during the days before the week of the saint, there's a glut of food and devotee gatherings in the *Buriti* village.

Mr. Naldenir Pinto Alves and Mrs. Diva were the hosts of the Feast on January 16, 2018, when the Flag left Mr. Argelino's house in procession to Mr. Naldenir's.

While getting there, the Flag went past the houses of this family nucleus; in each house the *folieiros* sang and prayed, doing the whole ritual of the saint. Right after the prayer, dinner was served: barbecue, rice, manioc, salad, and pasta. Afterwards, the dance began with Zíngaro band and Mistureira band's performances.

On January 17, 2018, the Flag was welcomed at Mr. Abadio Batista (*in memorian*) and Mrs. Senhorinha's old house (the *purungueira*, she's considered the most powerful shaman that the *Buriti* village has ever had, she is always remembered, and her prestige lasts until the present time).

Upon the Flag's arrival at the host's house, the hymns were sung and there was a rosary reciting. After the rosary saying, dinner was served; the menu was rice, salads, barbecue, cassava, and pasta. Around 9:00 p.m. the dance began, with the Mistureira Pantaneira band. An auction was held in the middle of the dance: calves, chickens, oxen, and bottles of whiskey were auctioned.

The auction was about an hour and afterwards the dance restarted and went on until dawn. It is important to point out that each family is responsible for the dance and the dinner, and on that very day, it's up to the host family rather or not having an auction and receiving the donations; the

funds raised at these auctions are often used to pay the cost of the dance and the dinner.

In the heart of the *Buriti* village, the Isabel family has also built a chapel, this family is in charge of the Feast on January 18th. Mrs. Filomena and Mr. Gregório are the elders in this family. Their daughters / sons and grandsons / granddaughters are responsible for organizing the dinner and the feast.

The Isabel Family and the Figueiredo Family live next door. The Figueiredo Family's house is the last one to receive the Flag before it's brought back to Mr. Juscelino, the main *festeiro*, and then taken to the chapel; the *recolhida*.

On that day it rained heavily in the afternoon, so the procession began a little later, around 6:00p.m. After the rosary was said, dinner was served, with rice, manioc, barbecue, salads, and lasagna. The lasagna was made by *Terena* Carol, a member of the Isabel Family, and it was the sensation of that dinner. That was a very important year for the members of the Isabel family, because it was the opening of the new hall that they had built, working really hard, so that the Feast of the saint could be held in their house.

The Isabel Family came up with another new thing and that was the renovation of their chapel and bar. The chapel of the Isabel family is right next to the bar of the Feast, referring to the idea that certain spaces can be used for both the sacred and the profane. On each day of the Feast, each host family is also responsible for running its bar so that it is a way of raising some money.

At this time, Laço de Ouro band livened up the Feast. The auction was held and heifers, chickens, calves, bottles of whiskey were sold.

Mr. Juscelino's niece and nephew, Viviane Alcântara, and her husband, so-called Gordo, warned that there was some food on the wood burning stove in the collective kitchen of the village, also built with donations in honor of the saint and located in the Figueiredo family's land lot, the food was for those who wanted to eat in the early hours or at sunrise. At dawn in the *Buriti* village, especially next to Mr. Juscelino Figueiredo's house, there was a huge movement of people, they had already lit the fire for the great barbecue on the main day, January 19.



FIGURE 2
Advertising the 94th Feast of Saint Sebastian on Facebook by the Terena from the Buriti village. Source: Personal file, 2018.

Mr. Juscelino Bernardo Figueiredo, the great *festeiro* at present, offers his house on Saint Sebastian's day, January 19, the main feast which is dedicated to the saint with the return of the Flag, the day breaks quite busy, the women were going along the *trieiros* of the Figueiredo family's house ("*trieiros*" are narrow paths opened by passages through the undergrowth), they were carrying bowls full of manioc, vegetables, and greens.

The preparation of the food had already begun the day before. The women made a big circle to peel the manioc with the younger children around them. This is the time to update information and, of course, to gossip about what happened in the feasts of the previous days. Specifically for this day 12 cows were donated; they cut up 8 for the barbecue and 4 were auctioned. The 2-meter-high bamboo skewers for roasting the meat had already been made several days ago.

At 11:00 a.m. the lunch dance began. In a *bailão* (a big dance) rhythm, many couples were in the hall. At 1:00 p.m. lunch was served; the menu was rice, cassava, noodles, chicken, *farofa* (a side dish, made of Brazilian seasoned toasted manioc flour), salads, sausages, and roasted meats. As people finished their lunch, the hall would be crowded again with couples who kept on dancing. At 4:00 p.m. the lunch dance was over, because it was time for the procession to begin.

Some interlocutors have explained that the returning moment of the Flag to the chapel and when it is received by the Figueiredo family is called *recolhida*. That's such an emotional moment for the devotees of Saint Sebastian.

After 79 days, taking the Flag to many houses in the region, the *folieiros* end their mission up. At this moment, it seemed that there was no more room for so many faithful people in the chapel, the *folieiros* took Saint Sebastian's image and the flag outside the chapel, they walked around it three times, carrying the image, and one of the *folieiros* handed it over to the Figueiredo Family. Mr. Juscelino's wife, Mrs. Celina Figueiredo, received it deeply touched, and her husband thanked the *folieiros* and the *festeiros* who were present.



FIGURE 3
Saint Sebastian procession, in Buriti village on January 19.
Source: personal file, 2018.

On that day, the procession gathered many devotees. There were wheel-chair users, barefoot people, people carrying Saint Sebastian images and candles. The procession was cherished by Catholic songs and rosary prayers. This is a very exciting moment of feeling and devotion. Everyone walked around the whole *Buriti* village, going back to the chapel of Saint Sebastian. Afterwards the mass began; at about 5:00 p.m., a priest from *Dois Irmãos do Buriti* celebrated it.



FIGURE 4
Moment when the priest begins the communion.
Source: Personal file, 2018.

The dance began at 9:00 p.m. on the 19th; that was the day with the largest audience ever, as long as it was the day of the saint and also because it was Friday night. Two musical bands performed during the dance, one of them was the Pantaneiro band, and there were also performances by singers and musicians from the *Buriti* village. An auction was held during the performance breaks. Cows, calves, heifers, chickens, and whiskey were auctioned.

One of the *festeiros*, teacher Antônio Bernardo Figueiredo, said that the money they raised at the auctions is also turned into improvements for the *Buriti* village, such as renovations in each *festeira* family's halls and chapels. But most of the money is used for the expenses of the event, such as the concerts, security guards, light and sound equipment, gas for people transportation vehicles and donations. That money is firstly used for the logistics of the feast, and the surplus is for the improvements that were mentioned above.

On January 20, 2018 the *Buriti* village remained busy, but the only dance took place in the evening; the one responsible for thrilling it was: Mr. Juscelino Bernardo Figueiredo's great-grandson, Patrick of the harmonica, a 12-year-old *Terena* from *Buriti*, who is a big hit at the village and in the region.

After so much fun during the Feast of the Saint, at the dance on the 20th, Mr. Juscelino Bernardo Figueiredo was asked the reason why walking around the house or the chapel three times when the Flag arrives, and he answered: "*Commitment to the saint*". He didn't want to say what that commitment was; he said it was a secret.

Even though Victor W. Turner (1974/2008) has observed rituals in other contexts, he seems to contribute to this article when he says that rituals are dramas that are acted out. According to Turner (2008), rituals can arise in times of social dramas as a form of reparatory action, which can be observed in the rituals of the Feast of Saint Sebastian. The flag of the saint is the reparation for possible conflicts that may happen in the community. The rites seem to have the intention of carrying out a reconciliation between visible and invisible parts.

So then rituals show values at their deepest level, as Wilson reports:

[...] men express in ritual what touches them most intensely, the form of expression is conventional and obligatory, the values of the group are revealed. I see in the study of rites, the key to understanding the essential formation of human societies (Wilson 1954 apud Turner 1974/2013, p.23).

IN CONCLUSION

In this article, the proposal was to present the Feast of Saint Sebastian, which has taken place for over 90 years in the *Buriti / T.I.* The Feast of Saint Sebastian has become a tradition and it has grown out of a promise for the yellow fever epidemic, which had devastated the region.

We have tried to present the main stages that make up the Feast, aiming to explain it as a socio-cultural element which is part of the current *Terena* identity field, not only in the village itself, but also in the entire *T.I.* and region, showing the ethnic and religious spirit that involve the event of the feast.

The relationship that exists between the village's patron saint and the remembrance of the traditional territory was also briefly mentioned, especially through the *folieiros* pilgrimage along the region.

Thinking of the *Terena* as a performative structure (Sahlins, 1990) it is believed that religion should be seen as a set of ideas, through which the indigenous peoples can express a particular cultural vision of their own history, manipulating and controlling their representations. This way, Saint Sebastian can be made out as an "endogenous" element, which is appropriated and re-signified by the *Terena* culture.

The entry of Christianity among indigenous peoples is part of the "civilizing" process which had been carried out by the West. But, knowing the *Terena* historical and cultural context, it is possible to think that the appropriation of other religious manifestations has a leading role in this culture, that's why it suggests a pattern of relationship of this culture with other cultures which the *Terena* historical and cultural context

emphasizes and values, re-symbolizing the differences that are presented to it from its cosmological framework.

Thinking particularly of the *Terena*'s case, despite the imposing and violent nature of these "religious encounters", what should be highlighted are the possibilities of cosmogonic, cosmological, eschatological creations and re-elaborations, even the latter ones that are the subject of an interesting commentary by Lawrence Sullivan:

There is no reason to doubt that South American religions and eschatologies had been the products of complex and pluralistic histories long before the introduction of Christianity. It is undeniable that the encounter with Christianity was matched by devastation... But South Americans had already been supplied to recognize the signs of radical cultural change and the end of the symbolic world. They had already had their own eschatologies. The tragic and destructive imagery, or the very image of a golden age, coming from their own mythical traditions, helped us to face the change and renewal creatively. The ways in which native religious paradigms have absorbed and transformed Christian eschatologies are the unpredictable result of their creative history of engagement with the sacred (Sullivan apud Wright 1999, p. 10).

Similarly, manifestations of religiosity express new formulations creatively, ethnogenesis (WRIGHT, 1999; 2004) that can come out in a framework that is sometimes pluri-ethnic and in permanent contact with the non-indigenous society.

The context experienced by the *Terena*, especially in the *Buriti* village, the relationship in the same space with other ethnic traditions and also with elements of the national society, such as Christian religions, seems to fit what Wright (1999) calls "interreligious fields of identity", in other words, the ways in which indigenous peoples shape/create Christianity, as well as shamanism itself, which in the village is present and strongly represented by the *purungueiros* (either males or females), people who recognize themselves as Catholics and devotees of Saint Sebastian.

Following Terence Turner and the concept of "agency" (apud Sahlin. 1997), the Feast has the objective of never forgetting the yellow fever epidemic that occurred in 1920 and the beginning of the process of the traditional territory loss; it brings together characteristics of sociability, integrality, and pluralism. It is considered "traditional" by the *Terena* from the village and *T. I. Buriti*, and it's also recognized like that by the non-indigenous regionals, showing itself flexible enough to answer to the modifications that inevitably occurred in the community facing a "colonial" process, and being able to carry an idea of ethnic persistence and revival.

Concluding, and considering that the Feast of Saint Sebastian is the result of a promise which became “tradition” due to an epidemic, the authors would like to register here that, due to the COVID19 pandemic (Coronavirus/2020), it has not been possible to go/stay in the village for a year; the *Terena* themselves have closed the *T.I.* to people who do not live there. But all the same, they get in touch via WhatsApp, Facebook, so they keep and strengthen friendship relations that go beyond “field researches”.

In January 2021, even in the time of the pandemic which devastated the world, some *Terena* friends from *Buriti* informed us that the Feast of Saint Sebastian would be held more discreetly and closely; because of the restrictive measures, the participants would only be residents of the *T.I. Buriti*. Viviane Alcântara explained that, since this Feast is a promise, it must be held.

Knowing it is not “a common practice”, the authors dedicate this article to Mrs. Celina Figueiredo (*in memoriam*), Mr. Juscelino Figueiredo’s wife, who, next to him, has been the main *festeira* of Saint Sebastian, and who passed away in December 2020.

TRANSLATION
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Submitted: 05/15/2021
Resubmitted: 10/12/2021
Accepted: 11/15/2021