

SOME THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PATHS FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH'S SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE GAME FREE FIRE

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DOSSIER: "ETHNOGRAPHIES AT THE TOUCH
OF A SCREEN - EXPLORING ANTHROPOLO-
GICAL METHODS, ETHICS AND KNOWLEDGE
WITH SMARTPHONES"

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the game Free Fire as a digital space for interaction, play, and career building for youth. By highlighting its transition from a simple form of entertainment to an environment for learning and professional development, the importance of social interactions in the game's virtual communities is emphasized. The study adopts methodologies such as biographies, life stories, and Ethnobiography, to understand contemporary gamer culture, revealing its complexity and significance for youth. Free Fire transcends entertainment, becoming a genuine environment for the formation of identities and authentic social interactions. With millions of daily users, the game plays a central role in solidifying and redefining current youth culture.

KEYWORDS

Virtual
communities;
Gamer culture;
Youth interactions;
Entertainment;
Digital
Anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of a pandemic scenario, where social interaction and the search for entertainment were substantially restricted, online games emerged as an alternative to escape reality and enjoy leisure in the comfort of home. Amid social distancing measures and even lockdowns, established to contain the spread of Covid-19 in 2020, online games played a crucial role in the emotional well-being of Brazilian adolescents and young adults, who found in games a refuge from adversities, opening new perspectives for leisure and virtual interactions. In this context, Free Fire stands out as the game with the highest number of downloads in Brazil that year. Belonging to the Battle Royale genre, which consists of a type of shooting game that gathers up to fifty players on a battlefield, of which only one survives in the end, Free Fire is developed by Garena, the electronic gaming division of Sea Limited, a company based in Singapore that also operates in e-commerce (Shopee) and investment (Sea Money). Free Fire is notable for its impressive number of downloads and active users on a global scale. According to a report by XP Research¹, dated April 4, 2022², Free Fire reached the second position in the global ranking of the most profitable mobile games in 2021, consolidating itself as one of Garena's greatest triumphs. Adopting a business model that is characteristic of Battle Royale³ games, Free Fire is made available to players for free, with revenue being generated through the sale of character accessories and the inclusion of advertisements.


Considered to be one of the games with the highest number of daily online users in Brazil and the world today, Free Fire consists of a digital space for interactions among young people and adolescents, which bears a great resemblance to the spaces they frequent in the cities of the current world.

In a typical Free Fire match, 50 participants are transported by plane over to a deserted island, where each player selects a point on the map to jump. An interactive map, located in the upper left corner of the user interface, provides an overview of potential landing sites, allowing strategic decisions regarding the landing point. After the jump, players initially find themselves without any equipment, making it imperative to explore the surrounding environment in search of essential survival items, such as weapons, ammunition, and protective gear. The average duration of each confrontation is approximately ten minutes, during which the playing area gradually decreases, delimited by a harmful gas that eliminates

1 XP Investimentos CCTVM S/A, registered under the CNPJ: 02.332.886/0001-04, is a financial institution authorized to operate by the Central Bank of Brazil.

2 World's highest-grossing mobile games in December 2021. Available at: <https://conteudos.xpi.com.br/internacional/relatorios/sea-limited-s2ea34-bdrs-fora-do-radar/>. Accessed: 16 Aug. 2023.

3 Game genre that launches dozens of players onto an island, where only one survives in the end. The game's dynamics involve exploring the territory in search of weapons and equipment and developing strategies to eliminate competitors and achieve victory.



players positioned outside the safe zone. This mechanism induces direct encounters between the remaining participants, culminating in the victory of the last survivor, who celebrates by using with the expression “Booyah”.

The described scenario reflects the essence of the “classic mode”, characterized by a game environment that favors both entertainment and practice, without the inherent pressure of competitions, and, in parallel, the “ranked mode” that introduces a competitive dimension, in which players can progress in ranks. The game also offers the “custom mode”, designed for creating closed matches, ideal for training sessions organized by guilds. Setting up a custom room requires the acquisition of a room card in the game store, using diamonds, a virtual currency obtained through real financial transactions. In addition to these, the “Clash squad” mode puts two teams of four players against each other in successive duels, until the winner is determined. Additionally, temporary modes such as “rush hour” and “death race” are introduced periodically, offering distinct rules and dynamics that diversify and enrich the gaming experience, enhancing the interactivity and engagement of participants with the Free Fire universe.

Within this virtual environment, there are two fundamental systems of communication available to players: chat message and voice communication. The chat message is accessible in the lobby⁴, before the beginning of matches, facilitating coordination and interaction among participants. This functionality is also present in a specific area of the game called “social island”, space dedicated to socialization, where players can interact more freely, establishing social connections through playful activities and dialogues. In addition to chat message, the voice communication system is available both in the lobby and during matches, allowing for instant and effective communication among players, which is essential for the coordination of strategies in real-time and for building an immersive collective experience.

The present study is anchored in my experience as a player, from my initiation into the Free Fire universe, in 2018, up until the current moment, a period in which I reconcile doctoral research with my role as a player. This trajectory, which began when I was a teacher in basic education, arose from observing the large number of students immersed in the field of digital games. After being invited by them, I downloaded the game, and my first immersions in Free Fire awakened in me an investigative interest that culminated in the production of my doctoral research project three years later. Free Fire is an engaging game that, due to its deterritorialized nature, provides diverse interactions with players from different strata of

⁴ The lobby refers to the place where players meet before the start of a game. It is a period in which they have the opportunity to interact with each other, customize their settings, and wait for the moment to begin the match.

society and various regions of Brazil and the world. Especially for those in the research field, being a player makes it feasible to continuously observe the social and cultural dynamics inherent to the game's virtual communities, also allowing for the monitoring of the game's evolutions and transformations of its social practices over time.

The question that this study seeks to answer is: how do social interactions in the virtual environment of the game Free Fire influence the construction of youth trajectories? Using as a theoretical reference the text *Café-com-leite, piques e gigantes: brincando no acampamento Canaã (MST – DF)*⁵ by Gustavo Belisário (2021), the aim is to initially explore how traditional childhood games are adapted to the virtual universe of Free Fire, presenting the similarities between the interactions in this digital space and the games and types of interactions that occur in person. For this, I also use as a theoretical guide the text *Quando o campo é a cidade: fazendo antropologia na metrópole*⁶ by José Guilherme Cantor Magnani (1996), which also greatly contributes to the understanding of contemporary youth culture addressed by Maria Isabel Mendes de Almeida and Kátia Tracy (2003) in the text *Noites Nômades: espaço e subjetividade nas culturas jovens contemporâneas*⁷.

From the construction of this initial dialogue between games, rituals, and youth encounters that occur in today's world and their reconfiguration in the digital space, I will seek, throughout the article, to shed light on the construction of successful youth trajectories in Free Fire, explaining the relevance of ethnobiography and biographical narratives for the development of studies that seek to understand the dynamics of social interactions in the virtual communities of the game and their influence on youth relationships in everyday life. For this, I take as a theoretical reference the texts: *Etnobiografia: biografia e etnografia ou como se encontram pessoas e personagens*⁸ by Marco Antônio Gonçalves (2012) and *Narrativas biográficas: que tipo de antropologia isso pode ser?*⁹ by Suelly Kofes (2015).

PLAYFULNESS AND BANTER IN FREE FIRE

Within the Free Fire game universe, we observe an interesting fusion between current affairs and virtuality, where traditional elements of everyday life ceremonies find new meanings and creative adaptations


5 "Playing at the Canaã occupation (MST - Federal District, Brazil)". Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/ha/a/x4WQmW63HTZsFHZF6rKMVLF/>.

6 "When the countryside is the city: making anthropology in the metropolis".

7 "Nomad Nights: space and subjectivity in contemporary youth cultures".

8 "Ethnobiography: biography and ethnography or how people and characters meet".

9 "Biographical narratives: what kind of anthropology can this be?".



within the virtual space. Even more remarkable is the way in which classic children's games are reinvented and incorporated into the game context, providing a unique and innovative experience for players. That way,

The actual and the virtual coexist, and they enter into a narrow circuit that constantly leads us from one to the other. It is no longer a singularization, but an individuation as a process, the actual and its virtual. It is no longer an actualization, but a crystallization. Pure virtuality no longer has to actualize, since it is strictly correlative to the actual with which it forms the smallest circuit. There is no longer unassignability of the actual and the virtual, but indiscernibility between the two terms that are interchanged (Deleuze 1996, 54).

This integration between the current and the virtual reflects a harmonious dynamic, where both coexist and mutually influence each other. Players, immersed in their real identities, enter the game and assume virtual avatars, creating a closed circuit where reality and virtuality feed and transform each other. The gaming experience is not merely a reflection of real life; it becomes a part of it, influencing the players' actions, decisions, and emotions. In the game, virtuality no longer needs to update itself to align with the real, as there is already an intrinsic synchrony between the two. The game and real life are no longer separate entities, but aspects of the same phenomenon, where the line between them is so fine that it becomes indiscernible. Players experience continuous individuation, where their choices in the game reflect and affect their lives outside of it, and vice versa, in a process of crystallization of their digital and physical identities.

It is astonishing to witness how funerals, weddings, June festivals, and many other celebrations are reinterpreted and symbolized in the game, in a way that they adapt to the virtual setting. The celebration of a wedding or the honor of a funeral within Free Fire offers players the chance to experience these rituals in a completely new and creative manner. And if "To play is to move ideas, concepts, images, sounds, textures, and feelings simultaneously", as Belisário (2021, p. 259) emphasizes, we can assume that this reinterpretation of rites and ceremonies in the game encompasses more than what can be seen superficially. Just as a child, when playing 'house', constructs ideas about habitation and family and experiences various feelings such as anger, joy, and sadness (Belisário, 2021, p. 259), the Free Fire player also lives through frustrations, fear, anger, joy, and other emotions, and begins to create new ideas and strategies to survive in the game and achieve the final victory. Within this context, they redefine the world and start to outline a path to reach their goals based on discipline, fulfilling responsibilities, daily training, and persistence in the face of failures.


As a Free Fire player and guild leader for four years, in my interactions with players and guilds from various regions of Brazil, I have observed that this type of behavior originates from the game's own dynamics because, to be the sole survivor among fifty players on the battlefield and achieve the "Booyah" (victory cry at the end of the match), one must have quick reflexes, strategy, and a lot of practice. However, over time, dreams expand, and players begin to seek the social and economic ascent that Free Fire influencers have achieved. Although gamer influencers are not financially compensated by Garena (the game's developer), the daily number of views on their internet communication channels guarantees them a significant financial return. And, as a result of the great visibility and prestige they have achieved in the digital space, major brands start to hire them for advertising campaigns, which enables a rapid social and economic rise that makes their life stories an inspiration for many. The narrative of the poor boy who became rich, bought a luxury mansion for his parents, and parades in designer clothes and imported cars, ends up becoming a fairy tale that motivates the vast majority of Free Fire players to invest time, energy, and money in pursuit of social prominence in the digital medium.

But it is important to highlight that in the virtual universe of Free Fire, there are also those who do not perform highly as players and do not dream of becoming influencers - there are those who professionally build themselves as event organizers, promoters, designers, coaches, and so on, through various new professions that even ensure the survival of entire families. However, it is crucial to emphasize that all this movement involving the construction of careers and success begins as a simple game, a distraction that, nevertheless, leads players to move concepts and ideas that enable the learning of a dynamic that is part of the current world, and the everyday life of an adult. They learn to have strength and determination to overcome obstacles, deal with situations that are part of adult life, and achieve their purpose, whether in the daily life of society or on the game's battlefield.

By proposing, in the virtual environment of the game, the participation of its users in symbolic ceremonies, such as simulations of weddings¹⁰ or funerary tributes¹¹, Free Fire creates an innovative approach that allows players to experience these traditional rituals. It is worth noting that such an opportunity is not limited to mere observation or visual representation, but involves active interaction by the players, allowing them to experience these ceremonies in a unique and creative way.

10 EDUARDO, Carlos. Me casei com a garota que conheci no Free Fire?. *Youtube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu1x72sbSB4>. Accessed: 17 Aug 2023.

11 DAVI GAMEPLAYS. Since faz homenagem linda para VK Thiago, jogador que faleceu. *Youtube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMk7fy0YZYY>. Accessed: 17 Aug 2023.



By participating in a wedding simulation, for example, players not only witness an event, but also have the chance to engage directly with the elements that make up the ceremony. They can personalize their characters, select virtual wedding attire, create a festive environment, and even interact with other players who play important roles in the simulation. This transcends mere passive observation and transforms the experience into an active immersion, where players are actively engaged in the creation and living of these symbolic ceremonies.

This approach offers players an unprecedented and innovative perspective on traditional rituals, allowing them to explore and experience different facets of ceremonies in ways that would not be possible in the real world. This active and creative interaction with known rituals adds a layer of depth to the gaming experience, enhancing its emotional relevance and providing a sense of significant participation. As a result, Free Fire becomes more than just a game; it transforms into a space where tradition meets modernity, and where players can redefine and reimagine traditional ceremonies in a unique and captivating way.


Through the customization of characters, the use of thematic skins¹², and the creation of virtual spaces for these occasions, Free Fire makes it possible to celebrate significant moments, even in a virtual environment, in the same way as the ‘pretend play’ that occurs in children’s games. That is,

Play arises from a creative act, where the perception of reality is simultaneous with the memory of flavors, smells, names, shapes, animals, and feelings. This simultaneity between the perception of reality and the child’s memory distances play from the dichotomy between reality and fiction, bringing it closer to other activities of the mind (Belisário 2021, p. 264).

As Belisário (2021) explains, the tangible effects of experiencing play are imprinted in memory, breaking the opposition between what is real and what is merely fiction. Therefore, the visual and auditory effects present in the graphic creation of the game’s ceremonies, combined with the memory of situations experienced by players throughout their lives, allow the experience to persist in the mind as something real.

Beyond the ceremonies, it is important to highlight that Free Fire also promotes a reconfiguration of traditional games such as dead or alive and hide-and-seek, which leads us to realize that the game, by using such elements as entertainment, ends up rescuing the nostalgia and

¹² Skin is a term used to describe a custom texture or appearance that can be applied to characters, weapons, vehicles, or other components within a game.



essence of childhood. Therefore, players can participate in variations of these games within the virtual world of Free Fire, recreating the fun and excitement they used to experience in everyday life. This adaptation of ceremonies, festivities, and games to the gaming environment adds a layer of complexity and fun to the game, breaking the division between the two worlds: the current and the virtual.

Within this context, it is also worth noting how the rules of behavior in ceremonies and games are adapted to the game environment: in any ceremony, event, or game that occurs in Free Fire, Discord¹³ proves to be an indispensable voice tool for organizing and agreeing on rules, in order to guide players on how they should behave. In this sense, “games are understood as a means for the development of abstract thinking and the internalization of social behavior rules. Play is part of socialization, the journey that leads a child to become an adult” (Belisário 2021, p. 272). In Free Fire, it is noteworthy that the game’s own dynamics and the rules that regulate player behavior have a significant influence on their socialization and their future prospects.

It is important to emphasize that the guidelines and acceptable behaviors are not established statically before the game starts - they emerge as players interact with each other and with the elements of the game. This process of collaborative rule construction contributes to a sense of immersion and active participation, making the gaming experience more authentic and personalized for the players.

Free Fire has an autonomous communication system, through audio, that enables the interaction of each team that forms to enter the battlefield. In this way, the interactions that occur between players of a team not only strengthen the bonds of friendship and belonging, but also represent a contemporary way of enjoying moments of shared fun, comparable to nights dedicated to entertainment, where friends gather to play, “banter” and have fun. Almeida and Tracy (2003) use the slang “banter” repeatedly to describe the playful, fun, and relaxed atmosphere that marks the gatherings of young people during night outs. According to the authors,

The act of “bantering” does not acquire meaning without the presence of the element ‘to banter with’. There is an intrinsic catalyzing effect in the act of ‘bantering’, a kind of incessant spiral in its own “existential creation”, emerging as an expression of pure compassion, to the detriment of the

¹³ Discord is a communication platform for groups that allows real-time voice, text, and video conversations. It is used by friends, gamers, and teams, to interact and collaborate.

mere importance of tangible and connectable goals (Almeida and Tracy 2003, p. 135).

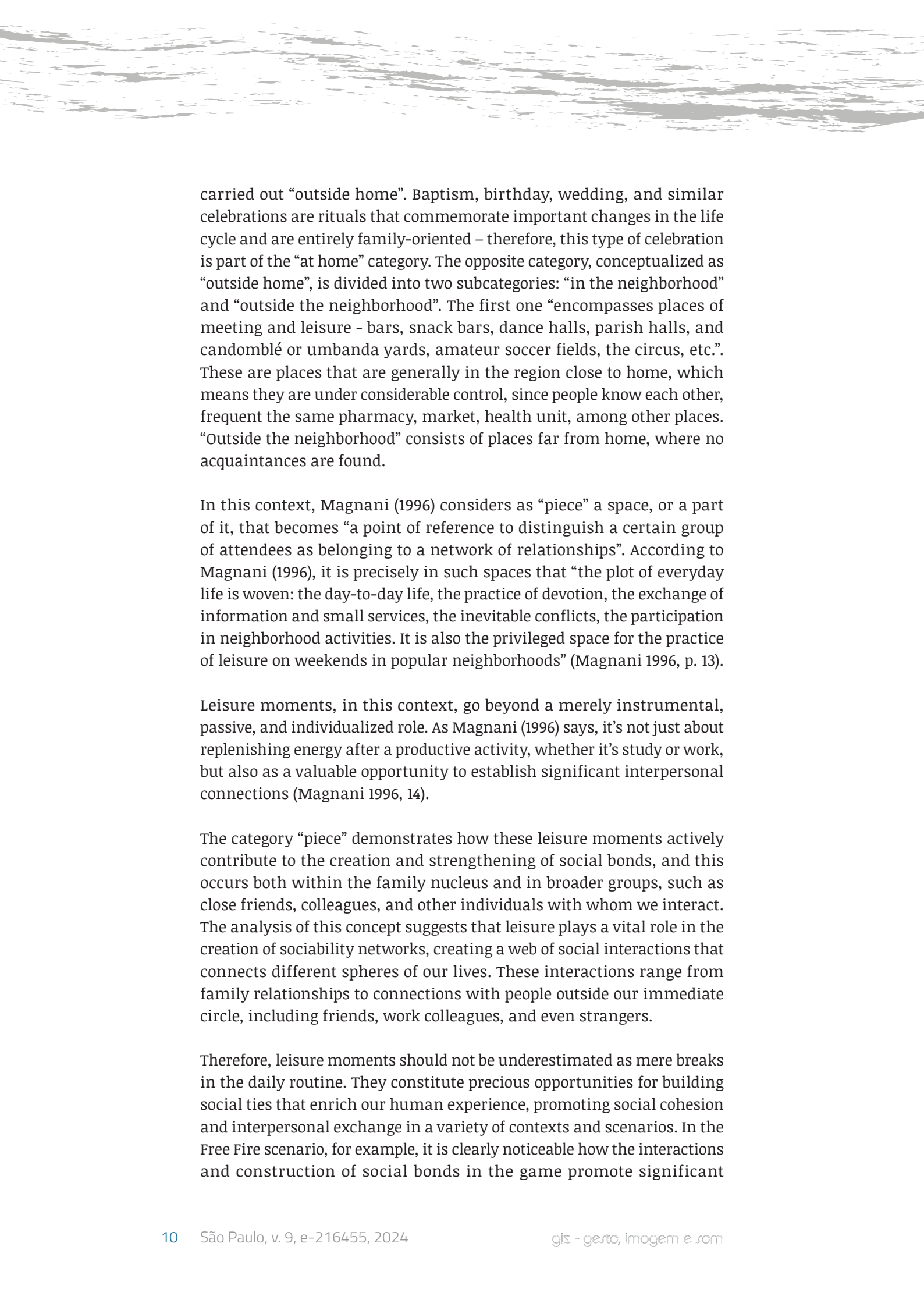
In this way, the act of “bantering” doesn’t make much sense on its own: it only gains meaning when people engage in banter and teasing in a kind of incessant impulse, within which the interactions of bantering generate more interactions, leading to a continuous and constantly evolving exchange. In this sense, the act of bantering is not just a form of superficial entertainment, but rather an expression that involves understanding, empathy, and connection among people.

Within the context addressed by Almeida and Tracy (2003), an interviewee identified as Fabiano shares an intriguing perspective on the meaning of the act of “bantering”. According to him, the conducive environment for “bantering” is primarily determined by the people present. In his statement, he says, “the place to banter depended on the people who were with me. The friends who were there, for the fun and such”. He highlights that the essence of “bantering” is more related to friends than to the place itself, and emphasizes the importance of the people around him.

Furthermore, Fabiano expands the definition of “bantering”, emphasizing its breadth and emotional depth, which involves a feeling of well-being that arises in the company of friends. Therefore, according to him, “bantering” is not limited to a simple joke or recreational activity, but is an act deeply rooted in the connection and relationship with friends, providing a sense of belonging and emotional comfort. Fabiano stresses that being in the company of friends is a fundamental sensation for the act of “bantering” and for building meaningful bonds with other people. The representation of this situation, even if initially related to the bustling nightlife of a party, finds a remarkable correspondence in the context of the Free Fire game. In this virtual environment, the relationships between players also extend deeply into the night, creating an intriguing parallel with the social dynamics of nights out for fun.

Just as in parties and face-to-face social gatherings, where people have the chance to meet and establish relationships, it is observed that the game offers a virtual alternative to create these emotional bonds. The conversations, laughter, and interactions that occur in this space can lead to flirting, courtship, and eventually more serious relationships. In this way, the game becomes an unexpected and captivating setting for the construction of affective connections, showing how contemporary technology can redefine and enrich our ways of interaction and relationship.

Magnani (1996), starting from the space of interactions, divides celebrations and events into those that are practiced “at home” and those that are




carried out “outside home”. Baptism, birthday, wedding, and similar celebrations are rituals that commemorate important changes in the life cycle and are entirely family-oriented – therefore, this type of celebration is part of the “at home” category. The opposite category, conceptualized as “outside home”, is divided into two subcategories: “in the neighborhood” and “outside the neighborhood”. The first one “encompasses places of meeting and leisure – bars, snack bars, dance halls, parish halls, and *candomblé* or *umbanda* yards, amateur soccer fields, the circus, etc.”. These are places that are generally in the region close to home, which means they are under considerable control, since people know each other, frequent the same pharmacy, market, health unit, among other places. “Outside the neighborhood” consists of places far from home, where no acquaintances are found.

In this context, Magnani (1996) considers as “piece” a space, or a part of it, that becomes “a point of reference to distinguish a certain group of attendees as belonging to a network of relationships”. According to Magnani (1996), it is precisely in such spaces that “the plot of everyday life is woven: the day-to-day life, the practice of devotion, the exchange of information and small services, the inevitable conflicts, the participation in neighborhood activities. It is also the privileged space for the practice of leisure on weekends in popular neighborhoods” (Magnani 1996, p. 13).

Leisure moments, in this context, go beyond a merely instrumental, passive, and individualized role. As Magnani (1996) says, it’s not just about replenishing energy after a productive activity, whether it’s study or work, but also as a valuable opportunity to establish significant interpersonal connections (Magnani 1996, 14).

The category “piece” demonstrates how these leisure moments actively contribute to the creation and strengthening of social bonds, and this occurs both within the family nucleus and in broader groups, such as close friends, colleagues, and other individuals with whom we interact. The analysis of this concept suggests that leisure plays a vital role in the creation of sociability networks, creating a web of social interactions that connects different spheres of our lives. These interactions range from family relationships to connections with people outside our immediate circle, including friends, work colleagues, and even strangers.

Therefore, leisure moments should not be underestimated as mere breaks in the daily routine. They constitute precious opportunities for building social ties that enrich our human experience, promoting social cohesion and interpersonal exchange in a variety of contexts and scenarios. In the Free Fire scenario, for example, it is clearly noticeable how the interactions and construction of social bonds in the game promote significant



transformations in the lives of young people: from a space of fun, the game transforms into a scenario of inclusion and social ascension, which are reported by poor boys, from the outskirts of town, who have become Free Fire influencers and today represent the brand on the global stage. Followed by thousands of gamers on their internet communication channels, these Free Fire professionals expose their life stories, dreams, and projects in interviews and testimonials, constituting a source of inspiration for their legion of fans and, more than that, a rich material for studies on youth.

METHODOLOGICAL PATHS FOR THE STUDY OF GAMER COMMUNITIES

To attempt to understand the dynamics of interactions in contemporary young cultures in the digital space, the accounts, life stories, and testimonials of those who are part of virtual communities of youth are a path that can yield good results. Kofes (2015), drawing on Franz Boas (1943), points out the importance of autobiographical accounts for the field of Anthropology - Boas advocated for a research methodology that encouraged subjects to narrate or write their life stories because, through autobiographical narrative, it becomes possible to collect important information about daily life, joys and sorrows, difficulties and victories of people.

Of course, narratives are not entirely reliable, as they depend on memory, and this memory can be distorted by feelings or emotions present at the time of the report. Through autobiographical narratives, the anthropologist can analyze, for example, each subject's reactions to social norms, their social group, and, therefore, by analyzing various different narratives, it becomes possible to understand the social group and its relationship with society, in general, from the perception of its members (Kofes 2015, 21). In this perspective, Gonçalves (2012) says that

[...] people and characters, whether real or fictional, formulate in their self-narrative modulations that accentuate characters and stereotypes, seeking coherences in their acts and thoughts that simultaneously shape a flexible construction of the self within a culture. [...] The self-narrative is constructed in a context that depends on alterity, operated through the play of similarities and differences, and that causes the person to become a character and the character to become a person in a context of interaction and production of self (Gonçalves 2012, 25).


By emphasizing that people and characters construct their own life narratives in a way that emphasizes characteristics and stereotypes, the quote highlights the search for coherence in actions and thoughts,

reflecting an attempt to build a flexible identity within a specific culture. In the digital scenario, characterized by rich and complex social interaction, these personal narratives become essential instruments for the manifestation and dialogue of personal identity. Gonçalves also highlights the importance of external influence in the production of these narratives, pointing to the intricate web of social and cultural interactions that influence each one's life stories. By investigating the digital narratives of young people, one gains a deep perspective on the processes of formation and manifestation of identity in an environment characterized by plurality, connection, and continuous negotiation between the self and the other.

In the case of Free Fire, what initially began as an act of uncomplicated fun, reveals a surprising dimension as it transforms into a platform for professional development and triggers the formulation of a future vision for the player. As one delves into the intricate mechanics of the game, exploring strategies and honing skills, each player begins to outline a projection of their professional trajectory. In this context, play transmutes into a tool for personal development and the pursuit of opportunities, offering a unique path to transform entertainment into a concrete career. The autobiographical narratives of Free Fire influencers serve as a source of inspiration for the massive adherence of young people to the game, mainly in search of fame, money, and professional fulfillment. The influencer Cerol, for example, emphasizes this aspect by declaring: "If I had no sponsoring from anyone, had nothing, wanted to live off of playing Free Fire championships, I would have an easy income of 10 thousand reais per month, why? Because I consider myself part of the elite of Free Fire. I play a lot."¹⁴

By mentioning his own trajectory as an example, Cerol reveals a recurring pattern within this universe, where the pursuit of professional success within the game consolidates as a tangible goal. The notion of belonging to the "elite of Free Fire" and the emphasis on dedication and intensive practice as determining factors to achieve substantial income is a standard discourse among influencers who repeat a kind of "formula" of speech that promotes general commotion. This demonstrates how players internalize and reproduce cultural narratives about economic ascension and social recognition within the specific context of the game. The emphasis on perseverance, competitions, and achieving prominence within the Free Fire scene reflects a deeply rooted understanding of how opportunities and status can be achieved within this virtual community. Ultimately, these narratives enrich the understanding of the motivations, values, and aspirations of Free Fire players, revealing the complex intersection

¹⁴ FLOW PODCAST. *História de vida do Cerol* | Flow Podcast. Youtube. 22/10/2020. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTi86egkQZ4>. Accessed: 17 Aug 2023.




between their personal trajectories, the culture of the game, and the pursuit of professional fulfillment and social ascension in society. Therefore, to understand, for example, the shaping of this new generation of young people who gather, have fun, interact, build relationships and life projects in the digital environment, biography, as much as life history and autobiography, can greatly contribute to the understanding of contemporary youth. However, as Kofes (2015) highlights, biography is not yet recognized in Anthropology in the same way as ethnography is. According to her,

If life history is an already established anthropological research technique and even has recognized existence as a method, as 'life documents' (a variation of the so-called 'qualitative methods'), biography and autobiography seem to challenge anthropological assumptions (Kofes 2015, p. 20).

It is necessary here to delineate the difference between life history, biography, and life trajectory, in order to understand how each methodological path can be used within anthropological research. Guérios (2011, p. 9), in reference to the studies of Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz (2011), explains that life history consists of "an interview technique employed by the social scientist, who obtains a 'narrator's account of their existence through time'. Biography, on the other hand, consists of a text about the history of a subject – a ready-made text, produced without the researcher's participation. The study of trajectories consists of a text written by the social science researcher himself, based on the conclusions he has reached "from the study of materials obtained from biographies and life stories" (Guérios 2011, p. 9).

However, especially for those who conduct research in digital environment communities, there is another relevant methodological path that "seeks to account for the intricate relationship between subject, individual, and culture", as pointed out by Gonçalves (2012). Within this ethnobiographical perspective,

The individual would not be simply the manifestation of the collective representation: the creative individuation of character-persons develops an autonomy of meanings that is not directly subjected to the immanent force of society. On the contrary, improvisation, speech, and narration, rather than being taken as neutral discursivity, take on the role of pure agency, insofar as they create and add new meanings to the world and things, while transforming those who construct the ethnographic narrative, whether the anthropologist or their ethnographic characters. In this addition of new meanings, narration is seen as simultaneously constitutive



of the experience, the event, the social, and the character-persons. It is taken beyond a representative function, thus highlighting, in this way, its poetic function of shaping the “real” (Gonçalves 2012, 10).

That is, individuals are not merely passive products of social norms; they are endowed with creativity to shape their identities and give meaning to the world. And this, according to Gonçalves (2012), is done through improvisation, discourse, and narration, which, much more than means of communication, consist of manifestations of individual agency. However, two fundamental points must be emphasized: firstly, it is necessary to consider that individual agency is not subordinate to society; secondly, it is important to observe that narration is not just a neutral representation of reality. It has a poetic function that shapes the ‘real’ and, as such, in addition to reflecting experience and society, the narrative also constitutes them (Gonçalves 2012, 10).

However, both real people and fictional characters create narratives about themselves, seeking to emphasize characteristics and stereotypes that may make their actions and thoughts coherent with the cultural context in which they interact. In this sense, Gonçalves (2012) emphasizes that the construction of self-narratives plays a crucial role in the construction of personal identity, shaping a flexible and adaptable “self” within a particular culture. Therefore, working with ethnobiography involves developing the ability to deal with the ‘person-character’ dimension. After all,

Self-narrative is constructed in a context that depends on otherness, operated through the interplay of similarities and differences, which causes the person to become a character and the character to become a person in a context of interaction and self-production. In this moment of shared experience, people may experiment with assuming certain characterizations and stereotypes, constructing a character marked by eminently social traits. The same is observed in narratives constructed and determined by the viewpoint of characters that are invaded by unpredictability, which brings forth the person in all their fragmentary power (Gonçalves 2012, 25).

In the various videos and interviews available on the internet, we can observe the emphasis that influencers place on the narrative of their achievements: by showcasing their accomplishments, displaying their luxury car, their branded clothes, their large and comfortable house, they are, in fact, shaping their image before their followers. Ethnobiography, in this context, becomes the result of the encounter between the narrator and the listener of the narration, a reason and condition for the creation

of a fictional “self”, something mysterious and fragmentary that points to the complexity and incommunicability of existence itself. The individual narratives of influencers can be intertwined with social and cultural contexts, creating a rich and multifaceted dynamic in the virtual world.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the initial purpose of shedding light on the game Free Fire and presenting it as a space for interaction, play, and banter in the digital realm, showcasing the various aspects of the game that evolve from simple fun to a space for learning and career development, I aimed, in the second half of this article, to draw attention to the methodological paths that can be used to study the social interactions occurring within the virtual communities of Free Fire, which bring together thousands of young people in Brazil and across the globe. The study of biographies, life stories, and ethnobiography, starting from an apparently subjective perception of the world and oneself, contribute significantly to the understanding of contemporary gamer culture. At the end of this brief study, it becomes clear that, much more than a mere distraction, the game Free Fire constitutes a space for genuine relationships and interactions, where teams are formed, friendships are strengthened, and communities blossom. More than all of this, due to the immense number of users who are online daily in the game, we can say that, above all, Free Fire is a space where contemporary youth culture is solidified and promotes a redefinition of society.

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