

Devotion and resistance: the tactics of the Folia de Reis Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro

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ABSTRACT

The Folia de Reis organize visits to the homes of the devotees in a period known as giros or journeys, taking place at dawn on weekends between December 24 and January 6, the holy Kings day. In order to carry out an ethnographic study that encompasses the complexity of this devotional endeavor, this article is divided into three parts: a first part that discusses who are the devotees of the Folia de Reis and their roles in the execution of devotion, a second part explores the availability of the spaces of home and street at the time of the revelry tours, and the final part of exploring the “tactics” (CERTEAU, 1994) practiced by the devout hosts of the flag to guarantee the physical and moral integrity of the revelers and their families during the ritual circuit carried out on the periphery of the Metropolitan Region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

KEYWORDS

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tactics, hosts,
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Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

INTRODUCTION

Annually, the devotees of the hol kings engage in a religious undertaking to fulfill the *sacred mission*¹, bringing the announcement of the birth of the child God to men. The realization of these festive circuits puts in circulation a heterogeneous set involving saints, people, ancestors, sacred and secular objects, knowledge and prayers, all encompassed in a knowledge dear to revelry: the foundation. This ritual process follows a specific calendar called the Epiphany of the Holy Kings, which extends from December 24th (date of Christ's birth) to January 6th (Holy Magi day). This period is called *giro* or *jornada*, as it starts a ritual cycle that involves the visit of the saint and the revelers to their hosts. Whether in rural or urban environments, these devotional procedures are carried out through an intense network of negotiations between devotees and their neighbors, and the ethnographic look elaborated in this text proposes to unveil the negotiations and disputes for the use of public spaces, mainly the one on the street.

¹ | Native categories will be written in italics.

The path offered for the development of this anthropological analysis was to follow Mr. Antônio José da Silva, Mestre Fumaça, and the hosts of the Folia de Reis Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente (Souza, 2012, 2020) in the municipality of São Gonçalo, second most populous city in the Metropolitan Region of the State of Rio de Janeiro. The choice for this study aims to elucidate the negotiation mechanisms and the solidarity and sociability networks activated by the devoted hosts to guarantee the displacement of the saints and their promisees in the marginal areas of the city during the dawn period.

To introduce the reader to the Folia de Reis and its members, I describe an ethnographic situation that enables the group's organizational framing (Goffman, 1986) through its preparation for the making of the ritual. I approach Erving Goffman's analytical category "frame (work)", translated as a framework to control my micro event data, but which contributes to macro-sociological analysis.

THE FOLIA DE REIS AND THE HOSTS HOUSE

Mr. Antônio José da Silva, Mestre Fumaça, was waiting impatiently at his gate for the arrival of each of his revelers so that he could finally organize the departure of the Folia de Reis Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente. The clock reads 23:30 in the evening of the Saturday January 2, 2016; the master showed his anxiety by shouting and saying that: "he's going to put his revelers on the street with whoever he has inside his yard". Around midnight, the last three members arrived and headed to the *revelry headquarters* to put on their uniforms and wield their instruments.

The *headquarters* is the place where all the ritual objects of the Folia de Reis are kept, among them, its maximum symbol, a *flag* (Bitter, 2010). The master has all the

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

elements of the revelry arranged in the living room of his house, where hangers with red and white garments hang on the walls, the so-called *uniforms*, the instruments being kept on the living room shelf - viola, accordion, bass drums, triangles, tarol (the war chests). In the center of the room is an ornate table with satin fabrics, which is the altar of the house, on which the Nova Flor do Oriente *flag* rests; above it, a picture of St. John the boy (holding a little lamb) and another of St. Sebastian. The wooden structure that makes the saint of that folia is turned to the door, welcoming each person who walks through the enclosure. After wearing uniforms, all revelers are positioned in front of the saint to start singing and as rewards for performing the *giro*. The master lights a candle and candlestick deposit next to a glass of water on the altar; the next step is to lead the singing called *prophecy*: “At this blessed hour I will play my instruments / For the three Kings of the East who left us this mission / I will start my prophecy to leave the journey / Guided by the star may the saints guard my revelers”.

The singing sequence for Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente is: 1) a phrase of the *prophecies* is said by the master; 2) follows an interval in which the instruments to break the silence; 3) the revelers repeat a phrase of the master singing. And so it happens, successively, with each sentence of the prophecies. After the thanksgiving, request for blessing and protection to the saints and angels, it's time to sing for a *flag* removal from the *altar*: “I will remove my *flag* from this blessed *altar* / God guide us and protect us so that we can do our mission / To bless the three kings in the house of the devotees”.

The process of *chanting the prophecies* lasts fifteen minutes, then the *flag* is removed from the *altar* by the *bandeireira* to be passed over the bodies of all the revelers; such process refers to the distribution of blessings and protection of the Holy Kings to their vows². At the end, the revelers prepare to follow the house of the devout hosts of the Santos Reis.

The so-called *folias de reis* are ritual groups composed of children, young people and the elderly of both sexes who are responsible for carrying *the flag of the Three kings* to the devotees houses; according to Daniel Bitter (2010), the *flag*³ is the Saint himself. The practice of *reisado* represents the sacred mission⁴ left by the Holy Magi of the East, for their promises to announce the birth of the baby Jesus and edistribute the blessings wherever the songs are sung, the so-called *prophecies*⁵. The ideological framework that supports the kings is called the *foundation*, a set of mythical narratives that is not necessarily found in the Christian bible. It refers to a whole knowledge of the rules of etiquette and codes of conduct to guide revelers in their engagements in the complex exchange and reciprocity relations that this undertaking raises. The Folia de Reis organize visitation circuits to the houses of devotees in a period known as *giros* or *jornadas*, taking place at dawn on weekends between December 24th and January 6th, the day of the Holy Kings. In the Metropolitan Region, departures last

2 | This ritual is described in all its complexity in thesis A Bandeira e a Máscara, by Daniel Bitter (2010).

3 | The kings' flag (with a lowercase “b”) is the saint who is taken with the revelers to carry out the announcement of the birth of Christ. It is a wooden structure decorated with ribbons and colored bands, in the center of which are displayed holy cards or images of the holy family and saints of devotion to revelers.

4 | It is the order left by the holy kings, the first revelers. This mission is the responsibility that revelers have to take the flag/holy kings to the house of devotees, announcing the birth of the Baby Jesus.

5 | They are memory verses uttered by the master and sung by revelers during the *giros*.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

until January 20, the day of São Sebastião, the patron saint of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Mestre Fumaça is a strong black man, 77 years old, and has been in charge of the *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente* since the 1980s. The main assistants for the fulfillment of the *sacred mission* are his family members. Antônio José da Silva's life was always crossed by the *giros* of revelry; he reports that he used to go out with his uncle since he was a child in the municipality of Trajano de Moraes (Serrana Region of the state of Rio de Janeiro) and then, "when he came to try life in Rio [Metropolitan Region]", he would go out with his future father-in-law, Manuel Barcellos, whose death led Fumaça to found *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente*. The master mentions that he almost stopped performing his devotion in the nineties, due to the loss of one of his sons, but it was through the insistence of his daughters Mazinha and Verinha that the revelry did not cease to exist. These long years to devotion have had the participation of a group of instrumentalists and singers ranging from fifteen to twenty members. The numerical fluctuation has to do with the devotion and personal history of each reveler; most devotees who are there years in *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente* is formed by family and close friends of Mestre Fumaça. All of these carry in their memories a relationship of "having been raised in the Folia de Reis with their parents" (Souza, 2012). The oldest instrumentalists and singers are remnants of deactivated Folia de Reis in the Metropolitan Region of the State of Rio de Janeiro, who look for mestre Fumaça to fulfill their devotion. The other revelers that appear seasonally are devotees who ask the master to fulfill a promise made to the Holy Kings in return for some miracle. These same ones, when interviewed, report that their promises are finalized after seven years of turning, but what the ethnographic data show is that this period is much shorter, about three or four years.

The groups are formed by a structured hierarchical system whose leader is the *master*, who holds the *foundation* (Pereira, 2014), the knowledge needed to teach the songs, relating the sung verses to the passages concerning the birth of Jesus or the life of the prophets. At his side is the *foreman*, who also stands out for his ability to master the same knowledge as the master, in addition to being able to minister the *prophecies* with the proper authorization. The *master* grants the title of foreman to the devotee who has mastered the *foundation* of revelry, as he can become the future leader. At the head of the group is the *bandeireira*, the reveler responsible for carrying the maximum symbol of revelry. There is a whole code of conduct for the *bandeireira* to enter houses, withdraw and resting the *flag on the altar*, passing the ritual object on to revelers and devotees. Such ritual actions are part of a *modus operandi* also governed by the *foundation* that she must have dominion. The other members are instrumentalists governed by the *master*, mostly devotees of the Holy Kings who find in the revelries the possibility of carrying out their religious practices. A large part of the revelries in the state of Rio de Janeiro is made up of family members of the masters and other devotees.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The dynamics of receiving the Folia de Reis extends the notion of mastery of the *foundation* to devoted hosts. The *flag*-receiving house needs, minimally, to organize itself to become a temple for the saint. The resident's room it is, in most cases, the place par excellence for the singing of the folia. It is in this place that the host builds the crib, transforming the house into the stable where the child God was born. The verses sung by the master and his revelers are the representation of the delivery of the gift of the three wise men to the divine child (Chaves, 2009). The host places the glass of water and the candle on a central piece of furniture in the room: the water represents the "abundance of food and drink that the Holy Kings never lacked in their journeys"; the candle represents the "protection of the guardian angel and the light of the star that guided the Magi to the Holy Family".⁶ The offer of food and drink is also extremely important for the reception of revelries, as commensality is the dimension of the party that represents abundance over scarcity (Pereira, 2013).

6 | Palavras de mestre Fumaça.

There is a code of knowledge that the devotee host must handle in order to receive the revelers and the *flag* into his home. In order to understand the ways of the *foundation* operation, whether by the revelers or the hosts, I approach here the appropriation that Wagner Chaves (2009) makes of Fredrik Barth's (2000) analytical category: "knowledge traditions". As in the "knowledge traditions", the *foundation* is permeated by three characteristics: the "substantive corpus", which it would be the content itself; "the communicative means", which are linked to the transmission form (*the prophecies*), since in the folias orality is predominant; and the "social organization", which are the social relations in which this knowledge is inserted, how it will be transmitted and who will be the future master. This ritual process is passed from generation to generation of devotees through the *giros* of revelry; therefore, the *foundation* is a structured but dynamic element. To better understand This set of multifaceted knowledge, Luzimar Pereira (2014) indicated that, even though the foundation is a structure based on an original myth, it is appropriated in different ways by the different groups of revelers, as each one has its own "system". The "system" is the operational agency of each group in the organization of their Folia de Reis manifested in their touches, singing, costumes and parades. In this way, we have an understanding of the relationship of structure and agency through the *foundation* and the "systems" within the Folia de Reis.

7 | "Sistema" é uma categoria nativa analisada através de seu potencial analítico por Luzimar Pereira (2014).

According to mestre Fumaça, the *foundation* of the revelry is based on the biblical passages that mention the *journey* of the three wise men from the East to fulfill the sacred mission of adore the baby Jesus and then announce the birth of the savior to humanity. To carry out this feat, it was necessary a twelve-day pilgrimage, through which the deities passed, received the assistance of the residents who offered landing at their homes.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

So that the three Kings could approach the house of the devotees, they started to play some instruments, as if they were in a party! This way, the residents would not be afraid to interact with strangers, offering them food and a roof over their heads to sleep. Wherever the saints went, they said they were going to worship the baby Jesus.

Also in this narrative, the master mentions that the Holy Kings only made their journey at night, as they were following the guide star. In this case, to get closer to the residents' house, they needed to play their instruments to wake up the residents. These, upon hearing the sound of music, lit their lamps and went to see what was happening in front of their gates.

The host devotees share this same narrative of the *foundation*: they project themselves into the ritual time-space, becoming the residents who offered a place to rest for the Holy Kings. For this, they need to be inside their homes with the lights off, waiting for "the hoopla of the revelers' instruments" to wake them up. When the revelers arrive at the door of a residence, they begin to play their instruments and the master initiates a *prophecy*:

That night the revelers stopped / At his door he stopped / To bring a memory of the three
kings / when he was looking for the Child God / My devotee of the house / I'm going to enter
more of my revelers / We we are standing here / In the shadow of his roof.

But he gave us the open door / with pleasure and joy / Showing that he is a devotee /
of holy Virgin Mary/She brought the world/the true messiah/Your door is open/receives our
flag.

The host stays close to the door in order to correspond to each part of the chanted prophecy, such as turning on the porch light, opening the windows and doors, receiving the flag. In the passage "receives our flag", the patriarch of the house or his wife receives from the hands of the flag maker the ultimate symbol of revelry. It is the hosts who take the saint to some central and safe place in the room to deposit him on a chair or on a makeshift altar, as the saint needs to stay somewhere high in the house (Bitter, 2010). The master is the conductor who governs all performances through the chanted prophecies, he is the one who guides the code of conduct of his revelers and hosts when they arrive at people's homes.

The construction of the verses sung inside the enclosure aims to dialogue with the representation of the improvised crib in the devotees' house. They refer to biblical passages about the path taken by the Holy Family and the Holy Kings in *their mission sacred to adore the Child God*. The verses are prophecies, because, when singing them, the revelers are blessing the *devotee* and the *dwelling place* with words (Chaves, 2009: 239). When there are other saints near the nativity scene, the master makes an effort to perform excerpts that refer to the lives of these characters, as is the case of the

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

encounter of the revelers of the *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente* with the Santa Supper painting in a devotee's crib:

God save you the lighted candle/that represents it to us/That blessed star/that shone in the East/Let's save your cup/full of fresh water/That Jesus separated it/and took it from that salty/For your son to quench his thirst/ wherever he is / Father, son and Holy Spirit / Jesus, Joseph and Mary / I will pay off his holy picture / with the verses of the prophecies / With the gathered apostles / It was the word of the Lord / Our Father who is in heaven / The holy supper began / Jesus being the master / At the head of the table sat / And the apostles always by his side / in the prayer of the Lord / Start at the center of the table / Jesus was scaled / I lift my knee to the ground / God bless our words / Blessed praise be/We fulfill our mission/ Raising by being a devotee/Fulfilling the obligation [Whistle marking closing].

At the end of the singing, the master and his revelers begin to hug and greet each of their hosts; soon after, the distribution of food and drink among the devotees begins.

HOME EXTENSIONS: THE HOSTS DOMAIN

The visit of the *master* extends not only to the *devotee's* house, but to the neighborhood street. The quality of being one of those "attended by the master and his revelry" is not limited to the family nucleus. The house visited bears the identity of the "home of the person who receives the fun". I realized the importance of this title in a common conversation at a birthday party, in which a boy informed me: "on my street there is also Folia de Reis, at least at Christmas time there is someone's house there that every year they play".

To participate in the event, the devotee organizes to *offer* money and food to the *saint* and his *revelers*, but such preparations are not limited to these subjects only. In my field work, I was able to understand that, in the surroundings of the houses that *host the Folia de Reis Nova Flor do Oriente*, a cluster of neighbors waits for the *singing of songs*. Usually, the host goes to his neighbors' house to let them know of the event that will take place at dawn. This measure is taken for the most varied reasons: to explain what it means to receive revelry; not to be frightened by the *singing*; to demonstrate prestige; for other devotees to meet with the *Holy*. In this respect, it is not surprising to find the street full of children and adults waiting for the Folia de Reis at dawn on the outskirts.

When the *Nova Flor do Oriente* flag enters the backyards of houses, there is the possibility of neighbors and other spectators accompanying it. The *devotee's* land also becomes an extension of the house, as suggested by Vogel, Mello and Santos:

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

At certain times, the backyard can transform itself into a place for parties and meetings, opening up to people who, not being from the domestic group, are, however, from the house – friends, godfathers and godmothers, relatives and so on. On these occasions, it becomes an informal room. The trace of the logical union between backyard and living room is, then, hospitality (Vogel; Mello; Santos, 1985: 50).

These places metamorphose to receive saints, revelers, devotees, neighbors and other people. I refer to “the others”, as I include myself as a researcher, pain and companion of the revelry, but I also indicate passers-by from the period of the drugad, such as drunks and homeless people. During the period of the field, I saw this happen sometimes. The hosts welcome everyone and offer both food and drink; those subjects try to interact with the others present, but end up getting out of place just by watching.

There are many variations in the ways of receiving revels from house to house, as well as in Luzimar Pereira’s (2013) analysis of the systems of organization of collective meals during the realization of the Uruguayan revelries. The author demonstrates how the system of organization of food tables calls into question the prestige of the “emperors” and the evaluations of the quality of their parties. In relation to the houses visited by Folia de Reis, I could see that the bigger the backyard or the porch of the house, the greater the possibility of spatial organization of the food tables in these environments. The table with crockery, food pans and appetizer plates for *revelers*, family members and guests is exposed on the balcony, so the greater the power. The host’s acquisitiveness, the greater is the display of varied types of food and soft drink brands. Chairs next to the table are reserved for the master, foreman, flag maker and hosts, who can serve themselves directly. By taking the standards of etiquette analyzed by Pitt-Rivers (2012), I realize that the importance of the proximity of the host to the guest is given. This proximity, which enhances an aspect of hospitality, also plays a role in controlling the guest, thus avoiding a possible misunderstanding or conflict. At all times, the host asks the master and his revelers if they “are being well served” or “if they are in need of something”. The placement of the host next to the master denotes hierarchy, respect, but also control of any kind of hostility. This relationship extends to the most varied types of guest service, for example: if there is any complaint about the taste of the food or if the drinks are heating up.

The other people sit a little further away from the table, the availability of chairs being a demarcator of the host’s social condition. The larger the house, the porch and the number of seats available, the greater the possibility of demonstrating their social status. The host provides not only chairs, but spatially distributes the sofas and armchairs on the balcony, thus aiming to provide accommodation for revelers. The gifts go beyond the *offering* of food and money to the saints; offering comfort and relaxation is within the “standards of etiquette” of the *devotee* host.

8 | Os imperadores são os principais mantenedores das Falias de Reis urucuianas, os giros iniciam e encerram em suas casas.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

Regarding the issue of etiquette, it is important to emphasize that there is a whole logic that can be understood by what Pitt-Rivers (2012) calls the “law of hospitality”. Pitt-Rivers understands the “law of hospitality” as a set of universal social codes that aim to establish a relationship between the host and the guest. The guest must honor his host by consuming what is offered and not usurp the place of the owner of the residence; the host must honor his guest by offering his best, defending and protecting him. The “law of hospitality” aims to alleviate conflicts based on an ambivalent relationship seeking order and making the unknown known. For Pitt-Rivers, the “law of hospitality” is a universal category of analysis that can be applied to understand both his ethnography carried out among the pueblos of Spain and the Eskimo communities analyzed by Boas.

Adding to the analysis of etiquette standards, Donald Pierson brings the possibility of understanding the appropriation of spaces in the house by the hosts. In his monograph *Cruz das Almas* (1966), this author proposes to understand the public and private spaces inside the house through the invitation to a “small black coffee”. In this logic, there are spaces inside the house where the host can receive his guest, establishing a sort of gradation according to the degree of intimacy between the two. The greater the friendship between host and guest, the more inserted in the private space the latter will find itself. To give more consistency with this argument, I can exemplify the balcony or the living room as a space to receive guests with a lower degree of affinity, thus obtaining a configuration of control over these guests and preventing them from approaching the more private spaces of the house. In case of greater affinity between the two, the “cafezinho” can be served in more private spaces, in the example pointed out by Pierson: the kitchen. These studies provided me with the refinement of the ethnographic perspective for the development of reading keys in order to understand the ways *to receive the flag* and the Folia de Reis. In addition to ensuring a better reception and comfort for the *revelers*, the hosts organize themselves to transform their balconies and public spaces into extensions of the private areas of the house. In this aspect, sofas and armchairs are the possibility of transforming this public space into a private one.

The other revelers who sit in these seats are served by the hosts families, however, if they want to eat more, they can go to the table to help themselves. In the same way that the owners of the house are positioned close to the master, the other guests have the company of the hosts’ relatives, such as children and close relatives, who make themselves available, chatting and entertaining them. The hosts’ children and relatives also fit the controller profile of any type of hostility towards the organization of the meal and guarding the house. One example was the field held at dawn on Sunday, December 29, 2013. It was the first house, on a large plot of land, full of plants, in the Colubandê neighborhood, municipality of São Gonçalo, that would host the revelry.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The residence stood out in the region due to the size of the house and the land, both belonging to Mario. The *devotee* owned a liquor store on the same street. Her relatives huddled on the porch to watch the arrival. At the front of the house, the doors and windows were closed, waiting for the singing to be opened. First, the windows were opened, revealing a nativity scene that filled a dining table, with twelve images each 30 centimeters high. Inside, there was the owner of the house, accompanied by his wife and their two children, plus a couple of gentlemen. After receiving the *flag*, he positioned himself on the right side of the nativity scene. At the end of the singing, the owner of the house placed the flag on a chair beside the nativity scene.

The appropriation of the territories of the house occurs in an inverse way when we relate to the less favored social class. The lower the host's purchasing power, the more the reception of *revelers* takes place inside the house. In these houses, the food is displayed on the kitchen table and the guests who eat at the table are: the master, quartermaster, *flag* maker and hosts. The logic of the etiquette is the same analyzed above, with the other guests being accommodated on the sofas in the living room, in the bedrooms of the house and on the balcony, but always accompanied by a relative of the host complying with the analyzed standards. These relatives perform the same function of serving, in case the reveler needs something.

With regard to the question of "abundance", the food displayed on the table denotes the purchasing power of the devoted host. On his visit to Mr. Hélio's house in the Colubandê neighborhood, he was proud to say to the guests: "you can eat all you want, if you don't want chicken, there's meat all you want! It's to eat to get enough!". Offer abundance in quantity and variety of types of food, it is a way of repaying the "gifts" of the saints through dinner.

The analytical categories of Pitt-Rivers (2012) and Donald Pierson (1966) are essential for understanding the movements and articulations of hosts for maintaining order in the festive atmosphere of the house. There is a tag code which governs and delimits the forms of treatment for revelers and the saint, manifesting itself in the hierarchy of the organization of seats and places at the table, in addition to the strategic positions assumed by the hosts alongside their guests. The *flag* also receives a unique treatment, being dedicated to it a special place in the house, always next to an oratory or a nativity scene. The elaboration for the occupation of the spaces of the house is guided by the interpretation that the hosts make of the *foundation*. Thinking about the exchanges carried out between the revelers and the hosts, the "knowledge traditions" (Barth, 2000) help me to understand how such tag codes are transmitted between devotees in the act of *receiving the flag*. The *prophecies* sung by the master and his singers are the "communicative means" that help the devotee in how to behave when meeting the revelers at the door of his house.

RECEIVE AND OFFER

From 2010 to 2016, I could see the existence of a “network” of sociabilities that allows the maintenance of the Folia de Reis through their *giros*. The hosts belong to an intertwining of social relationships that extends through the continuation of their devotion to the Holy Kings. To understand the analytical category “network”, I approach the notion of Alain Caillé:

The network is the set of people in relation to whom the maintenance of interpersonal relationships, friendship or camaraderie, allows us to preserve and expect trust and loyalty. More than in relation to those outside the network, in any case. The only thing that is missing a priori in these analyzes is to recognize that this generalized alliance that constitutes networks, currently as in archaic societies, is only created from the bet of giving and trust (Caillé, 1998: 65).

The maintenance of this network of sociability is established by the fidelity and trust that exist among all the devotees and revelers involved, so that they can continue to relate to the three Wise Men.

In the speeches of older devotees hosts, devotion mostly begins with a *promise* made to the Holy Kings. But the *payment of promises* that would last for a period of seven years, extends for a lifetime and ends up involving the other family members. In this aspect, Renata Menezes (2004) brings the possibility of broadening the perspective on devotion to the saints beyond the payment of promises: “the relationship of devotion involves pragmatism, that is, the fulfillment of requests that one wants to reach, but also a process of identifying the devotees with the saints” (Menezes, 2004: 238).

It is a relationship of devotion that goes beyond the notion of *payment of promises*, people participate in the *revelries giros*, expressing the character of affinity with the entities. They are devoted practitioners of revelry or maintenance of these, because they they identify with the saints and with the accomplishment of the *mission* left by them.

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Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

of revelry; when they receive the flags in their homes, they contribute to the accomplishment of the sacred mission of the devotees revelers. Even if the Folia de Reis of a certain group ends, the instrumental revelers belonging to this group can join another party or continue their religious practices by opening the door from their homes to receive the flags of other revelries. In short, devotion manifested in the act of going out on the giro or receiving revelries in their homes inserts devotees into a “network” founded on the foundation.

It was in a conversation between Mestre Fumaça and one of his devoted hosts that I heard the following sentence: “One hand washes the other and washes the face with both hands, as my teacher said!”. They were combining the possibility of carrying out the *giro* in the house of this devotee at Christmas 2015. It is on this occasion that the devotee is able to give his offerings, materializing the retribution for the gifts given by the saints. It is in the *giros of revelry* that people indulge in giving their offerings to the saints. To Marcel Mauss:

The circulation of goods follows that of men, women and children, feasts, rites, ceremonies and dances, even that of jokes and insults. Deep down, she is the same. If things are given and reciprocated, it is because “respects” are given and reciprocated – we can also say “courtesies”. But it is also because people give themselves, it is because they “owe” themselves – themselves and their goods – to others (Mauss, 2003: 263).

In this way, when giving back to the saints, people give themselves and that is why they need to warn and be warned of the visits of the flags. This focus on devotees allowed me to answer ethnographically how the alliance between the *Folia Nova Flor do Oriente* and its devotees visited on the day of the *giros* takes place. Perceive the members of this network of sociability is to understand the connection that each devotee has with revelry and, above all, with the Holy Kings. The maintenance of this alliance network is the guarantee that these devotees have to continue relating directly with the saints through the *visitations of the flag* during the *giros* period.

Within the *giros*, I could see that food plays a crucial role: it is also offered as an element of “retribution for gifts” (Mauss, 2003) by devotees for receiving the *Nova Flor do Oriente flag on the giros day*. Food also plays the role of an agent that establishes relationships between people and saints inside the party. Devotion can be established through the commitment to go out in a group of Folia de Reis for seven years, or receive it in their home to be able to pay some promise made to the Holy Kings.

SÃO GONÇALO CITY: A STAGE FOR STRATEGIES AND TACTIS

The city of São Gonçalo is located in the Metropolitan Region of the State of Rio de

9 | Estimativa de 2019 de acordo com o site do IBGE (<https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/rj/sao-goncalo/panorama>).

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

Janeiro and is recognized for having the second highest population index in the state, with about 1,084,839 inhabitants, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The municipality has 247,709 km² and is divided into five districts, with 91 districts registered by the city hall and 18 more districts recognized by the citizens. The population's poverty rate reached 39.86%, according to 2003 census indices provided by the IBGE. It is in this socioeconomic framework that both the devoted hosts and the members of the *Folia de Reis Nova Flor do Oriente* are inserted.

This complex picture of social inequality is aggravated by the constant conflicts between rival criminal factions that aim to occupy and dominate the city's peripheral regions. The echoes of this territorial conflict bypass the borders between the center and the periphery of cities in the Metropolitan Region, reserving high homicide rates for these areas. According to the 2019 Atlas of Violence:

In Rio de Janeiro, four out of the six mesoregions were, in 2017, with high rates of lethal violence: the South and North Fluminense; the Coastal Lowlands; and the Metropolitan Region. Among the ten most violent cities in the state, five were in the Metropolitan Region, [...] The capital of Rio de Janeiro had an estimated homicide rate of 35.6. In addition to the historical problems of violence in the state, which involve skirmishes between the three criminal factions in Rio de Janeiro – CV, Amigos dos Amigos (ADA) and the Terceiro Comando Puro (TCP) – in recent years the presence of militias has increased a lot, not only in the capital, but in many inland cities. The war between militia groups and drug traffickers, as well as between the latter, has contributed to increasing the number of deaths not only in the metropolitan region, but throughout the state. The state government, in turn, through its security policy based on brutality and nondescript lethal confrontations, has increasingly contributed to the increase in lethality rates: in the first half of 2019, the police were responsible for 38% of deaths in the metropolitan region (Atlas of Violence, 2019: 30).

And the tours of the *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente* are carried out within these territories in constant dispute by factions and by the armed wing of the State. The prophecies are sung at dawn and, for the fulfillment of the sacred mission, they need silent agreements between the residents for the maintenance the physical and moral integrity of the promising devotees. For the demonstration of these underground negotiations, I aim to stick to the tactics of the devotees through the analyzed ethnographic data.

The most emblematic case occurred in the Chumbada slum in São Gonçalo, which is a region parallel to the central zone that connects with four important neighborhoods for the city: Estrela do Norte, Galo Branco (both give access to the city center), Mutondo and Maricá Avenue (both give access to the commercial area of the city, the neighborhood of Alcântara). This slum is controlled by drug trafficking, having one of the best known dances in the city and with a high level of violence

10 | Na primeira semana de 2018, foi publicado na capa do jornal *O São Gonçalo* o "Mapa das Barricadas" do município. Segundo o site do periódico, em menos de um dia o recurso digital já havia sido acionado por milhares de pessoas. Cf. "O mapa das 'barricadas' mostra onde 'mora' o perigo na região". *O São Gonçalo*, Ano 86, quarta-feira, 3 de janeiro de 2018.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

caused by armed conflicts. Being a resident of the city and knowing about the constant confrontations that took place in the slum, I asked the teacher if there would be no complications when we walked through the neighborhood. The master told me that he would notify the *hosts of the flag* in advance by telephone and gave me some recommendations to drive the car around the region: “when we get there, you need to roll down the windows of the car, turn on the car’s warning lights, if it’s at night, turn on the saloon light too! Just do that and no one will mess with us! ”.

This set of information given by the master is disseminated on the outskirts of the Metropolitan Region of the State of Rio de Janeiro, it is found on the walls of the entrances to the slum complexes, indicating a mechanism for recognition and control of the individuals who circulate through the place. On one of the streets I passed, there was the following message:

“Turn on the flasher and lower the windows, otherwise we’ll drop the steel”; the imposing speech means that the driver who did not comply with the recommendations would be the target of *trafficking soldiers*.

The path chosen by Fumaça was the Mutondo neighborhood and, right at the access to Chumbada, we found the first impediment. The street had a barricade made of burnt tree logs that made it impossible for cars to access it. We stopped the car and asked two gentlemen who were on the corner talking if we could pass or if it would be better to park there. They said that we would just move the logs away and drive the car along, but that we should put it on them back. And so we did. The moment I came across the situation, I paid attention to the young people on motorcycles who were in the bar in front of the barricade, who were watching us intently.

The first house visited was that of Mrs. Lourdes, who looked about 60 years old. She met us at the gate and said it would be a pleasure “to receive the Folia de Reis that weekend”. I asked if there would be any problem with the revelry playing there at night, and she replied that there would be no complications. Near the house, three young people of approximately 20 years were talking, Mrs. Lourdes called them and said: “Hey, Gabriel, this Saturday the fun is going to come here, call the boys to take a look here! I know you like it! ”. The boys that Mrs. Lourdes referred to they were the “dealer boys”, individuals inserted in the drug retail trade in the slums of Rio de Janeiro and in the Metropolitan Region are called boys of the “movement” (Barbosa, 2017). The region we were in was completely supervised by the soldiers of the drug trade. At every corner we drove by, we saw at least three young men, all very young. None of them carried an exposed firearm, apart from a young man of approximately 18 years old who was at the door of the candomblé center to which we went to warn about the *giro*. As we approached the gate, this same young man wielded a firearm in one hand and a radio in the other. He asked me to lift my shirt, to notify himself that I was not carrying a weapon in my waistband. The master said that he was there to talk to his mother Rosinha, so the boy started knocking aggressively on the gate

11| Todos os nomes citados nesta parte do artigo são pseudônimos, para não ferir a integridade de meus interlocutores.

12| A palavra “movimento” (entre aspas) utilizada neste texto é uma categoria nativa que se refere aos integrantes do tráfico de drogas na Região Metropolitana do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, distanciando-se de qualquer possibilidade de relação com a categoria movimentos sociais.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

until one of the daughters of the owner of the terreiro opened the door and talked to the boys in the movement.

After this incident, we head to the house of the last person to be notified of that weekend's giro. Just around the corner, we found an old house that appeared to be abandoned, with a hipped roof structure and a balcony. In it, a group of sixteen young people who were probably related to the movement gathered. The mansion was located on a high part of the street, constituting a strategic point to view any passerby on the main street that gave access to the Mutondo and Estrela do Norte neighborhoods. To go to the house of the late Fióte, we had to pass in front of the big house. We arrived at an extensive plot of land that contained a set of four houses, all distributed among Fióte's children. The person who attended us was Mauro, a 50-year-old man who moved when talking to Smoke. He reported that, after his father's death, "the house was thirteen years old and did not receive any revelry". He assured us that he would let the community know about the visit of the Folia de Reis. In this case, informing the community would involve not only the neighbors, but the children of the movement.

On the way back to the headquarters, we went through the street that gave access to the Estrela do Norte neighborhood, I was tense by the situation and asked the teacher if it would be okay to make the *giro* in that place on the weekend at dawn. Fumaça answered me:

Look, Folia de Reis has always been to places like this. If we get scared, we don't even leave the house. But what we do is a mission! Of course, if the things is getting worse, people give us a call and tell us not to get involved! Ouch! In this case, we're not going with the flag there this year, we'll leave it for next year. Because the devotee must also receive the King!

We cannot lose sight of the fact that the accomplishments of the revelry giros are a *sacred misfortune*. When asked, the master uses this argument to emphasize the religious character of his ritual practice. The practices of the visits are the "tactics" used by the master, but the protection of the holy angels and the Holy Kings is fundamental for the master and his revelers "to put the *flag* on the street".

Definitely, these positions taken by the master and his hosts are not just the fulfillment of the recommendations generated by the "movement", but orders that show the coercibility of those who want to maintain the hegemonic domain of the region. I understand this violent control (in the sense of violating human rights) by the "movement" on the outskirts of big cities as the "strategy" of Certeau (1994).

I call strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relations that becomes possible from the moment a subject of will and power (a company, an army, a scientific institution) can be isolated. Strategy postulates a place susceptible of being circumscribed as something

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

of its own and being the base from which relationships can be managed with an exteriority of targets and threats [...] (Certeau, 1994: 99).

They are mechanisms of control, domain and maintenance of time-space guaranteed by the coercive presence of the Foucaultian panopticon (Certeau, 1994: 99) embodied by the “trafficking soldiers”. It is important to emphasize here that such dispute for the occupation of these marginalized regions does not occur due to the complete abandonment of the State, as all areas of the municipalities are the stage of continuous struggles for the public and political uses of the city. These peripheral regions reveal themselves as border areas that can be understood as the “edge of the State”, spaces for creative uses of networks, occupation of space, circulation of things and people (Das; Poole, 2008):

Paradoxically, it is in these exception spaces where the creativity of the margins is visible; it is here where alternative forms of economic and political action are instituted. To suggest that the margins are spaces for creativity is not to decide that the forms that politics and the economy acquire in these, which are generally formed by the need to survive, are not loaded with terrible dangers (Das; Poole, 2008: 34).

We also need to understand that a basic structure for the retail drug trade is needed that guarantees the maintenance of the coercive strategy of the gangs. According to Antônio Rafael Barbosa: “Crime resembles the greatest part of neoliberal enterprises. There needs to be a State, but a certain type of state functioning that allows the development of its activities” (Barbosa, 2017: not paged).

And it is in the midst of this coercive and violent environment that the Folia de Reis of the Metropolitan Region of the state circulate. Within this complex framework, those in vows wield and receive the *flag*, creating their mechanisms of action to carry out the *sacred mission*. I return to the analytical categories of Michel de Certeau (1994) to understand the plans of Mestre Fumaça and the tricks of residents of peripheral areas as “tactics” for circulation in their neighborhoods, even though these are conflict zones.

In short, tactics are the art of the weak. [...] The greater a power, the less it can allow to mobilize a part of its means to produce cunning effects: it is indeed dangerous to use considerable numbers for appearances, while this kind of “demonstrations” is generally useless and “seriousness of bitter necessity makes direct action so urgent that it leaves no room for this game.” Power is tied to its visibility. On the contrary, cunning is possible for the weak, often just it, as the “last resort”: “The weaker the forces submitted to strategic direction, the more they will be subject to cunning”.

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

As I was able to demonstrate in the cases of Mrs. Lourdes, in Mãe Rosinha yard and in the family of the late Fióte, the tactics of the hosts of *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente* are an invitation to the “dealer boys”. It’s a simple action, but it allows the resident a sequence of possible maneuvers to warn, explain and negotiate with the soldiers of the drug trade the presence of revelry on the *giro* day. The ritual circuit of the *Folias de Reis* in the Metropolitan Region depends on tactics that activate networks of sociability and solidarity that guarantee the maintenance of the physical and moral integrity of all the devotees involved in this undertaking.

THE SIDEWALKS OCCUPATION

At dawn when the *giro* of the *Nova Flor do Oriente* festivities took place, we went to Chumbada via the access to the Galo Branco district. I had made my car available to take the revelers to the late Fióte’s house. On that day, the number of revelers meant that I had to make three trips by car to take them. On our first trip, we came across a long street with barricades made of old furniture in each of the three blocks we passed. Near the barricades, there were two people seated, assisted by a motorcycle rider who surrounded the car by 3 times. I had completed all the required auto tips when the driver poked his head into the car through the driver’s window. I asked him if he had been warned about the *Folia de Reis*, and he replied in the affirmative. With that, I let him know that I would have to make the journey two more times; at each, the car passed through the streets, and the barricades were removed and repositioned. Farther along, on a soccer field, a slum dance was taking place with parked sound cars playing deafening music. That day, I had contact with more than three hundred soldiers of the drug trade in celebration. Near the little field, two rows were passing with about twenty young men flaunting their weapons and holding them over their shoulders. According to Antônio Rafael Barbosa, the “ball” would be a complementary space to prisons, enabling the verticalization of hierarchical relationships as the author suggests.

In turn, the “ball” is representative of the alliances formed in a “smooth space”; cross-cutting alliances between “creation” from various locations - dealers, managers, soldiers - that provide a kind of dam to the hierarchical verticalization of relationships, by asserting the power of each one to create their own relational networks without necessarily depending on their position in the hierarchies of local groups. A space of alliances dissociated from the bonds of a disciplinary environment, a place where free men and women meet (in their possible freedom). Alliances of the future, made by young people, by those who will assume or are already assuming the leadership of the “movement” (Barbosa, 2008: 8).

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

I was able to go through the event three times without having any problems, and when I entered an alley that gave access to the house of the late Fióte, I came into contact with another dimension of protection provided by the devoted hosts: the sidewalk occupation. The deceased's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were occupying the sidewalk, talking to the sound of radio boxes that were positioned on the wall facing the street, where soft drinks and snacks were offered to us. This "frame" may seem simple, but it escapes the entire ritual context of the arrivals of the Folia de Reis. In the ritual context, residents need to be inside their houses closed with the lights off, only turning on when the revelers touch and opening the windows and doors responding to the singing according to the chanted prophecies. The sidewalk occupation was part of another logic, it was the transformation of a public territory into a private one. Family members take their seats, speakers, drinks and food, transforming the sidewalk into an extension of the house's interior space. However, the difference in this case is the "tactic" used by devoted hosts to ensure the physical and moral integrity of their visitors in a zone controlled by the dealers. This is a way of informing the community that the house is in a festive period, in addition to the "frame" of the possibility of guaranteeing the protection of the guest and controlling, as far as possible, possible conflicts with the movement's staff.

When all the members of *Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente* arrived, the devotees of the house entered, taking all their things with them and starting the visit of the revelry in those residences.

The "strategies" and "tactics" are the theoretical tools that help me to think about the articulations of revelers and hosts for the occupation of public space in the midst of conflict zones in the city, the "edge of the State". Unlike Pitt-Rivers' (2012) "laws of hospitality", which focus on the relationships between host and guest in the private space of the house, Michel de Certeau's categories provide interpretive keys for understanding the mechanisms operated by residents of the outskirts of cities for the festive occupation of the street. In this sense, the house becomes a privileged space for maintaining the festive order established by the *foundation*; on the other hand, the uncertainties provided by the risk of the street make both revelers and hosts transgress the "tradition of knowledge" that rules the Folia de Reis. But risk neither excludes nor makes it impossible to fulfill the *sacred mission*; for the *foundation*, the imminent danger in the pilgrimages complements and institutes the mythical narratives about the baby Jesus birth, the Holy Family and the Holy Kings. In the Hagiography of the Three Wise Men, Emperor Herod puts his soldiers on the trail of pilgrims to discover and murder Christ. The Holy Family also flees to Egypt after being warned by the Mages of Herod's plans. Thus, the street scratches are inserted in the time and space of the foundation; as Roger Caillois (2015) warns us, danger reveals the violent character inserted in the mythical festival of Foliás de Reis. The "tactics" used by the master and his hosts to circulate and receive the flag are the

13 | Nas palavras do autor: "Todos os excessos são permitidos, pois deles mesmos, como também dos desperdícios, das orgias e das violências a sociedade espera a sua regeneração, tentando assim alcançar um vigor novo da explosão e do esgotamento" (Caillois, 2015: 41-42).

Hosts in the metropolitan region of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

practices that inscribe in the physical plane – through the bodies crossed by devotion – the metaphysical *foundation* of the Foliás de Reis.

CONCLUSION

The ritual cycle of Foliás de Reis puts people, saints, objects, promises, blessings and gifts into circulation. And, to account for the diversity present in this devotion, I proposed to analyze the appropriations of the *foundation* made by the master and the hosts of the Bandeira Nova Flor do Oriente. I demonstrated how the “knowledge traditions” are guaranteed through their transmission and maintenance by the chanting of *prophecies*. Regarding this issue, the *giro* revelry turns allow the kings and their hosts to insert themselves in the cosmology of the Holy Kings, making the house a double space: the birth and the announcement of the coming of the child God.

I tried to analyze ethnographically the obstacles faced in the processions of the devotees, since the circulation of the Foliás de Reis in the Metropolitan Region of the State of Rio de Janeiro occurs, mainly, in the outskirts. Are performed in conflict zones controlled by the coercive power of drug trafficking. But the ritual space-time also reveals the mechanisms and tricks of the inhabitants of these areas: it is through them that the saint circulates and distributes his blessings and protection.

The moment revelers and devotees occupy the street and the house, they become extensions of each other. More than a devotional occupation, these religious festivities allow us to see micropolitical performances of “uses of the city” (Certeau, 1994). Even though peripheral regions suffer from the ostensible presence of violence caused by drug trafficking, this article proposes to point out mechanisms of action of devoted hosts for the maintenance of their religious practices. Actuations as the sidewalks occupation and communication with the “dealers boys” are crucial for the realization of the Foliás de Reis tours through the Metropolitan Region.

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