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TRAVELING RITUALS:
AZOREAN HOLY GHOST FESTIVALS IN SOUTHEASTERN NEW
ENGLAND¹

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The scene is a large room. There are two laptop computers and a printer on a table between piles of print outs of lists and photocopies of maps downloaded from "Yahoo". Two cell phones can also be seen. The two computer screens have an Access file open with names, addresses, more names and credits and debits in English. Three men sit at

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the table; two of them are unshaven and blurry-eyed as if they had been up all night. The third has just come out of the shower – his hair still wet – and looks freshly shaven. Laid out on nearby tables are rows of raw meat hygienically sealed in transparent plastic bags, different types of breads and biscuits on small plastic plates and bottles of wine. This food is being loaded onto pick-ups and will be delivered door-to-door by teams of two men, who, equipped with lists and maps, will sort out with their cell phones problems they might have about finding the way.

In this hectic scenario with dozens of people rushing about, orders and counter orders, cars coming and going, the most surprising element is the way in which these visible signs of technology and modernity blend with practices and representations linked to tradition and roots.

Indeed, what I have just described is the general atmosphere surrounding the distribution of *pensões* – the Portuguese name given to a gift of raw meat, sweetbread, and red wine – that are part of the *Império Mariense*, a Holy Ghost festival organized by Marienses – the Portuguese name given to the Azorean immigrants from the island of Santa Maria ² – who live in East Providence, a city in the state of Rhode Island, where 35% of the population have an Azorean origin. The sophisticated and ultra-modern equipment mentioned – computers, data basis, cellular phones – is thus used within the framework of a ritual, the Holy Ghost festival, which aims at recreating a rural tradition saturated with ethnographic references.

Continuity and change, tradition and innovation are indissolubly entwined here. This article seeks precisely to explore the dialectics between continuity and change, between

² The Azores is an archipelago of nine islands in the mid-Atlantic belonging to Portugal. Approximately 240,000 inhabitants live in the islands. Santa Maria, a small island with an area of 97 Km², has a

tradition and innovation, as demonstrated in the Mariense Holy Ghost festival of East Providence. After addressing these dialectics of ritual continuity and change as reflected in the formal structure of East Providence Mariense Holy Ghost festivals, the paper links these dialectics to the transnational and bifocal identities of *Mariense* immigrants, which also affect, it is argued, the socio-cultural meanings of the ritual and its connections to the cyclical assertion and reinforcement of networks of social relationships. In the concluding section, I turn to Stuart Hall's characterization of diasporic identities as anchored both in Tradition and Translation as a way of understanding the hybridity of Mariense Holy Ghost festivals in the US.

“Back Home”: Holy Ghost festivals and tradition

Holy Ghost festivals have played an extremely important role in the processes related to the construction of identity among Azorean immigrants. This role must be seen as a result of the great importance that these festivals have in Azorean religious, cultural and social life⁸ Holy Ghost festivals are celebrated in every parish of the Azorean archipelago and are indeed a central element in the religious and social lives of the Azorean population. They are also a ritual which has been central to the identity of individuals and groups in the Azores.

population of approximately 5,000. Throughout the paper I will use the Portuguese adjective “Mariense” to refer to people (or things) from the island of Santa Maria.

⁸ For further information on this topic, cf. Leal 1994.

Re-created in the USA, Holy Ghost festivals have played an important role in the maintenance of symbolic ties between the immigrants and the homeland. They have also been an active element in the construction of a sense of community among the immigrants and an important symbol of Azorean and Azorean-American ethnicity.

The figures available show the importance of the Holy Ghost festivals in the Azorean diaspora. According to information provided by the directors of the *Grandes Festas do Divino Espírito Santo* of Fall River – an annual festival that brings together Holy Ghost brotherhoods from all over New England – there are seventy Holy Ghost brotherhoods active in the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Holy Ghost festivals are celebrated every weekend between Holy Ghost Sunday and the beginning of September in both states, and in several weekends there are Holy Ghost festivals taking place at three or four different neighborhoods⁸.

This re-creation of Holy Ghost festivals in the US, which began during the first wave of migration and reached its peak during the 1960s and 1970s, has followed certain patterns.

The most important of these patterns is connected to the segmentary nature of the process. In fact, in the Azores, group identity is structurally linked to two major geographical and social units: the parish and the island. Although people also identify themselves as Azorean, this more general level of identification is somehow recent and coexists with a stronger sense of loyalty towards the island and the parish. Immigration has reinforced the importance of these loyalties. Indeed, both the access to the American green card and settlement in the US were greatly dependent on pre-existing social

⁸ Holy Ghost festivals are also of great importance among the Azoreans immigrants in California. Cf.

Goulart (2002).

networks which were operative at the level of the parish, or, in the case of smaller islands, at the level of the island.

It is precisely this segmentary logic that presides over the re-creation of Azorean Holy Ghost Festivals in the US. Apart from the recently created pan-Azorean *Grandes Festas do Divino Espírito Santo* of Fall River, Holy Ghost festivals in the US have been re-created as festivals organized by groups of immigrants coming from specific Azorean islands and/or parishes.

Mariense *Impérios*, or Holy Ghost festivals organized by immigrants coming from the island of Santa Maria, are a good example of this trend. The first Mariense *Império* in the US was founded in 1927 by immigrants from Santa Maria who had arrived during the “first immigration”. It was founded in Saugus, which is currently a northern suburb of Boston, by a group of immigrants from Santa Maria who had settled in Cambridge (Boston, MA). Other *Impérios* were launched during the “second immigration” in other towns of New England: in Hartford, CT, in 1976; in Hudson, MA, where the Mariense represent 80% of the local Azorean population, in 1978; and, more recently, in Bridgewater, MA.⁹

The East Providence Holy Ghost festival is part of this pattern of re-creation of Mariense *Impérios* in New England towns with significant groups of immigrants from Santa Maria. Indeed, among East Providence Azorean population of 15,000, who comes mainly from the island of São Miguel, there is also a small group of 1,000 immigrants from Santa Maria.

⁹ There are also records of a Mariense *Império* taking place in Taunton, MA in the 1970s, but this festival has apparently come to an end.

Initiated in 1986, the *Império* was founded by some of the more active members of the Mariense community in East Providence. One of its founders, Manuel Braga, wrote a detailed account of the foundation of the *Império*:

On the day of the *Império Mariense* in Connecticut [in 1986], José P. Cunha and José M. Resendes [two immigrants from Santa Maria living in East Providence] went out to have some Holy Ghost soup, and were nostalgically recalling the Mariense Holy Ghost festivals of the past. As they were talking to one another, they suddenly came to the conclusion that they too could also organize an *Império* in East Providence. Although the Mariense population there was rather small, all that was needed was good will.

José P. Cunha spoke to John Medina, who thought that the idea was a good one, and then they both spoke to Manuel F. Braga, João F. Braga, João L. Marques, José M. Braga and Manuel S. Braga. They had a first meeting but were too few to be able to appoint a committee. They decided then to appeal to all the Marienses in East Providence and surrounding areas to see if they could set up a committee to start off the project they had in mind.

As a result eighteen people (...) turned up and a committee was appointed. (...) The committee (...) held a general meeting in which 38 people took part and approved a plan for the launching of the association they intended to form. The association was registered so that they could take the first steps towards organizing a Holy Ghost festival. While some people thought that the first festival should be held in 1987, others insisted that the *Império* should take place that very same year, which was 1986. This issue divided both the committee and the general meeting. Voting took place and the majority decided that the first *Império* should take place that year (Braga s/d: 1).

The association – which currently has 200 members – was named Mariense Holy Ghost Brotherhood. First, the *Império* took place on the premises of other Holy Ghost Brotherhoods in East Providence, but in 1998 the Mariense Brotherhood moved into its own premises, located at the Mariense Cultural Center. As well as organizing other

activities, such as dinners based on traditional Mariense menus, the Brotherhood also rents out the premises for a number of events, such as weddings, showers, etc., organized by Azorean immigrants who live in East Providence.

However, the main activity of the Brotherhood is, of course, the *Império Mariense*, which, takes place, since 1998, in the first weekend of July.

The structure of the East Providence festival is directly inspired by *Impérios* back home.¹⁰ Thus, as in Santa Maria, the Holy Ghost is symbolized by a silver crown, topped by a dove, which is part of a ceremonial kit, also composed by a scepter and a tray, both in silver. The main protagonist of the festival is the *imperador* (literally “emperor”), who is helped by some twenty to thirteen *ajudantes* (literally “those who help” [the emperor] or “assistants” [to the emperor]). Among those *ajudantes* are the so called *ajudantes grados* (literally “major assistants”): the *trinchante* (literally “carver”), the *mestre sala* (literally “master of ceremonies”) and two *briadores* (from *vereador*, literally “councilor”). One of the more important *ajudantes* of the *Império* is the *pagem de mesa* (literally “table page”), who is a child, usually an *imperador*’s son, nephew or grandson. During the festival, music is provided for by the *folia*, a traditional musical group composed of three musicians. In the East Providence festival, the *folia* is backed by one or two Portuguese-American brass bands.

As in Santa Maria, the most important occasion of the *Império* is the so-called *dia de Império* (literally “the day of the *Império*”), which takes place on a Sunday. Among the ceremonies that take place on *dia de Império*, the most important one is the *coroação* (literally “crowning”). This ceremony, which is preceded and followed by two

¹⁰ Since the specific contents of *Impérios* in the five parishes of the island of Santa Maria, present some diversity, the East Providence festival uses as its main source of inspiration the *Impérios* of the parish of Santo Espírito.

processions, usually takes place at the end of mass and consists in the crowning of the *imperador* by the priest. After the mass, and throughout the day, a number of distributions of food, open to all who wish to join the celebration, also take place. Inside the premises of the Mariense Cultural Center, *Sopas do Espírito Santo* (literally “Holy Ghost Soup”), a soup made of beef and wheat bread, are served. Outside, the *ajudantes grados* are in charge of distributing, throughout the day, slices of *massa sovada* (sweet bread) and glasses of red wine to anyone who asks for them. In the morning, usually before the mass, Holy Ghost Soup is also delivered door to door to some 20 to 30 old or sick people who cannot attend the *Império*. Finally, just as in Santa Maria, the celebrations of *dia de Império* also include musical attractions and several stalls with food and drinks.

Besides *dia de Império* celebrations, East Providence Holy Ghost festivals also include, as in Santa Maria, a number of preliminary ceremonies and celebrations. In the week prior to *dia de Império*, the rosary is prayed each night at the *imperador*'s house, where the crown is kept in a decorated altar. Meals are also offered to the assistants, especially in connection with the preparation of the food at the Mariense Cultural Center. On the eve of *dia de Império*, finally, a procession carries the crown from the *imperador*'s house to the Mariense Cultural Center.

Every Mariense involved in the celebrations insists on how scrupulously the ritual sequence of the *Impérios* back home is replicated by the East Providence festival. This idea was strongly emphasized to me by the directors of the Mariense Holy Ghost Brotherhood during our first conversation, in May 2000, at the Mariense Cultural Center. In a room decorated with nostalgic photographs of wheat threshing, maize harvest and *Impérios* of the 1950s, I was told that the aim of the *Império Mariense* was to produce a copy of the *Impérios* of Santa Maria. One of the directors even suggested

that in East Providence the Mariense *Império* was more faithful to Mariense tradition than most of *Impérios* in contemporary Santa Maria: “perhaps we are better organized than they are there”. This idea, which is recurrent in other diasporic contexts, was constantly repeated to me during my fieldwork: “it is here, in this side of the ocean, that tradition is alive”, “tradition in Santa Maria is coming to an end”, “*Impérios* here are more complete [than in Santa Maria]”, etc.

The traditionalist claims of many Marienses in East Providence emphasize, on the one hand, the alleged fidelity of the general sequence of the festival to the original sequence of *Impérios* back home. Simultaneously, the authenticity of the local *Império* is also argued by pointing out how certain specific sequences of the original Mariense Holy Ghost festivals, viewed as more typical or traditional, can be found in the US. That is the case of a ceremony called *provimento da mesa* (an expression that can be translated as “opening the meal”), which, in *dia de Império*, initiates the distribution of slices of sweet bread and red wine. Many people gather to watch the ceremony, which is minutely regulated, and their comments stress the way in which the whole ceremony is performed according to the traditional requisites. That is also the case of the so-called *caldo da meia-noite* (literally “midnight broth”), a distribution of Holy Ghost soups that takes place at the eve of *dia de Império*. Viewed as one of the most picturesque sequences of the *Impérios* back home, its performance in East Providence becomes a means for claiming authenticity and fidelity to tradition for the local *Império Mariense*. The debates about the genuineness of the flavor of Holy Ghost soups, the comments about the musical performance of the *folia*, whose members sometimes come from Santa Maria, are further proofs of this strict and constant monitoring of the authenticity of the ritual both by the organizers and by the audience. What seems to be at stake is the way in which several meaningful details of the ritual are able to reproduce the “genuine

tradition of the *Impérios* of Santa Maria”, thus enhancing the authenticity of a ritual which is viewed as a faithful facsimile of the original *Impérios* of Santa Maria.

This traditionalist discourse is also the driving force behind some small changes that have been introduced in the East Providence festival in order to make it look more authentic. This is the case of the decorated arches that are put on top of the pick-ups that are used to distribute the *pensões*; these arches are inspired by similar arches which, in Santa Maria, decorate the ox carts which are prominent in some *Impérios* processions. This is also the case of the small Holy Ghost flags that the assistants carry with them when they distribute the *pensões*. Although these small flags are also used in Santa Maria, they are used in a different ritual context. Thus, in both cases, actual transformations in the ritual are legitimated by recourse to tradition.

The continuation and future of tradition is also one of the main concerns of the activists involved in the organization of the East Providence Holy Ghost festivals. As in other contexts, there are constant complaints that “youngsters no longer want to have anything to do with tradition” and the musical program of the *Império* is directed towards young people, in an effort to contradict the so-called “law of the second-generation”, according to which assimilation into US society and culture and the consequent distancing from homeland is the prevailing tendency among the children of first-generation immigrants.¹¹ To this effect, younger musical artists and groups, whose repertoires are not so much associated with Portuguese music, are usually invited to

¹¹ One of the canonical formulations of the law of the second-generation was proposed by Hansen.

According to him, the second-generation immigrant “wanted to forget everything: the foreign language that left an unmistakable accent in English speech, the religion that continually recalled childhood struggles, the family customs that should have been the happiest of all memories” (Hansen 1996[1938]: 204). Cf. Kivisto and Blanck (1990) for a reevaluation of Hansen’s thesis. Cf. also Portes & Rumbaut (1996: 232-268 and 2001) for current debates on second-generation.

perform. A special celebration directed and performed by children has been also launched in 1998 as part of the festival in order to “teach them so that they may continue the tradition”. Inspired on the *Impérios de Crianças* (literally “Children’s *Impérios*”) that take place in Santa Maria on Saint John’s day¹², this celebration is a kind of small-scale *Império*, in which children themselves carry out all the preparations and ritual sequences of an *Império*.

“Away from Home”: innovation in the Holy Ghost festivals

Despite all the emphasis put on tradition and on fidelity to the original ritual, East Providence Holy Ghost festivals are strongly affected by change, innovation and cultural creativity. Hidden behind the purity that the participants demand for the ritual, one can also find contamination, impurities and transformations.

First of all, these transformations affect the organizational structure of the celebrations. One of the major changes relates to the weakening of the role of *imperador* as the main organizer and sponsor of the festival. In Santa Maria *Impérios* are the direct result of individual promises made to the Holy Ghost which exchange the favor solicited and granted to the individual for an *Império*. Although the community also participates actively in the funding of the festival, it is the *imperador* who assumes the basic responsibility for its organization and funding. The share of the *imperador* in the financing of an *Império* represents indeed between 40% and 70% of the total expenses, which in the 1980s amounted to € 1,500,000. Through the appointment of a special assistant known as the *copeiro* (literally “butler”), the *imperador* has also a decisive role in the organization of the festival.

¹² Cf. Leal (1984: 58) on Mariense *Impérios de Crianças*

In East Providence, however, this double role of the *imperador* as the sponsor and the main organizer of the festival has substantially weakened. His role becomes basically a ceremonial one and his organizational and funding responsibilities are transferred to the board of the Brotherhood. In financial terms, while the *imperador* usually pays for the meat needed for the preparation of the Holy Ghost soup, the bulk of expenses of the *Império*, which can amount to some \$30,000, is borne by the Brotherhood. It is also the board of directors of the Brotherhood that chooses and supervises the assistants of the *Império*, except for the *ajudantes grados* and the *pagem de mesa*, who are generally chosen by the *imperador* among his closer family. Finally, in the event that there are no promises, it is the Brotherhood directors who choose the *imperador* from among their members.

A second group of transformations is related to the ritual sequence of the Mariense *Impérios*. Apart from some minor alterations, the major change has been the introduction into the sequence of the festivals of the so-called *domingas* (“domingas” is the feminine plural of “domingo”, the Portuguese name for Sunday) This is the name given to a set of preliminary ceremonies that precede the actual *Império*. These ceremonies take place during each of the seven weeks prior to *dia de Império*. Each *dominga* has its *mordomo*, who keeps the Holy Ghost crown at his house for one week. During the week, a number of rosaries take place at the *mordomo*’s house, and, on Sunday, after the mass, a lunch is usually held at the Mariense Cultural Center. This lunch is attended by 50 to 150 guests and, besides other courses, must also include Holy Ghost soup. At the end of the meal, items offered by the guests are auctioned. The profits, which may amount to \$3,000, revert on behalf of the Mariense *Império*. *Mordomos* are usually chosen among those who volunteer for the job and the expenses associated with the *domingas* are usually supported by the respective *mordomo*.

Another major change in the ritual contents of the *Impérios* is the introduction of the distribution of *pensões* mentioned at the beginning of this paper. This distribution consists of a door-to-door distribution of a *pensão* composed of raw beef (5 lbs), wheat bread, sweet bread, biscuits, and a bottle of red wine. These *pensões* are given in return to all those who have previously made gifts of \$25 to the *Império*. These gifts, which can at times be as many as 700, represent an important part of the revenues of the *Império*. Besides these standard *pensões*, there are also the *pensões grandes* (literally “large *pensões*”) usually numbering between 30 to 40. These *pensões grandes*, which include also a bigger piece of raw beef and one *pão leve* (a kind of sponge-cake), are given in return to those who made gifts of over \$250 to the *Império*. The distribution of *pensões* takes place one week before *dia de Império* and, as we have seen, is carried out by groups of two assistants carrying a small Holy Ghost flag.¹³

Finally, a third group of changes relates to some ritual forms of the *Império*. These changes are particularly relevant in connection to the organization of processions. New figures, such as the *rainha da festa* (literally the “festival queen”), and her maids of honor, have been added. Local authorities are also represented in the processions. More Holy Ghost silver crowns, as well as several Holy Ghost banners and flags, have also been introduced into the ritual. Underpinning this series of changes, is the desire to add a more spectacular tone to the *Império* processions. As a consequence, they now have their own organizing committee directly appointed by the board of directors of the Mariense Brotherhood.

¹³ Although there is a similar distribution of food in Santa Maria, both its name – *irmandade* [literally “brotherhood”] – and its main characteristics are very different from *pensões*. In East Providence as a

Transnationalism and bifocal identities

To sum up: Mariense *Impérios* in East Providence are as much about tradition as they are about innovation. This apparently contradictory anchorage in both tradition and innovation reflects the ambiguous and contradictory status that characterize Mariense migrants in the US. As in the case of other Azorean communities in New England, the Mariense community can indeed be seen as an ethnic community, unstably located between the country of origin and the host country. It is a transnational community in the sense that Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) use this concept, through which they characterize the structural ambiguity of the identity of migrants, and the way in which they are as involved with the host country as they are with their country of origin, maintaining multiple relations and identities that cross national borders.

As the Mexican immigrants studied by Roger Rouse, Mariense immigrants have thus become

skilled exponents of a cultural bifocality that defies reduction to a singular order. Indeed, in many respects (...) they [too] have come to inhabit a kind of border zone, especially if we follow Américo Paredes in recognizing that a border is ‘not simply a line on a map but, more fundamentally,... a sensitized area where two cultures or two political systems come face to face’” (Rouse 2002[1991]: 163).

The traditionalist dimension of *Impérios* is connected to the importance that the homeland has for the identity of Mariense migrants, viewed as bifocal transmigrants. Celebrating tradition, they try to recreate the homeland in the host country, thus injecting a dose of Azoreanness into the lives of people and groups who, despite living in the US, also live in the Azores. The innovative side of *Impérios* is about creating ties

result of the introduction of *pensões*, *irmandade* has lost its former importance; the same occurs in the Mariense *Impérios* of Bridgewater, Hudson and Saugus.

with the host country and adjusting a traditional discourse to a new socio-cultural context, to its codes and representations. It is about that other side of the transnational condition of migrant communities constituted by the links to the country where the immigrants have chosen to live. In that sense, East Providence *Impérios* – like the stories that the immigrants mentioned by Svetlana Boym tell about the diasporic objects they have at home – “reveal more about making a home abroad, than about reconstructing the original loss” of home (Boym 2001: 328).

Thus, some of the changes introduced in the ritual sequence of *Impérios* can be seen as a means of adapting them to the constraints, expectations and codes of the larger Azorean-American community the Mariense immigrants have joined. In fact, as I have mentioned before, the Azorean-American community in New England is dominated by Micaelenses, i.e., by immigrants coming from the island of São Miguel, which is the most important island of the archipelago of the Azores. As a consequence, Micaelenses control most immigrant organizations and the majority of local political leaders are also recruited among them. The ritual and festive calendar of the Azorean-American community is also strongly influenced by distinctive aspects of Micaelense folk culture, such as *Romarias Quaresmais* (Lent processions which exist only in São Miguel) or the cult of *Senhor Santo Cristo* (Holy Christ, the Lord). In the case of the Holy Ghost festivals, the Micalense influence means that the Micaelense variant is the dominant variant of Holy Ghost festivals all over New England.¹⁴ This means that not only the majority of New England Holy Ghost festivals are organized by Micaelense brotherhoods according to the São Miguel variant, but that Holy Ghost festivals organized by immigrants coming from other Azorean islands are strongly influenced by the Micaelense variant.

¹⁴ For a presentation of the Micaelense variant of Holy Ghost festivals, cf. Leal (1994: 182-185).

That is precisely the case of the Mariense *Impérios*. Indeed, some of the changes that have been introduced to the *Impérios* can be seen as the direct result of the influence of the Micaelense way of celebrating the Holy Ghost. That is the case of the changes that have affected the organizational structure of the *Impérios*. In fact, the increased importance of the Brotherhood in the organization of the festival at the detriment of the *imperador*, the introduction of *domingas* and *pensões*, are all changes that reflect the importance that these three aspects have in São Miguel Holy Ghost festivals.

So, while reflecting tradition and preserving specific Mariense characteristics, the *Impérios* have also underwent transformations that tend to adapt them to the new ethnic context where they are now performed.

Besides being dominated by Micaelense immigrants, this new ethnic context is also a context where an active dialogue with US culture is often engaged. It is from this point of view that the changes concerning the processions can be analyzed. These changes can indeed be viewed as a result of a process of adoption of the conventions and norms surrounding the “parade”, viewed as an US specific genre of marching.¹⁵ The influence of this pattern is particularly evident in the presence of the Portuguese, US and Azorean flags at the head of the parade, closely followed by several representatives of local political authorities such as state representatives, the mayor and other members of the City Council, and members of the School Committee. The introduction of new characters, such as “the festival queen” and maids of honor, also reflect the influence of the US pattern of parade.

In this case, innovation in the *Impérios* reflect how Mariense immigrants, as other sub-groups of the Azorean-American community, while using the their traditions in order to

¹⁵ On the “parade” as an American genre of marching, see, for instance, Ryan (1989).

celebrate their country of origin, have also entered into an active dialogue with their host country.

Other aspects of the festival also illustrate the importance of this dialogue with US culture. That is the case of the choice of artists invited to perform at the *Império*. Along with folkloric groups, who are supposed to perform and enact Portuguese or Azorean tradition, American pop music and rock and roll artists are also invited. The assortment of “homeland flavors” and “fast food” in the stalls is another example of this coexistence between the cult of roots and innovative cultural blending. Alongside the *malassadas*, *caçoila*, smoked sausage and other Azorean traditional dishes, one can also find hot dogs, hamburgers and other US snacks.

To sum up, behind tradition, which connect the immigrants to their country of origin, lies innovation, which relates them to the new ethnic context and to American culture. *Impérios*, as the immigrants themselves, are unstably located in the intersection of distinct cultural universes between which their protagonists and their audience move. The same bifocality that characterizes the migrant condition also characterizes Mariense *Impérios*.

Kinship, neighborhood, work and community: old and new forms of sociability

I have demonstrated elsewhere (Leal 1994) that *Impérios* in Santa Maria are an important ritual tool for the cyclical assertion and reinforcement of networks of social relationships. This dimension of *Impérios* is strongly connected to the language of gift and reciprocity. It is through gifts and counter-gifts of food, through meals and other forms of food sharing that *Impérios* in Santa Maria contribute to the reassertion of social ties within family, kin, neighborhood, and larger social units such as the parish or the island.

Mariense Holy Ghost festivals in the US keep this vital sociological dimension. However, their role in the cyclical reassertion of social ties is also strongly affected by the dialectic between tradition and innovation that I have been addressing.

Thus, in the US, *Impérios* continue to have – just as in Santa Maria – a fundamental role in the reinforcement of family and kinship ties.

Kinship is indeed central to the understanding of the social dynamics of the Mariense Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is directed by two main bodies: the executive committee and the board of directors. The first has five members elected for one year and the second has nine members who serve two-year mandates; four of the mandates in the board of directors are renewed on even-numbered years while the other five are renewed on odd-numbered years. Whereas the executive committee is in charge of the executive administration of the Brotherhood and, most of all, of the organization of the *Império*, the board of directors is a kind of fiscal council with a great authority in financial areas.

One of the most relevant aspects in the composition of these two bodies is the fact that the majority of their members belong to one of three “extended” Mariense families, usually designated by their respective last names: the “Amarals”, the “Sousas” and the “Bragas”. As a result, these families are viewed as essential to the very operation of the Mariense Brotherhood and of the *Império*.

The language of kinship is also important for the annual organization of the *Império*. Indeed, although his actual functions in East Providence are less relevant than in Santa Maria, for the accomplishment of his ritual duties the *imperador* is also strongly dependent, on the language of kinship. Some of his assistants are chosen among his close relatives, especially in the case of the major assistants of the “festival queen” and her maids of honor. Female members of the *imperador*’s family play an important role

in the preparation of food for the festival. *Impérios* are also important occasions for the reunion of relatives of the *imperador* living in different areas of the US and Canada.

Finally, the language of kinship is also important in the *domingas*. On the one hand, many of those who help to prepare the food for the Sunday lunch are relatives of the *mordomo* in charge of the *dominga*. On the other hand, most of the guests to these Sunday lunches are also relatives of the *mordomo* or of his wife.

Thus, like in Santa Maria, the East Providence *Impérios* continue to provide a relevant context for the cyclical strengthening of kinship ties. From this point of view, they do not only share strong similarities with the *Impérios* “back home”, but also show the enduring importance of kinship among Mariense immigrants.

Mariense *Impérios* in East Providence are also strongly linked to the ritual assertion of the island as a major social unit in Azorean social life. Besides the fact that the majority of the members and directors of the Mariense brotherhood share a common Mariense background, several other aspects of the *Império* also show the importance of Marienses in the organization of the festival. The participation of Mariense immigrants, both through *pensões* and through *pensões grandes*, is also of great importance.¹⁶ Finally, in the door-to-door distribution of Holy Ghost Soup that takes place in the morning of *dia de Império*, the majority of soups handed out were for Marienses.

The importance of Santa Maria is also stressed by the policy of inter-visits of the East Providence brotherhood. Holy Ghost brotherhoods in New England usually send delegations, consisting of board members and the *imperador*, to a selected number of Holy Ghost festivals with which they have a more close relationship. In the case of the

¹⁶ Ten percent of the number of *pensões* – 84 out of a total 700 in 2001 – come from Mariense immigrants. The contribution of Marienses is of even greater importance in the case of *pensões grandes*; in 2001, out of a total of 27 of these *pensões*, 21 came from individuals born in Santa Maria.

East Providence *Império*, this inter-visit policy gives preference to other Mariense *Impérios* in New England, such as the *Impérios* of Hartford, CT, and Bridgewater, MA. Finally, the importance of Santa Maria in the East Providence *Império* can also be found in the way in which the celebrations of *dia de Império* bring together Mariense immigrants from several areas of the US. In the past, when there was only one Mariense *Império* in the US, that *Império*, which took place in Saugus, MA was the rallying point of the Mariense diaspora in North America. But, even today, with a total of five Mariense *Impérios* taking place in the US, Mariense *Impérios* in general and the East Providence *Império* in particular, continue to be attended by hundreds of Mariense immigrants living in the US who join to celebrate their common ties to homeland. Bus excursions to visit the different *Impérios* are often organized, and, in some cases, the realization of an *Império* provides the occasion for more formal gatherings of Mariense immigrants in the US. This was the case in 2002 of the third “Bairos” meeting¹⁷ in the US, which brought together over 200 people and took place in Hudson, MA on the same day as the local Mariense *Império*.

Thus, like in Santa Maria, *Impérios* keep, under the new immigrant conditions, a strong localist dimension, reasserting the importance of the island as an important framework for individual and group identity. They can thus be viewed as a celebration of the deterritorialized Mariense community in the US.

But at the same time that they maintain strong connections to social ties and groups related to the country of origin, Mariense *Impérios* have been also affected by the new sociological environment in the host country.

¹⁷ “Bairos” is a very common last name in Santa Maria and there are many people who argue that it is a last name that can only be found in Santa Maria or among people of Mariense ancestry.

The most relevant modification in this respect is the decline of the importance of the parish in the organization of Mariense *Impérios*. Indeed, in Santa Maria, the parish is one of the fundamental social units for the promotion of Holy Ghost festivals (cf. in particular Leal 1994: 107-127). However, in the US, due mainly to the low figures of Mariense immigration, the home parish loses its importance as a main locus for the social identification of individuals and groups. The decline of the importance that the language of neighborhood has in *Impérios* back home must also be noted. Indeed, both *vizinhos de perto* (close neighbors) and hamlet neighbors are fundamental to the working of *Impérios* in Santa Maria (cf. in particular Leal 1994: 77-104). In the 1960s and 1970s, when Azorean immigrants used to concentrate in densely populated ethnic enclaves, relations of neighborhood kept some importance in the social networks of the Mariense diaspora. But with the recent suburbanisation of a large number of immigrants, neighborhood has lost its importance. As a result, the influence of the language of neighborhood in Mariense *Impérios* in the US has also substantially declined.

At the same time, new social networks, closely linked to the new American social and cultural environment, have acquired an important role in East Providence Mariense *Impérios*. That is the case of social networks based at the workplace, which are absent

in *Impérios* in Santa Maria, but that, in the US *Impérios*, have become very important. This importance of the workplace is particularly evident in *pensões*. Indeed, outside the Mariense circle, the great majority of *pensões* – almost 500 out of a total of 700 – circulate among the Azorean work mates of the directors and other activists of the Mariense *Império*.

The importance of the workplace reflects the sociological importance of industrial and post-industrial forms of work: besides being a means for earning a living, work has also become, in the US and other countries, a major focus for personal identity and social relations (cf. Sennet 1999). In the case of Mariense immigrants, this sociological importance of work is reinforced by the close relationship between ethnicity and work (cf. Portes & Manning 1999: 88-96). Indeed, a number of jobs in the Azorean diaspora are ethnically oriented. That is the case of many small firms owned by Portuguese-American in sectors such as construction, gardening, garage, restaurants, which basically employ Portuguese-American workers. There are also some US companies that recruit an important part of their employees among the Azorean community. That is the case, for instance, of the American Insulated Wire Corporation, based in Pawtucket (RI). Although owned by North Americans, the company employs so many

Portuguese that it uses to send representatives to Portuguese-American events such as Portugal Day or the Fall River *Grandes Festas do Divino Espírito Santo*.

Finally, Mariense *Impérios* in the US also reflect the importance of a larger Azorean identity in the social lives of individuals and groups in the diaspora. As we have already seen, the importance of this large Azorean framework, under Micaelense aegis, is evident in some formal changes that the *Impérios* have undergone (*pensões*, *domingas*, etc.). But it is also evident in the participation of non-Mariense Azorean in *pensões* and in the celebrations of *dia de Império*.

This Azorean dimension of the Mariense *Impérios* results, on the one hand, of the mixing of Mariense immigrants with other Azorean immigrants at the workplace. But it is also a result, on the other hand, of increasing inter-marriage between Mariense and non-Mariense Azorean. This last tendency is clearly reflected among the East Providence Mariense *Império* activists. Although the Mariense are clearly dominant among these activists, there is also a significant number of non-Mariense directors and assistants who actively participate in the *Império* because they are married to people from Santa Maria. That is the case of one of the Brotherhood executive committee members in 2000, who is also one of the major financial contributors to the *Império*. Although he was born in São Miguel he is married to a woman from Santa Maria.²²

²² This Azorean dimension of the Mariense *Impérios* and also of the Mariense community is again under Micaelense aegis. The most common relations both at the workplace and through inter-marriage are those that the Mariense tend to establish with the numerically and culturally dominant group within the New England Portuguese-American community, the Micaelense.

Concluding remarks

To sum up, *Impérios* are both a ritual where homeland identities and social networks are reflected and a ritual open to new social ties and identities resulting from immigration. Like their formal sequence, the sociological meaning of *Impérios* also reflects the way in which they speak simultaneously about continuity and change, about fidelity to tradition and active accommodation to a new cultural environment.

Addressing the contemporary “fragmentation of identities”, Stuart Hall (1992: 274) – following Robbins – has stressed the way in which globalization has “a pluralizing [and contradictory] impact on identities” (ibid.: 309):

While some identities gravitate towards (...) Tradition, attempting to restore their former purity and recover the unities and certainties which are felt as being lost (...) [O]thers accept that identity is subject to the play of history, politics, representation and difference, so that they are unlikely ever again to be unitary or pure; and these consequently gravitate to what Robbins (following Homi Bhabha) calls “Translation” (ibid.).

Impérios reveal the importance that these social and cultural identities, rooted both in Tradition and Translation, have in the Mariense ethnic community:

(...) Identities (...) which are not fixed, but poised, *in transition*, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world (ibid.: 310).

At the same time that they dialogue with Tradition, these “formations of identity” – in particular those linked to diasporic cultures – are engaged in a work of Translation:

[They] Cut across and intersect natural frontiers and which are composed of people who have been *dispersed* (...) from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their

places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the trace of the particular cultures traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped (ibid.).

We hope to have shown the ways in which the East Providence Mariense Holy Ghost festival is, indeed, a good example of this dialogue between Tradition and Translation characteristic of contemporary diasporic identities.

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