

*Carnavais e outras f(r)estas: Ensaio de história social da cultura.*

Edited by maria clementina pereira cunha. Coleção Várias Histórias, vol. 13.

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The study of festivals has long been relegated to the margins of historical inquiry. In fact, theoretical structures erected by sociologists and anthropologists, which in the past tended to be universalistic and chronologically static, have kept historians from considering festivals as outward expressions of ongoing social negotiations. The authors of the articles in this volume move away from universalistic analyses and toward discussions of particulars through their careful examinations of context, change, and the multiple and criss-crossed identities and meanings that existed within these popular cultural expressions. The play on words in the title changes the word *feira* (festival) to *fresta*, which can mean either a narrow opening through which light and air can pass, or an interstice.

Both meanings of *fresta* highlight the ways in which the contributors have historicized and problematized festivals in late colonial and republican Brazil.

The collection's narrowly focused geographical scope makes only a brief nod toward breadth. It begins with two articles about carnival traditions outside of Brazil — Venice in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries and New Orleans' Mardi Gras in the nineteenth

and early twentieth — but these two pieces are not well incorporated into the rest of the book. The remaining articles concern carnivals and other festivals in Salvador, Bahia, and its environs, and in the city of Rio de Janeiro, with one additional article on carnival in Porto Alegre. The articles on carnival in Rio alone make up half of the book. In this way, the collection maintains the traditional axis of discussion about popular culture in Brazil that revolves around Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. A wider focus would have had to include the well-known festival traditions in Maranhão, Pernambuco, and Minas Gerais, as well as less well-known traditions elsewhere in Brazil. Such a wider view would have better served the organizer's purpose of moving from the universal to the particular. Nevertheless, the articles on Brazil work well together as a whole.

One of the main themes tying them together is the ways elites came to interpret popular festivals. The authors place the festivals in the path of national-level ideological debates that took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: liberal versus conservative, civilization versus barbarism, and progress versus degeneracy. For example, João José Reis's article on black festivals in Bahia examines the "civilizing" elite's concern about the threat of barbarism inherent in the *batuques*, as well as the way the regulation of *batuques* played out in the liberal-conservative debates. The theme of civilization versus barbarism is also central to the arguments of Wlamyra R. de Albuquerque and Alexandre Lazzari. Cristiana Schettini Pereira's fascinating chapter on the representation of women in the "Great Society" floats closely examines the self-proclaimed role of those societies as civilizing and educational.

The authors do not see the elite view as static and monolithic, however. On the contrary, many of the articles include some discussion about changing, and at times multiple,

elite views of festivals. The articles do not exclusively take a top-down view. Many

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authors examine the ways that the popular classes understood and took advantage of the

cracks (frestas) in elite viewpoints and actions. For example, one of Reis's most interesting points is that despite the fact that the elites continuously banned batuques in the nineteenth century, they continued to spread through the city. Likewise, Maria Clementina Pereira Cunha points out, in her essay on *zê-pereiras*, that despite their overshadowing by the "Great Societies," they continued to adapt and celebrate. Martha Abreu and Rachel Soihet demonstrate the ways in which religious festivals, with their mixture of sacred and profane activities, served to bring different segments of the population together in ways that other types of social occasions could not. Conversely, Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares and Leonardo Affonso de Miranda Pereira show that festivals were not only sites of peaceful interactions, but could also serve as platforms for the sometimes violent acting out of built-up social tensions.

The essays together make the point that festivals need to be examined by historians as the multifaceted, multivocal, and context-laden expressions that they have always been. The articles are rich in detail, carefully researched, and well argued. They are a welcome addition to a growing body of literature that brings festivals, pilgrimages, and other popular cultural expressions to the forefront of historical discourse.

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