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Ritual, transnationalism and social remittances: two way travels of the Holy Ghost

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Ritual, transnationalism and social remittances: two way travels of the Holy Ghost. This article is centered on the travels of Holy Ghost festivals between the Azores and Azorean immigrant communities in the USA with a special focus on how ritual innovations introduced in California found their way back to the Azores. It argues that these innovations can be viewed as social remittances the success of which is dependent upon a particular regime of transnationalism, characterized a) by prominent links between particular locales in the host and home countries and b) by a specific political economy of migration, marked by the economic success of immigrants and by non-migrants' capacity for emulation. It is thus a contribution to current debates on transnationalism and social remittances, especially those that have stressed their circular nature and the connections between transnationalism and the micro-economics of migration.

KEYWORDS: ritual; transnationalism; social remittances; Holy Ghost *festas*.

Ritual, transnacionalismo e remessas sociais: viagens de ida e volta do Espírito Santo. Este artigo centra-se nas viagens das festas do Espírito Santo entre os Açores e as comunidades açorianas dos EUA, com um foco particular no modo como inovações rituais introduzidas na Califórnia influenciaram as festas nos Açores. Argumenta-se que essas inovações podem ser vistas com remessas sociais cujo sucesso depende de um regime particular de transnacionalismo, caracterizado a) por importantes laços entre localidades específicas na terra de origem e na terra de acolhimento, b) por uma economia política da migração marcada pelo sucesso económico dos imigrantes e pela capacidade de emulação dos não-migrantes. O artigo é, nessa medida, uma contribuição para debates recentes sobre transnacionalismo e remessas sociais, particularmente para aqueles que têm sublinhado a sua natureza circular e para aqueles que têm enfatizado as conexões entre transnacionalismo e as micro-economias das migrações.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ritual; transnacionalismo; remessas sociais; festas do Espírito Santo.

Ritual, transnationalism and social remittances: two way travels of the Holy Ghost

As has been emphasized by the growing literature on circulation and mobility, transnational flows of people are often associated with the movement of cultural forms and ideas (e. g. Inda and Rosaldo, 2002; Vertovec, 2009). In the case of migration, most of these movements are from the home country to the host country, where migrants use their “emotional and symbolic ties with their past life experience back home” (Boccagni, 2012, p. 119) to produce cultural forms that can successfully meet new social and cultural challenges. There are also complementary movements flowing in the opposite direction from host to home country. Describing such movements, Peggy Levitt has proposed the concept of “social remittances”. Defined as “ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from host- to sending- country communities” (Levitt, 1998, p. 928; see also Levitt, 2001, p. 54), social remittances are often part of “circular and dynamic process[es]” (Parreñas, 2013, p. 195) connecting home and host country. While social remittances are often articulated with economic remittances, they have received less attention in the literature centered on the transnational connections between immigrants and their countries of origin.¹

This paper addresses a particular type of social remittances, related to ritual symbols and practices. It focuses on Holy Ghost *festas* (*festas do Espírito Santo*), a widespread and important religious ritual in the Azores (Portugal). Given its importance in the Azores, the *festas* have been a vital aspect of the processes of “recreating home away from home” among Azorean immigrants in the USA. As a result of these processes of trans-border diffusion some important changes have been introduced in the structure of the ritual. While

1 This work was supported by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) under grant PTDC/CS-ANT/100037/2008. I thank Rita Jerónimo and Filomena Silvano for the collaborative fieldwork in Ribeiras and the *mordomos* of the several *festas* that I have attended in Ribeiras for their sympathy and patience. I am also grateful to Miguel Moniz for his careful revision of the paper.

the impact of these changes in the Azorean *festas* has largely been residual, in some cases innovations to the rituals in the US have made their way back to the Azores.

The objective of this paper is to highlight some of the social and cultural processes involved in these two-way travels of symbols and practices related to Holy Ghost *festas*, with particular emphasis on how some of them were turned into social remittances. I will focus on a specific case study, involving Holy Ghost *festas* in Ribeiras (Pico Island) in the Azores, and in San Diego (California). The empirical data upon which this case study is based derive from long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Azores and among Azorean communities in the US (Leal, 1994, 2011, 2016). The specific information on Ribeiras was collected in May 2010 and May 2012; in San Diego, information was mainly collected during a fieldwork trip to California in June 2010, combined with extensive research on historical and ethnographic sources on local Azorean-American communities and *festas*.

I will try to show how, in this specific case, the successful transfer of social remittances associated with Holy Ghost *festas* was linked to a particular transnational regime characterized by two main features. The first one is the existence of “strong, geographically-focused ties” (Levitt, 1998, p. 930) between two particular locations in the home country and the host country, forming what Levitt has termed a “transnational community (or village)” (2001, p. 11). The second feature has to do with the importance of migrants’ economic success and status claims in the structuring of this transnational community. Opposing approaches that consider transnationalism as a structural trait of contemporary migration, some scholars have stressed the importance of variations in transnational ties. As Alejandro Portes (2003, p. 879) has put it “transnational activities are quite heterogeneous and vary across immigrant communities, both in their popularity and in their character”. In this paper I argue that the same applies to the influence of transnationalism in the home country and that Ribeiras can be viewed as an example of a migratory context in which transnationalism was particularly important and culturally transformative.

The paper is organized in three main sections. In the first section I provide some background information related to Azorean immigration to the US and to the important role played by Holy Ghost *festas* in the “religious place making” (Vásquez and Knott, 2014) and ethnic structuring of American-Azorean communities.² I also show how, despite the importance of a rhetoric of authenticity, the recreation of the *festas* in the US was linked to

2 For comparative purposes, see, for instance, Mahler and Hansing (2005), Paerregaard (2008) and Ferraiuolo (2009).

some important transformations and innovations. One of the most prominent of these changes was the introduction of the “queens”, who have become a central ritual element in the *festas*. The second part of the paper, centered on the Holy Ghost *festas* in Ribeiras (Pico island), shows how this innovation from North America was adopted in the Azores during the 1930s and later transformed into a defining trait of the *festas* there. It also analyses the main characteristics of the transnational regime that favored the adoption this innovation and hence illustrates the impact of social remittances. In the concluding section I will return to some of the arguments developed throughout the paper to emphasize the importance of variables such as social class and status claims in the analysis of specific transnational regimes, such as the one described in this paper.

AZOREAN HOLY GHOST *FESTAS* AND QUEENS IN THE US

Azoreans constitute the overwhelming majority of the 1.4 million people of Portuguese ancestry who live in the us.³ The first migrants arrived between the 1870s and the 1920s. Initially Portuguese immigration to the us was driven by the needs of the whaling industry. Given that the major whaling ports were located along the East and West coasts of the us, Portuguese immigrant communities were first established in New England and California. This migratory movement continued until the decline of whaling at the end of the 19th century. In New England, while some of these immigrants turned to fishing or farming, most found jobs in the textile industry. In California, although some small communities remained dedicated to fishing, most Azorean immigrants moved into agriculture and dairy farming.

The numbers of immigrants from the Azores increased dramatically until the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. In 1870 there were 9,000 Azorean immigrants in the us, a number that had grown to around 280,000 first- and second-generation immigrants by 1930 (Williams, 2007). The Great Depression drove some 20,000 Azoreans back to the Azores and restrictive legislation halted new immigration, a trend that lasted until the passage of the Azorean Refugee Relief Act, which opened migration from the archipelago after the eruption of the Capelinhos volcano devastated Faial in 1957. Immigration levels also rose significantly after the Immigration Act of 1965, which increased the quotas that had been in force in the us since the 1920s. In the 1960s, '70s and '80s, Azorean immigrants flocked to California and New

3 On Portuguese immigration to the us, see McCabe and Thomas (1998), Williams (2007), Goulart (2008), Holton and Klimt (2009).

England. As was the case with other immigrant groups, they settled in the same places as earlier waves of immigrants. It is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the numbers of immigrants involved in this second wave of migration to the US. However, between 1960 and 1980, at least 200,000 Azorean migrants moved to the US.

As a result of these two migratory waves 1.4 million Portuguese-Americans (90 percent of whom have an Azorean background) live in the US. According to the 2000 US Census, some 28 percent of the immigrants live in California and around 31 percent live in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Given their importance in the Azores, Holy Ghost *festas* were from the outset a major aspect of the processes of settlement of Azorean immigrants in the US. These *festas*, which in the Azores last from seven to eight weeks between Easter Sunday and Pentecost or Trinity Sunday, consist of a number of ceremonies in honor of the Holy Ghost and are centered around a silver crown symbolizing the Holy Ghost. Formally independent of the Catholic Church, the *festas* have as their main protagonist the *imperador* (emperor), who is, in most cases, a member of a Holy Ghost brotherhood, which also plays a significant role in the *festas*. The ritual is quite elaborate and includes a series of religious celebrations, such as processions and prayer sessions in honor of the Holy Ghost. The most important of these ceremonies is the *coroação* (coronation), which takes place at the end of a special mass and culminates in the crowning by a priest of the *imperador* or *mordomo* or a child chosen by him. In addition to these religious ceremonies, Holy Ghost *festas* also involve the distribution and consumption of large quantities of food, organized around the principles of gift and counter-gift (Mauss, 1983 [1923/24]). These foods include, most notably, the *sopas do Espírito Santo* (Holy Spirit soup), portions of raw beef, bread, wine, and different varieties of sweet bread (*massa sovada*).

The first Holy Ghost *festas* in the US were initiated in the late 19th century with the first *feira* taking place in California in 1865, at the very beginning of Azorean immigration to the state.⁴ After that, the founding of a growing number of *festas* closely followed the emergence and development of Azorean communities in different Californian cities and small towns, so that by the late 1930s the total number of *festas* was around 120. After World War II, the growth of Holy Ghost *festas* in California came to a halt and a large number of them were discontinued. With the arrival of the second wave of immigrants,

4 Detailed information on Holy Ghost *festas* in California can be found in Goulart (2002). Data concerning Holy Host *festas* in New England and Canada were collected through an extensive survey that took place between 2011 and 2013 and involved the research team of the FCT funded project “Ritual, Ethnicity, Transnationalism, Holy Ghost Festas in North America”.

between the 1960s and 1980s, however, new *festas* were founded and some of those that had become dormant were revitalized. The development of *festas* in New England followed a similar pattern. The first *festa* was launched in the 1880s, and as new immigrants settled themselves in the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, new *festas* were founded, so that by the 1930s their number totaled 30. Although the available data do not allow us to quantify the extent of the decline of *festas* after World War II, the arrival of a second wave of immigrants gave a new impetus to the creation of new, and the recreation of older dormant Holy Ghost *festas*. As a result of these processes of historical development, the current total number of *festas* in the US is 201: 99 in California, 91 in New England and 11 in other US states. Given that the majority of these *festas* are attended by some 700 to 1,000 people, the total number of people involved may be estimated at around 150,000, an impressive figure that attests to the *festas*' continuing importance among Azorean communities in the US.⁵

The impressive presence of Holy Ghost *festas* in North America is largely a result of the *festas*' importance among Azoreans. Participation is seen as an expression of the devotion of most Azorean-Americans to the Holy Ghost. Being a *mordomo* (or *imperador*) is often the result of a vow made to the Holy Ghost and devotion to the Holy Ghost also takes more general forms, based on the exchange of participation in the *festas* for the protection of the Holy Ghost. This participation can be carried out in a number of ways, including an active involvement in the organization and funding of the *festas*. These forms of association with the *festas* are usually based on what most people describe as "faith in the Holy Ghost" (*fé no Espírito Santo*) and are often linked to practical acts of devotion, such as participation in prayer sessions or processions.

At the same time, the organization of *festas* has been an important tool for the gradual production of new identities, sociabilities and groups related to the immigration process. More specifically, *festas* have been a decisive tool for the processes through which immigrants have become attached to a new kind of group that can be defined as ethnic.

This ethnic role of Holy Ghost *festas* can be seen in Barthian terms. For Frederick Barth, an ethnic group is a group whose members view themselves and are viewed by others as culturally distinct. As he puts it, ethnicity does not refer so much to the "sum of objective [cultural] differences" but to those differences "which the actors themselves regard as significant", that is, "those

5 With the development of Azorean immigration to Canada, between the late 1950s and the 1980s, the *festas* also expanded to Canada, where a total of 86 currently take place each year (see Leal, Januário and Mapril, forthcoming). Considering the fact that Holy Ghost *festas* also take place in Hawaii and Bermuda, the total number of *festas* in North America is now 290.

cultural features [that] are used by the actors as signals and emblems of difference” (Barth, 1969, p. 14). Holy Ghost *festas* are an important tool for the construction of this sense of distinctiveness among Azoreans in North America. On the one hand, the main aspects of the Holy Ghost *festas*’ script are seen as visible tokens of a cultural heritage taken to be exclusively Azorean. On the other hand, the *festas* also provide a context for the expression of more in-depth cultural values regarding the relationships between individuals and God, the role of reciprocity in social life, conceptions of social immediacy and distance, and so on. Accordingly, they are an important expression of a particular worldview essential to the distinction between insiders – “we, the Azoreans” – and outsiders – “they, the Americans”.

Given their Azorean origin, Azorean-American *festas* are mostly organized according to a rhetoric of authenticity, which claims continuity between the Azorean *festas* and *festas* in the new immigrant context. Despite the importance of this rhetoric, the recreation of the *festas* in the us is characterized by a number of innovations. These innovations are most evident in the organizational framework of the *festas*, characterized by the weakening of the role of the *mordomo* (or emperor) and the correlative affirmation of the role of incorporated brotherhoods (and other associations) in the organization of the *festas*. At the same time, there were also changes in the ritual organization of the *festas*. Some of their ritual segments were suppressed, others were added and there was intense hybridization between Azorean and North American formulations. In most *festas*, for instance, the model of the Azorean religious procession was combined with the North American model of the ethnic parade (Leal, forthcoming). But the most important and spectacular result of this articulation between Azorean ways of celebrating a *feira* and North American modes of celebrating a festival relates to the role played by queens in most Holy Ghost *festas* in the us.

Queens are generally teenage girls, chosen either by Holy Ghost brotherhood directors or by the *mordomo* (or *imperador*), who play a central role both in Holy Ghost *feira* processions and in the *coroação*. They wear special dresses, similar to bride’s gowns, and an elaborate (and expensive) embroidered velvet cape decorated with spangles and ermine. Tiaras and elaborate hair-styles are also of great importance. The queens are usually escorted by two or more *aíás* (maids of honor or “side maids”). Depending on their age, queens are said to be *grandes* (“senior queens”, adolescent girls) or *pequenas* (“small queens”, pre-adolescent girls and children). While some *festas* can include up to eight queens, most have between one and four. Not only is glamour the prevailing aesthetic language, but considerable amounts of money are involved: at least \$8,000 is spent per feast on each queen and her maids of honor, although in

some cases the amount of money involved can be much higher, as in San Diego CA, where \$40,000 was spent in the 2010 *feira*.

According to Maria Ascensão Carty (2002), the first queens were introduced in Californian Holy Ghost *feiras* in the late 19th century. They were already teenage girls but the dresses they wore were first-communion dresses. In the following years a gradual sophistication of ritual clothing took place. Although the diffusion of queens in California was gradual, in post-World War II the vast majority of Californian Holy Ghost *feiras* had adopted them.

For most people involved with the US *feiras* this innovation has strong links with the very origins of Holy Ghost celebrations and with the role allegedly played by Queen Isabel of Portugal in the foundation of the *feiras*.⁶ Queens are seen as “modern” figurations of Queen Isabel and people emphasize their “true” and “authentic” origins. Other explanations view the queens as resulting from contacts between Azorean ways of celebrating the Holy Ghost and less vernacular North American cultural formulations. Most people usually emphasize the link between the queens and North American beauty contests. One of the myths of origin of the queens in California mentions an Azorean teenage girl who entered a beauty contest in a local high school. Contrary to her mother’s expectations, the girl didn’t succeed in winning the contest and was not crowned as beauty queen. The reaction of the girl’s mother was immediate: ‘Since my daughter was not crowned at the high school contest, she will be crowned at the Holy Ghost *feira*’. Although this story has not been corroborated, the important point is the link that it establishes between Holy Ghost queens and beauty contests.

The connection between queens and North American cultural formulations is also one of the main conclusions of the research on the origin of queens conducted by Carty (2002). According to her, the adoption of queens in Azorean *feiras* in California is the result of the influence of the model of the North American civic parade in Holy Ghost *feiras*’ processions. Maypole Queens played an important role in these parades: “At least since the 1890s, little girls dressed in white and wearing garlands in their hair served as Maypole queens in local civic parades. Young ladies, whether of Portuguese descent or not, must have been influenced by the pageantry of these American traditions” (Carty, 2002, p. 454). This seems a plausible hypothesis. As Lois Banner (1983) has pointed out, US beauty contests have a long and “venerable lineage” among

6 According to the most widespread narrative of their foundation, Holy Ghost *feiras* were initiated in the early 14th century by Queen Isabel, the wife of King Dinis. Queen Isabel – or *Rainha Santa Isabel* – was canonized by the Catholic Church in the 17th century.

which he indicates “local May Day celebrations [involving] the selection of queens”. As to the narratives linking the queens to Queen Isabel, Carty views them as posteriori rationalizations (Carty, 2002, p. 455).

Having originated in California, queens were introduced in other North American Holy Ghost *festas*, both in New England and in Canada. While in New England 50 percent out of a total of 91 *festas* currently feature queens as their main ritual protagonists, in Canada 40 percent out of a total of 86 *festas* also have queens.⁷ The diffusion of queens also had an impact on some Azorean *festas*. Indeed, while actively involved in the celebration of *festas* in North America, most immigrants kept an active connection to the *festas* in the Azores. Most of them insisted on sponsoring the *festas* back home and especially between the 1960s and the 1980s, they were decisive in the organization of *festas* in the Azores (Leal, 1994). Although most immigrants involved in the promotion of *festas* back home insisted on organizing them *como é da tradição* (“according to the traditional ways”), in some cases, they had a transformative impact on the ritual structuring of the *festas*. That is precisely the case of the Ribeiras *festas*.

RAINHAS AND HOLY GHOST FESTAS IN RIBEIRAS

Ribeiras is a parish located on the southern shore of Pico island, with a total of 975 inhabitants (2011 Census), living in different *lugares* (hamlets), such as Santa Cruz, Santa Bárbara, Pontas Negras and Ribeira Grande. Fishing was one of the main activities of Ribeirenses, especially in Santa Cruz, but when Portugal joined the EU it gradually lost its importance. As elsewhere in the Azores, migration to North America is an important feature of Ribeirense social and cultural life. Between the late 19th century and the 1920s, Ribeirenses migrated to California, especially to San Diego. In addition to San Diego, in the 1960s and the 1980s, Ribeirense migration also reached some Canadian cities, notably Toronto.

There are a total of six Holy Ghost *festas* in Ribeiras. This paper will mostly concentrate on the two *festas* that take place in the center of the parish at Santa Cruz on Pentecost Monday (the *feira da segunda feira* or Monday *feira*) and on Pentecost Tuesday (the *feira da terça feira* or Tuesday *feira*).⁸

In both organizational and ritual terms, these two *festas* share several similarities with other Holy Ghost *festas* organized in Pico (and elsewhere in the

7 On New England *festas* see Leal (2009, 2011), and on Canada see Leal, Januário and Mapril (2015).

8 The other four *festas* take place at Santa Bárbara, Pedras Negras and Ribeira Grande.

Azores). In Ribeiras, however, Holy Ghost *festas* are unique when compared to the usual pattern. As in the US, the *rainhas* (queens) are a central ritual element of the *festas*. Along with the *mordomo* these queens are crowned at the end of the Mass and are the focal point of several processions that are an important part of the *festas*. Like in the US, *rainhas* are said to be *grandes* (senior queens) and *pequenas* (small queens). While in the past some *festas* could include up to ten queens, nowadays there are between two and four queens in each *feira*. They also wear special gowns and sophisticated (and expensive) velvet capes and are escorted by two or more *aíás* (maids of honor).

The local authorized narrative of the origin of queens stresses their migrant roots. According to this narrative, the origin of the queens in Ribeiras goes back to the 1930s, when they were first introduced in Ribeiras by Emily Cabral, whose father was an immigrant in San Diego who returned to sponsor the Monday *feira* in 1935. We don't know whether coming back to the Azores in the 1930s was as usual as it was between the 1960s and the 1980s, but oral testimonies in Ribeiras suggest that the case of Emily Cabral's father was not an isolated one. As elsewhere in the Azores, some migrants – albeit in smaller numbers – were already willing to make the trip back to the Azores in order to honor and thank the Holy Ghost for economic success and prosperity. This was the case with Emily Cabral's father. However, instead of merely coming back to celebrate the Holy Ghost in the usual Ribeirense way, the Cabrals decided to make an impression on their friends at home. Organizing a part of the feast as if it were being held in California, they made Emily the queen of the *feira*.

The innovation would be enthusiastically adopted by Ribeirenses. In the next year there was a new queen, a local teenage girl who was crowned at the Pontas Negras *feira*; and in 1937, the Monday *feira* also featured a local queen. This queen, Dona Berta, despite being now 90 years old, still proudly remembers the occasion:

I didn't ask to be the queen, it was my parents' decision. I still remember the way I was dressed. The cape was blue, a beautiful blue, very beautiful. It was in blue satin, fully ornamented with white ermine and white spangles. At that time there were no golden spangles, but anyway I was very elegant. A local dressmaker made the cape. As she had already seen one, she made it her own way, copying some aspects but she didn't use velvet. At the time velvet was not yet used in the capes. But anyway the cape was very elegant [Dona Berta, Interview, 2012. Translated from the Portuguese].

From the 1930s to the late 1950s, the queens were confined to the Monday *feira* and to the Pontas Negras *feira*, but in the late 1950s they were also adopted by the Tuesday *feira* and in the 1960s by the Santa Bárbara *feira*. Throughout

the years there was a constant exchange between California and Ribeiras. While some queens were local adolescent girls, others – like Emily Cabral – came from California. Some dresses and capes were locally produced but others were brought from California. Even when they were made locally, cloth and other materials used in the capes came mostly from California. There was also some circulation of dressmakers. Thus one of the most famous Ribeirense dressmakers of the 1980s and 1990s, Dona Lurdes, was in California for some years, where she was able to acquire the knowhow that she later introduced in Ribeiras (Silvano, 2015). Given this constant flow of people, material culture, and knowhow, the Ribeirense queens closely followed some innovations that were first introduced in the US. Most of these innovations followed a pattern that saw the queens and the processions in which they participated increasingly glamorized: the number of queens, especially in the Monday *festa*, increased; and new roles – such as maids of honor and small queens – were introduced with dresses and capes becoming increasingly sophisticated and lavish.

In the 1960s queens were also adopted in some neighboring parishes, but, for the most part, this was a limited expansion. In most of these parishes, although queens were adopted, the glamorous style that came to be associated

PHOTO 1

Monday festa (*festa de segunda-feira*), Ribeiras (Pico) 2012. Photo by the author.



with them in Ribeiras was not. That is the reason why most people in these parishes – and elsewhere in Pico – usually insist that *rainhas só nas Ribeiras* (literally “queens only in Ribeiras”).

Indeed the diffusion of queens outside Ribeiras and its neighboring parishes was met with some resistance. While most people in Pico have an admiration for the performative aesthetics of Ribeirense queens and are eager to attend the *festas* in Ribeiras, some people also view them as an *americanisse* (a derogatory expression for “something American”) the adoption of which (outside of Ribeiras) is seen as foreign to the authentic tradition of Holy Ghost *festas* in Pico.

This resistance – which can be viewed as a form of “anti-syncretism” (Stewart and Shaw 1994) – is still prominent in contemporary Pico, and caused a fierce polemic in local newspapers in the late 1990s. Thus, in June 1998, the newspaper *Ilha Maior* published a survey on queens defined from the outset as “new *modas* [trendy fashions] that are not part of Holy Ghost celebrations”. Given the critical position of the newspaper on the topic, it was not difficult to find negative opinions about the queens. In 1999, a columnist wrote that “the introduction of modernisms is going to harm the ethnographic dimension of the *festa*” (*Ilha Maior*, 30 April 1999, p. 12, translated from the Portuguese). In another article, a local intellectual tried to dismiss the argument that queens were traditional because they represented Queen Isabel (*Ilha Maior*, 28 May 1999, p. 12). More radical commentators insisted that queens were an expression of bad taste imported from the US (*Ilha Maior*, 28 May 1999, p. 12). As in the cases studied by David Fitzgerald, immigrant “dissimilation” – i. e., the “differences in cultural practices between the migrants and the groups in their places of origin” (2013, p. 118) – was viewed by some “as a cultural threat” (Fitzgerald 2013, p. 120) to local ways of organizing the *festas*.

Despite these resistances, in Ribeiras queens are not only viewed as something unique to the parish, but they are also something of which local people are very proud. At the Monday *festa* hall, an old photo of Emily Cabral dressed as queen hangs on the main wall next to a photo of the first President of the Brotherhood, Joe Fernandes, who was himself an immigrant to San Diego.

Most former queens in Ribeiras – some of them now aged between 60 and 70 – also keep photos of themselves dressed as queens. In some cases, the capes they wore at the *festa* have been retained as a treasured ceremonial token. Despite their Californian origins (or because of them), queens have been thus locally recycled as a diacritic of the Ribeirense tradition of celebrating the Holy Ghost and have recently been co-opted as a central element of local cultural heritage.

Thus in 2011, a first exhibition of capes took place in Ribeiras, followed in 2012 by other initiatives centered on Holy Ghost *festas*. The latter were organized by an association committed to the safeguard of local heritage and included a second exhibition, whose major attraction were again Holy Ghost capes. Besides these initiatives organized by Ribeirense heritage activists, Ribeiras' queens and capes were also the theme of a major exhibition that took place in 2011 at the Museu dos Baleeiros (Whalers Museum), the most important museum in Pico island.

TUNA FISHING AND QUEENS

Two aspects were of decisive importance in the successful adoption of queens by the Ribeirenses. One has to do with the particular importance of immigration in Ribeiras and, especially, the importance of immigration to a particular place in the us: San Diego. The other is related to the role that *festas* played in the exhibition of the economic success of the immigrants.

As to the first factor, what seems to be at stake is the “dipolar” (Rocha-Trindade, 1976) nature of the Ribeirense immigration to the us. This concept stresses how, in some cases, there is a particularly dense relationship between a specific locality in the home country and a specific locality in the host country. That's precisely the case with Ribeiras. While in most parishes in the Azores the migrants are dispersed in different locations in the us and Canada, in the case of Ribeiras, at least until the 1960s, immigrants from the parish lived predominantly in San Diego. Ribeiras and San Diego can thus be seen, in Peggy Levitt's terms, as a “transnational community”, or a “transnational village” (Levitt, 2001) characterized by privileged links between specific locations in the home and the host country. Such a fact may have facilitated – as in the cases studied by Beatriz Rocha-Trindade and Peggy Levitt – a more effective working of modes of transnational circulation of people and religious forms, such as the ones evident in Holy Ghost *festas*.

At the same time the *festas* played a crucial role in the exhibition of the economic success of some immigrants. The prodigality shown by most immigrants in their visits to the Azores is still remembered today.⁹ As people stress:

The immigrants returned *muito fortes* [literally “very strong”, i. e., “very rich”]. Even in the 1940s they were welcomed by philharmonic bands, they organized *matanças do porco* [ritualized pig slaughter], they offered people beer and chocolate. They were welcomed in

9 For a similar trend in Northeast Portugal, also associated with local *festas*, see Brettell (1983).

this way because they were rich. They returned to show that they were doing well and visit their families. But there were also ostentation, they returned to celebrate their triumph [Manuel Francisco Costa, Interview, 2012; translated from the Portuguese].

This evocation of the ostentatious behavior of some immigrants – all from San Diego – is often associated with three or four families that were considered to be particularly rich. One of them is Emily Cabral's family (her father already owned a boat in Ribeiras prior to migration), but there were also mentions to the Garcias, the Medinas, and the Silvas:

These were people with much money. They were able to amass a large amount of money [in San Diego] and then came back to visit Ribeiras. Other immigrants took fifteen to twenty years to return, but that wasn't the case with these families. I still remember that in the 1960s they organized *festas* for the whole parish, slayed cattle, invited the parish, there was music, people sang for the Americans, there was dance and they were the ones who were paying [Manuel Francisco Costa, Interview, 2012; translated from the Portuguese].

As people in Ribeiras stress, this behavior was the consequence of the prosperity that characterized important segments of the Portuguese community in San Diego. Initially established in Point Loma and Roseville, this community – which also integrated immigrants from other Pico's parishes and smaller contingents of migrants from Madeira and the Algarve – has built an important and economically lucrative relationship with tuna fishing.¹⁰

Initiated in San Diego in 1893, tuna fishing developed after World War I, thanks to increasing demand. Taking advantage of this growing demand, Portuguese captains – especially those who were born in Pico – invested heavily in technological innovation, building larger and larger ships that were able to navigate to faraway distances. Interrupted by World War II, when tuna fishing sailboats were requisitioned by the US Marines, tuna fishing went through a new boom in the 1940s, much to the advantage of Portuguese captains. In 1955 the majority of the 228 boats that composed the San Diego tuna fishing fleet were owned by Portuguese (Batista, 2002, p. 424).

As a result of its involvement in tuna fishing, the Portuguese community in San Diego became one of the more prosperous of its kind in California. Much of the money from tuna fishing “was invested in the Point Loma area, where the majority of the Portuguese resided. Beautiful mansions overlooking the

10 There is an impressive bibliography on the Portuguese community in San Diego. See Alves (2002), Batista (2002), DaRosa-Feliciano (2010), Dias (n.d.), Dias (1982), Pinho (1978), The Portuguese Historical Center and Alves-Calhoun (2009).

bay were purchased or built at high prices. Some Portuguese became astute businessmen, making fortunes” (Batista, 2002, p. 424).

Connected from the outset to tuna fishing, immigrants from Ribeiras were among the main beneficiaries of the economic prosperity of the Portuguese community. Thanks to their prior involvement with whaling in Ribeiras, they were experienced fishermen who were able to play a key role in the expansion of the San Diego tuna fishing industry.

Among them were precisely the Medinas and the Silvas:

This parish has a strong fishing tradition and they arrived there [in San Diego] and worked very hard. The opportunities were there, what was missing was people able to build larger boats. The Garcias were the sons of a very well-educated man, who had been the boss of a whaling boat. He had been to America and brought one of his daughters and the five sons [to San Diego]. It was a very united family, all of them had their own boats and they gave them Portuguese names. The Medinas too went to America and they all got rich with tuna fishing [Ema Porto, Interview, 2012; translated from the Portuguese].

The fishermen who composed the Ribeirense tuna fishing crews also made money very quickly: “in a single trip (and they could make three per year), they earned what other migrants took one year to earn” (Manuel Francisco Costa, Interview, 2012; translated from the Portuguese).

TRANSNATIONAL FESTAS

What these data suggest is that Ribeiras and San Diego constituted a particularly dense “transnational field” (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc, 1992, p. 1), fueled by the economic prosperity of the immigrants. Holy Ghost *festas* were from the outset an important aspect of this prosperous ‘transnational field’. The first Holy Ghost *feira* in San Diego took place in 1909 (some authors also mention 1906) in Point Loma. In 1921, there was a division among the organizers of the *feira* and, as a result, a second *feira* was initiated in downtown San Diego.

One of the main characteristics of the development of the two *festas* was the constant development of their performative aesthetics. Combining the written information and the photographic documentation on the San Diego *festas* published in the book *The Holy Ghost Festas. A Historic Perspective of the Portuguese in California* (Batista, 2002; Alves, 2002), it is possible to reconstitute some steps of this process. The first queen was introduced before the 1920s and in 1921 a drill team was incorporated in the *festas*. The first official parade took place in 1930, with the participation of more than 20 teenage girls

dressed in white. In 1937, the *feira* had its first little queen and also its first king; and in 1940 parasol groups were added to the parade. New ritual attractions were successively added to the parade: statues of saints (including Queen Isabel), floats, the illumination of the Portuguese tuna fleet. The number of queens and maids of honor also increased and their dresses and capes became the most glamorous in California. As a result, the San Diego Holy Ghost *feira* is known as the richest and most expensive in California.¹¹

PHOTO 2

San Diego queens at the San José Holy Ghost *feira*, 2010. Photo by the author.



What these data suggest is that Holy Ghost *feiras* in San Diego were not only linked to the growing prosperity of the community, they were instrumental in the exhibition of financial success derived from tuna fishing. Especially after 1928, the Portuguese tuna fishing fleet started funding the *feira* and as a consequence,

From 1928 to 1948, the *feira* evolved from a very traditional style of celebration as was celebrated in the Azores, most specifically on the island of Pico, to the rather elaborate affairs of today (...). The competitive spirit of the community was evident

11 See DaRosa-Feliciano (2010) on some aspects of contemporary San Diego Holy Ghost *feira*.

from the beginning of the celebration of the *feira*. Every year there were changes made either to the parade or the manner in which the participants were dressed [Alves, 2002, p. 428].

Ribeirenses played an important role in the processes I have been describing. M. O. Medina, in particular, was the decisive figure in the implementation and development of the *feira* after 1922. He was the founder and the President, between 1922 and 1932 and between 1938 and 1977, of the *United Portuguese Sociedade do Espírito Santo* that organized one of the *feiras* (Alves, 2002, p. 427). He was thus one of the most influential individuals in the gradual development and glamorization of the San Diego *feiras*.

Among the successive *mordomos*, the Medina and other Ribeirense surnames are most usual.¹² The role of these prosperous Ribeirense immigrants – as we have seen – was not limited to the San Diego *feiras*. They were also instrumental in the processes of social remittances that aligned Ribeira's *feiras* with those in San Diego. They were thus essential in the process of formation of a particularly dense “transnational field” between San Diego and Ribeiras, fomented by the economic prosperity of the immigrants. The queens in Ribeiras' *feiras* can be viewed as the more spectacular outcome of this process, which not only involved the successive transfer of innovations in relation to the queens, but also the transfer of the “competitive spirit” that so strongly characterized Holy Ghost *feiras* in San Diego.

This transfer was favored by reasons connected with the relationship between Ribeirense *feiras* and local socioeconomic status. As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, the adoption of queens in Ribeiras was a selective process. Initially, only two out of a total of six Ribeirense *feiras* adopted the queens: the Monday *feira* at Santa Cruz and the Pontas Negras *feira*. Leaving aside the Pontas Negras *feira* (on which the information that I was able to collect is scarcer), what is striking about the Monday *feira* are its historical links to the local elite.¹³ Many people mentioned to me how the Monday *Feira* Brotherhood was locally viewed as the *irmandade dos ricos* (the brotherhood of the rich); some of their members had connections with the elites in neighboring Faial island, and boats from that island brought participants to visit the *feira*.¹⁴

12 See www.presd.org/projects/feira/, accessed on 18 June 2013.

13 Although the information that I gathered on the Pontas Negras *feira* is scarcer, it must be mentioned that there is probably a link between the introduction of queens and the local elite since the first queen was the niece of a local doctor.

14 According to a local scholar, the families from Faial who used to visit the Monday *feira* were connected to Masonry. That could be viewed as further proof of the connections between the Monday *feira* and local elites.

Comparatively, the Tuesday *feira* – which had a strong connection to local fishermen – had a more popular basis and, as Dona Berta (Interview, 2012) put it to me, was “mais pobrezinha” (much poorer). It is thus significant that the first *feira* to adopt the queens was the Monday *feira*. By doing so, members of the local Ribeirense elite were emulating the immigrants and affirming that they were also engaged in a transnational social field defined by claims to economic success.

At the same time they were probably using the queens as a means to assert their local socioeconomic status vis-à-vis other local groups. This line of reasoning seems to be confirmed by the late adoption of queens at the Tuesday *feira*. Significantly enough, they were introduced in the late 1950s by a former immigrant to San Diego who launched a tuna fleet that brought generalized prosperity to local fishermen. As in the Monday *feira*, the adoption of queens in the Tuesday *feira* was thus linked to local claims to participation in a transnational field characterized by prosperity.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the travels of Holy Ghost *feiras* between Ribeiras (Azores) and the Azorean community of San Diego (USA) with a special focus on how ritual innovations introduced in California found their way back to the Azores. It has argued that these innovations can be viewed as social remittances, the success of which is dependent upon factors that were addressed throughout the paper.

The paper is thus a contribution to the study of social remittances as a circular process linking migrants and non-migrants (Boccagni, 2012; Parreñas, 2013; Cruz, 2013). The main steps of this process involve a transfer of cultural resources from home to host country. Once adopted by immigrants, these resources are creatively transformed through a dialogue with host country cultural formulations. As the migrants keep moving between host and home countries these transformations travel back to the home country.

The success of these flows between the immigrant group in the US and the local group in the Azores is dependent on some specific characteristics of the transnational field they help to create. As the case of Ribeiras shows, the successful transmission of social remittances was from the outset connected to a particular transnational regime characterized by “strong, geographically-focused ties” (Levitt, 1998, p. 930) between Ribeiras and San Diego, fueled by the economic success of the immigrants and coupled with a local capacity for emulation.

The importance of “transnational communities” in defining stronger transnational fields was addressed by Peggy Levitt (2001). As she has shown, migrant spatial concentration in the host country favors the development of more significant transnational movements of people, cultural forms and ideas. As to the second point, it confirms what Portes has written on transnationalism as a phenomenon strongly dependent on the economic and social capacity of migrants and non-migrants to navigate between two worlds. As he has pointed out,

The migrants most involved in cross-border initiatives are not the most exploited or marginalized. On the contrary, transnationalism in its different forms emerges (...) as mainly the pursuit of solid family men – educated, social connected and firmly established in the host country. They, rather than the recently arrived and the downwardly mobile, organize cross-border enterprises; support political parties and civic committees in their countries; and *lead the cultural festivities, sports and religious events* linking each migrant diaspora with its respective nation [Portes, 2003, p. 887; emphasis added].

I don't know if some of the expressions used by Portes (such as “solid family men”) apply to the Ribeirense immigrants involved in the comeback travels of the Holy Ghost from San Diego to Ribeiras. In the Ribeirense case, also, what he writes applies not only to immigrants but also to non-migrants: as I have suggested, the members of local Ribeirense elites were the most actively engaged in the processes of transnational circulation of Holy Ghost *festas*. In any case, what the Ribeirense case shows is the existence of a correlation between the economics of migration and both the importance of transnationalism and the success of social remittances.

Tomas Soehl and Roger Waldringer (2010) have recently reminded us how transnational social fields can be seen as flexible combinations of inter-border relations characterized by diverse types of actors and activities and varying degrees of intensity. What this paper has sought to show is the relevance of “a pattern of cross-border activity” (Soehl and Waldringer, 2010, p. 1498) shaped by ritual and whose effectiveness is strongly dependent on factors related both to the social morphology of the migrant group and to the micro-economics of both the migrant group and the sending community.

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