


**BLACK PARTIES ON THE OLD PATH OF THE ROYAL ROAD: FAITH,
OBLIGATION, TOURISM AND LEISURE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
RELIGIOUS RACISM**

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ABSTRACT: This article is the result of a research about the Reign of Nossa Senhora do Rosário along the Old Path of the Royal Road and aimed to record and present analyzes of historical, sociological, cultural, religious and tourist aspects present in the congado groups on this route, and evaluate the importance of festivals as a phenomenon of devotion, obligation and, at the same time, resistance, leisure and tourism in the investigated locations. The qualitative research was based on the oral history method, with interviews being the main strategy adopted. 15 cities were visited, 22 groups, with 34 respondents. It is hoped that studies on the Congado can contribute to the debate on the anti-racist struggle in our country, in particular, against religious racism filed against manifestation of African matrices. For this, knowledge about these manifestations is essential.

KEYWORDS: Congado. Religious racism. Royal road.

**FESTAS DE PRETOS NO CAMINHO VELHO DA ESTRADA REAL: FÉ,
OBRIGAÇÃO, TURISMO E LAZER NA LUTA CONTRA O RACISMO
RELIGIOSO**

RESUMO: Este artigo é fruto de uma pesquisa² sobre o Reinado de Nossa Senhora do Rosário no Caminho Velho da Estrada Real e teve como objetivo registrar e apresentar análises de aspectos históricos, sociológicos, culturais, religiosos e turísticos presentes nos grupos de congado neste percurso, avaliando a importância das festas como fenômeno de devoção, obrigação e, ao mesmo tempo, de resistência, de lazer e turismo

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nas localidades investigadas. A pesquisa qualitativa se apoiou no método da história oral, sendo as entrevistas a principal estratégia adotada. Foram visitadas 15 cidades, 22 grupos, com 34 entrevistados. Espera-se que os estudos sobre o Congado possam contribuir com o debate sobre a luta antirracista em nosso país, em especial, contra o racismo religioso impetrado contra as manifestações de matrizes africanas. Para isso, o conhecimento sobre as manifestações é imprescindível.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Congado. Racismo religioso. Estrada real.

Introduction

A society aiming to become free from all forms of racism (and here I am dealing more specifically with religious racism) undoubtedly needs to consider different manifestations in our country of religiosities of African origin that were consolidated with the blood and sweat of those who survived the crossing and the diaspora.

Nogueira (2020) states that no one is naturally prejudiced, since every form of prejudice emerges from a social, historical and cultural stance that aims to segregate to dominate and, at the same time, determine and maintain a standard with its markers of prestige and power. According to this author, the debate on religious racism cannot escape the discussion on black epistemology as a possibility to combat colonialism, conservatism, Eurocentrism and, in this vein, religious racism. The latter is defined by the author as follows:

Religious racism condemns the origin, the existence, the relationship between a belief and a black origin. Racism does not only affect black men and women who practice these religions, but also affects the origins of religion, practices, beliefs and rituals. This is alterity condemned to non-existence (NOGUEIRA, 2020, p. 89).

Even though the manifestation of *Reinado*, *congado* or *reisado* is typical of black people, popular and important in our country (NORONHA, 2014; 2017) and has roots in Eurocentric Catholicism, it does not escape religious racism. *Reinado* or *congado* is the term that defines an annual cycle of festivals in devotion to Nossa Senhora do Rosário and the Black Saints, including Santa Efigênia and São Benedito. The influence of Catholic religiosity can be seen in novenas, the raising of flagpoles,

processions, solemn processions, masses, among many other symbols. Knowing the manifestation, its origin and functioning, its mythical and symbolic aspects, can help society face the anti-racist struggle and begin to respect not only this religiosity, but all others of African origin. Presenting knowledge about congado is the purpose of the article.

The study is the result of research that over the course of 10 years investigated the congado along the route of the Royal Road, this historic access road to the cities of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The four stages of the research included, respectively, the Old Path (or Caminho do Ouro), from Ouro Preto to Parati, passing through São Paulo; the Caminho Novo, considered the safest route to transport cargo to Rio de Janeiro; the Rota dos Diamantes, which connected Ouro Preto to Diamantina and Caminho de Sabarabuçu, from Ouro Preto to Serra da Piedade (ROYAL ROAD, 2022).

In this article, the evidence found in the cities along the Old Path route will be presented. First, however, the methodology adopted for the study will be presented. During the development of the article, the emphasis is on the history of the groups; an analysis of the mythical narratives that constitute the *modus vivendis* of congadeiros from MG and SP; the meaning of congado and its symbols; the festivals present on the route and their calendar; the groups' relationship with city halls, churches and schools, and also a discussion about their importance for tourism on Royal Road. Finally, the final considerations.

Methodology

This is qualitative research that adopted oral history, seen as a discipline, technique, methodology or as a disciplinary locus (MAIA, 1999) and used as a source on historical events. With oral history, the work prioritized interviews as “*parteiros de*

lembranças” (MONTENEGRO, 2007), facilitating the recovery of memory marks and the management of new experiences by those involved.

The “Old Path” (from Ouro Preto/MG to Parati/RJ, passing through São Paulo) included the cities described in Tables 1 and 2, and were chosen due to the presence of the Reinado festival. Data collection was carried out between July 2018 and September 2019. The cities where the congado takes place were mapped, with visits to identify the groups, scheduling and conducting interviews with their leaders, audiovisual recording and transcription of the interviews, with participant observation and iconographic records of the parties, spaces and subjects for analysis of the data.

Table 1: Cities and guards in Minas Gerais

CITIES	GUARDS
1. BELO VALE	1. Associação Guarda de Moçambique de Nossa Senhora do Rosário
	2. Guarda de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Vargem de Santana
2. SÃO JOÃO DEL REI	1. Guarda de Congado de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Santo Antônio de Rio das Mortes Pequeno
	2. Guarda de Moçambique de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Sebastião
	3. Guarda de Moçambique e Santa Efigênia
	4. Guarda de Congo São Benedito e São Sebastião
	5. Guarda de Moçambique Quincongo (Distrito de Ijaci)
3. TIRADENTES	1. Guarda de Congo Nossa Senhora do Rosário Escrava Anastácia
4. IBITURUNA	1. Guarda de Moçambique de Ibituruna
5. CARRANCAS	1. Guarda de Congo Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Carrancas
6. LAVRAS	1. Guarda de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito
7. CONCEIÇÃO DO RIO VERDE	1. Irmandade São Benedito e Nossa Senhora do Rosário
8. ITABIRA	1. Guarda de Marujo de São Sebastião
	2. Guarda de Marujo de São Benedito

Source: The author (2020).

Table 2: Cities and guards in Minas Gerais

CITIES	GUARDS
1. LORENA	1. Grupo Folclórico e Religioso de São Sebastião
2. GUARATINGUETÁ	1. Associação Cultural de Congada e Moçambique
3. APARECIDA	1. Festa de São Benedito
4. PINDAMONHANGABA	1. Congada de Pindamonhangaba

5. CUNHA	1. Congada de São Benedito de Cunha
6. TAUBATÉ	1. Congada de São Benedito do Alto Cristo
	2. Grupo de Moçambique do Parque São Cristóvão
7. LAGOINHA	1. Congada de São Benedito e Nossa Senhora da Conceição

Source: The author (2020).

The preparation, execution, transcription and analysis of the interviews (LEVEN; FARIA; MOTTA, 1996) were observed, respecting the regional characteristics of the speech of the interviewees. When quoting excerpts from these interviews, the initials of the name and the year of the interview are used. The full name of the informant, and his place of origin, is provided in the paragraph preceding the direct quote.

Research of this nature brings difficulties, such as contact with informants. Fortunately, the interest in publicizing the parties favored communication and facilitated access to interviewees. Another problem was traveling to the interview location: the interviewee's home or the group's headquarters were in regions or cities that were difficult to access, which required the researcher to spend more time in the region. But the interviewees were extremely helpful, offering information about their groups and thanking the interview and the importance of publishing it. For them, the more people understand congado, the greater its appreciation, acceptance and less prejudice.

Results and Discussions

The Royal Road was laid out by the bandeirantes following ancient indigenous trails, connecting Minas Gerais to the coast, and is considered the first official road in the country. Immigrants, drovers, cattle drivers, slaves, representatives of the Portuguese Crown, rebels and other historical figures passed through it. It was the first path through which the riches of the Minas Gerais lands flowed, but it also served for men to develop revolutionary ideas, histories and subjectivities (SEBRAE, 2006).

In recent decades, private entities and public authorities in Minas Gerais have come together to promote Royal Road as a tourist product. Among the actions of the State Government, Law 13.173/99 brings an Incentive Program to the tourist potential of Royal Road, guiding actions by the State Secretariat for Tourism. In 1999, the Federation of Industries of the State of Minas Gerais (FIEMG) created the Royal Road Institute (IER): a non-profit, non-governmental organization that manages the Royal Road tourist product, articulating the interests of the Government, companies and those interested in develop tourism. However, the relationship between the IER, the State Office for Tourism and other institutions, researchers and residents in its surroundings does not occur without conflicts, due to the role to be assumed by the institutions, the need to study the tourist potential of Royal Road and it should be approached as a finished product (GUERRA; OLIVEIRA; SANTOS, 2003).

There are attractions on Royal Road that configure it as a space for experiences and experiences. Rodrigues (2008) characterizes the potential of the Royal Road for tourism and highlights the physical-environmental environment (relief, climate, vegetation), natural historical, cultural (churches, museums, markets, traditional fairs, monuments, culture and art centers) and the intangible products (festivities) of the regions.

But these attractions require in-depth analysis. To transform Royal Road into a tourist product, research based on historical-cultural analyses, in which the population is heard, is necessary. Considering the black population, often forgotten by the official history of the country, and as part of this path, will certainly contribute to the configuration of a “real” Royal Road. Furthermore, the congado also demarcates the paths through the symbolic field, a path traced by the black imagination, which

constitutes the “map of redemption” in Minas Gerais (TAUSSIG, 1993 apud NORONHA, 2017).

As for leisure, I understand it as a dimension of human life that is essential in the constitution of being, as it involves culture, the imaginary, the dreamlike, the playful, health, education, public policies, struggle, resistance, relationship with the modes of occupation of cities in their urban and rural environments. Leisure is a condition for survival, for our being in the world, for “allowing” ourselves to live with joy and willingness, for filling gaps, for mobilizing our desires, emotions and courage to face everyday problems, with freedom and desire to create and recreate constantly life itself.

Leisure is one of the possibilities found by humanity to face the anguish of time passing (increasingly faster) and approaching death (DURAND, 1988). Therefore, it is symbolic production, a condition of our humanity, a field open to experiences, to the possible (NORONHA; FONSECA, 2021), to the exploration of the human bottomless that is the creative, mysterious force, which gives rise to within us the ability to transform the insignificant humus of nature in a humanized world (RUIZ, 2003).

In this expanded concept, I understand that the party, experienced as one of the leisure options, contains the possibility of understanding the human experience and the imaginary, and it is up to researchers not only to describe it, as is usually done, but rather to apprehend it in its epistemic sense, with a view to knowing more about ourselves and society. Likewise, tourism, as a sociocultural phenomenon also capable of mobilizing these elements of leisure, characterized in its essence, also, by the (re)knowledge of an extraordinary place, in which the most varied relationships (social, economic, historical, political, cultural, affective, etc.) in a given time and space (GOMES, 2007).

Having made these considerations, I will now present the results of the interviews carried out in the research, highlighting important aspects for understanding this population and also for the implementation of Royal Road as a tourist and leisure product, taking as a reference the black parties that take place there. occur.

The History of Groups

The stories of the groups are very diverse. Each with a historical context and motivations for its founding. The influence of old family members and their customs is notably noticeable in maintaining existing groups and founding new ones. In several cities the groups are traditional, formed by members of old families. Others are made up of friends who share a common devotion to black saints.

Groups with approximately 100 years of existence and others with 10, or even 3 years of formation were found. Some report that they stopped for a while and came back with full force. Others, who are already tired, have no participants and, therefore, are stopping. But the majority declare that, as long as they have strength, they will be leading their groups, as they are moved by faith, mainly in Nossa Senhora do Rosário and São Benedito.

On Royal Road, almost all groups are organized into brotherhoods, with boards and registrations in a notary's office. Recently, some were recognized as Intangible Heritage³, such as the guards of Belo Vale and Ibituruna, in Minas Gerais. This is a reason for joy for the members, as they feel valued and can ask the public authorities for help to maintain the group. Others are finalizing their cultural projects so that the same recognition can happen. The groups with their own head offices took us to them wearing their clothes, carrying their instruments and other artifacts.

³More information at www.iepha.mg.gov.br.

Most groups originated with the exclusive participation of men, with women often denied their presence. Many of them were only present carrying the flags of the saints, as queens or collaborating with logistics. In this regard, the speech of Sérgio de Lima, congadeiro from Belo Vale (MG), clarifies:

S. L. (2018): In the past, our Mozambique was all men, women had to stay at home, because here our statute only said that women couldn't go to the congado, that women give weight. This about 'giving weight', the ancients don't explain it (...) it's a secret. But as time went by, around 1990, my grandmother said that women were already going to the congado.

With the death of the oldest congadeiros, they began to occupy the spaces. Even today we find groups that do not have the participation of women, such as those in Rio das Mortes (MG) and Ibituruna (MG). In cities like Lavras (MG), Lorena (SP), Taubaté (SP), we find women who command everything in the festival. Many interviewees spoke of the importance of women who assume command positions in groups, with "functions equal to those of men".

There are many saints of devotion in the groups. In the cities of Minas Gerais, Nossa Senhora do Rosário is the main devotion, while in the cities of São Paulo, São Benedito reigns. In addition to these saints, each group elects others: Saint Ephigenia, Anthony of Padua, Saint Sebastian, Saint Gerard, Saint Joseph, Virgin of Mercy, Nossa Senhora of Aparecida and the Divine Holy Spirit.

In their clothing, the groups highlight the colors of the saints: blue, pink and white for Nossa Senhora do Rosário, brown for Saint Benedict, green, gray, red and even orange, which is not related to any saint, but was the color chosen in Conceição do Rio Verde (MG).

In Minas Gerais, the guards are from Congo, Mozambique, Catopé, Marujada and just one villain. On the other hand, in São Paulo, the groups are sometimes called congadas, sometimes mozambiques and the congueiros themselves (congadeiros, in

Minas) claim that the congada is Mozambique, causing a little confusion with the names. Coelho (2016) reports the importance of this city in the gold cycle and later in the sugar cane cycle, and also discusses the confusion of names given to the guards, bringing testimonies from the congueiros themselves. Also in this research, there are many names of the groups. Mr. Benedito G. de Faria, from Taubaté (SP), for example, told us:

B. G. F. (2019): we play the Divine, we can't do Mozambique, we receive congadas from outside, today we speak Mozambique, it's actually from Congo, it's the congada. These are bigger with instrument. There are only four from São Paulo, the rest are from Minas Gerais. We just don't have marungo⁴, there are children who arrive and are afraid.

Regarding the difference between congada and Mozambique, Ademar Gonçalves Gonçalves, from Guaratinguetá (SP), said:

A. G. G. (2019): Congadas are heavy instruments, whether made of leather or accordions... now, in reality, Mozambique is a small box, a floor tom, a viola, a tambourine, something small. That's why there is a difference, but we combine the two.

In turn, Osvaldir ALde Toledo, Seu Tuca, from Cunha (SP), states:

O. A. L. T. (2019): Congada de São Benedito. That's the name here in Cunha. Because in Parati it is Marrapaiá. Here it is Congada and in each state it has a different name, you know. The same in Minas is Mozambique, Congado, Congo, right? But it's different there, they don't use sticks, right? But here we use it, theirs is just an instrument. Lagoinha is also just an instrument, there is no stick either. São Luiz do Paraitinga is... It's not São Luiz, it's Ponte Nova, which already has a stick as well.

These statements show that there are differences between the manifestations, despite all being part of the Reign. They concern the instruments used, the rhythms played, the ways of singing, the clothing, among others.

Some groups define themselves as religious, with a predominance of Catholics, and others mixed, with spiritualists. Other groups define themselves as folkloric and

⁴ The marungo that Mr. Benedito refers to is a clown, a character from the Santos Reis festivities, which take place in December and January. Ver Van Der Poel (2013).

religious, as they participate in festivals, birthdays and also parties for saints and the payment of promises. Many groups promote other events such as the folia de reis, the folia do Divino, strong traditions in Minas. In São Paulo, in addition to these, jongo, the São Gonçalo dance, cana verde, lundu and catira are strong.

The number of group members varies, but on average it is 30 people. Many highlight that the groups are getting older, making it difficult to encourage young people and children to participate in the tradition. Most of the members of the guards are family members, friends, residents of the same neighborhood, allowing for an extended and intimate collective experience, with communities united by the festival.

Many captains and masters say that young people think differently, are ashamed to wear traditional clothes and not remain in the guards, preferring to deal with social networks, taking and posting photos. Even during religious events, they prefer shows and pagoda groups⁵. Older people also say that they lose one or two young people to drugs and violence. Children are always welcome, although some guards report difficulty in keeping them, as they require care, and, in addition, they cannot swear at them so as not to discourage them.⁶ Mr. João dos Santos Leone, from Itabira (MG), said that “they are a gift from God, those who don’t have children don’t have much power to evolve”.

There are many lessons learned from those who live the congado, or congadas. This happens through observation and participation. For some, this knowledge is already in their blood, others seek knowledge from their elders and also from books and documentaries. This process is living culture itself, the recognition of the praise of Mary's rosary and all the saints and, also, of the work of those who are here and those who have passed away.

⁵ About youth in Congado, see theses by Brandão (2020) and Silva (2020).

⁶ With regard to the participation of Children, see the thesis by Altivo (2019).

In almost all guards in Minas Gerais we find the crowned throne. There are variations, but the Crowned Throne is made up of the Congo King and Queen, the Perpetual King and Queen, the Major King and Queen, the King and Queen of Ano, the First, Second and Third Captain. Each king or queen takes on a role at the festivities. Almost always the kings Congo, Perpétuo and Mor are the ones who possess the wisdom of the congado, guide the guards, and represent the saints on earth. The Reis de Ano are the partygoers and responsible for party expenses. Mr. João dos Santos Leone, from Itabira (MG), says that “A reign without congadeiros is not a reign”, drawing attention to the importance of the other components of the groups.

In São Paulo, most cities do not have a crowned throne, coronation of kings or the Reign, with the Master, Counter-Master, Captain and queens of the flags of the saints and the state. In Taubaté we find the King and Queen of Congo, the queens of the flags of São Benedito, Nossa Senhora Aparecida, Nossa Senhora do Rosário, Divino, the Queen of Folklore and the queens of the city, state and country flags. It is customary to draw lots to determine the Congo kings and queens of the year. Being chosen fills devotees with pride.

The instruments used also vary. The most common are drum, patangome, boxes, gungas (campanha), accordion, cavaquinho, banjo, mandolin, guitar, tambourine, reco-reco, cuíca, timba, ganzá, tambourine, snare drum, floor tom, ruflos, rattle. Each group uses it according to the rhythm played, such as Congo, Mozambique, Catopé, Villain, Serra Below, or dances, such as batões and cacunda, which only existed in Ijaci (MG). According to André LF Medeiros, “the terno de cacunda is almost the same as the catopé, but when dancing it is different, only instead of stamping their feet they tap cacunda with cacunda”.

Rituals are developed with dances and songs passed down orally from generation to generation. Songs to ask for permission when arriving in someone's territory, to receive and thank them for food (coffee or lunch), for the conga mass, to raise and lower flagpoles, for processions, for the meeting of flags, among others. Some captains pride themselves on improvising songs on the spot, without copying verses sung by others. These captains say that these improvised verses come from the soul.

The Mythical Narratives

These manifestations are based on mythical narratives. In Minas Gerais, devotion to Nossa Senhora do Rosário is given by congadeiros recognizing her as the mother of slaves. Congadeiros say that there is the mother of the earth and the mother of the heavens, Nossa Senhora. The myth is told in different ways⁷. For some, the image of a girl (saint) appeared on a rock, or in a cave. For others, this image of Senhora do Rosário came from the sea. In Lavras (MG), Mrs. Helena C. Felisberto said that:

H. C. F. (2019): Nossa Senhora do Rosário appeared in a stone cave, you know, so they wanted to remove her and no one could remove her. Then it was the Terno de moçambique, a beautiful look for her, she didn't take it off, it was the sailor's suit, it was the feathered suit, the ones with a nice plume, the catopé didn't take it off. It was the villain who took it, he thought it was interesting, she followed the villain, they were singing, they were beating their chopsticks, they were dancing, she found it very interesting, so she left. Then they built a church for her right in front, the black kids built the church for Nossa Senhora.

In Ibituruna (MG), Mr. Maximiniano S. Neto said that:

M.S. N. (2019): Look at the story of Nossa Senhora do Rosário, what we know is that Nossa Senhora do Rosário, in the past, when I was a black man, you took people to work, I got close to a forest and a woman came out, and she went to the in the middle of the woods, he stayed there. She lit a candle for a picture and every day she went there to light a candle. Then the guard says: try to see what this woman is doing. Then, he went there and found an image there, go from here, go from there, let's build a chapel, let's build a chapel and everyone was fighting to get Nossa Senhora do Rosário out of there and everyone went there, no one took it out, only Mozambique went there and shooting Nossa Senhora do Rosário. So that's why Mozambique

⁷ An analysis of the myth of Nossa Senhora do Rosário, with its images and symbolism can be found in Alves (2008) and Noronha (2014, 2017).

pulls the crown. Everywhere we go, there is more Mozambique, first among this one, this one leaves, then another one comes in, and so on.

Another statement, from Conceição de Rio Verde (MG), says that Nossa Senhora do Rosário and São Benedito were good and charitable people, which is why they were considered padroeiras of congados. Nossa Senhora would be the light that came down from the heavens, sat on the drum and broke the chains of the enslaved. It is clear that there is no single version of the myth, it is believed that the elderly knew the stories of the saints, which today need to be found in other sources. Therefore, they recognize the importance of teaching younger people.

Tadeu N. Souza, from São João Del Rei (MG) tells us another story:

T. N. S. (2019): Look, it's a story my father told me. At that time, he said that time there was neither congado nor mozambique, that Brazil owed the crown to Portugal, he couldn't even tell why he was a native, a 'homi' from the countryside, this must have been passed from black to black, but He said that the crown of Portugal demanded gold here from Brazil and that there was a great need here, the farmers were not able to send the amount of this gold, he said that it was Dom Joao V, and that's where the expression emerged '*quinto dos infernos*' [Fifth of Hell]. Then he said that in Africa there was a king called Calanga, and that this Calanga was very smart, experienced in Minas, and that he went there and they caught this guy, I don't know how it happened, they caught him and inside the slave ship there was a guy who spoke Portuguese and Yoruba or Banto, I don't know, and spoke to him: if you want to do well in Brazil you have to accept Jesus as your God, right, and Nossa Senhora do Rosário. Then he said to this interpreter, I deny it too: look at Jesus for the white people and zamboapongo for the people of Calango.

These different versions of the myth confirm that the tradition is oral. In Minas Gerais, the story of Chico Rey is also remembered, despite many claiming to have no knowledge of who he was. In São Paulo, Chico Rei is not mentioned. Mr. Maximiniano says:

M. S. N. (2019): No, I don't have much knowledge, but Chico Rei is one of the members of folklore, because that's what we heard about. That's what Mr. Gonçalo, who is my captain, who taught me, I talk a lot, but we end up forgetting, right? It's been a lot of years, you know, one day we feel good, another day we don't, our head gets so full that we end up forgetting. But Chico Rei is firm and strong, thank God. That's why when the group leaves we shout: Long live Chico Rei! Zombie life! Long live! Long live Zumbi dos Palmares! Because Zumbi dos Palmares came from slavery, right? Because the time of the slaves was the time when he was singing, making fires, dancing in the masters' houses, you know, it was the time when Zumbi dos

Palmares and Nossa Senhora do Rosário were appearing, the mother of all slaves, the mother of slaves. Nossa Senhora is the mother of slaves and blessed everyone. When you arrived and beat Nossa Senhora who healed those wounds.

São Benedito is also widely celebrated in Minas, but in São Paulo the devotion is highlighted:

M. S. N. (2019): São Benedito was a cook at the barracks, right, so every day he liked to take care of street children, those abandoned children, starving. Then every day, he had his cassock, which he tied and filled the sleeves with things for the children to eat. They were all waiting for him, he took them. Then one day the commander said: “What are you taking there, Benedito?” “I’m not taking anything, sir.” “Are you carrying something there, what’s in that shirt of yours that’s full?” “There’s nothing, sir.” “So open this shirt there?” Then when he opened it, so much pink fell out. Because he took care of children who were starving.

This narrative is told with few variations by the *congueiros* of Vale do Paraíba (SP). Another curiosity is about the São Benedito sweet, served at parties. According to Joaquina Vieira, from Taubaté (SP):

J. v. (2019): They talk about São Benedito sweet, it's the sweet saint. Then, if you have a headache, a pain, if you eat a little bit of that sweet, it means that person's health. So, why is there sweet every year in Aparecida, in Guará. Every São Benedito festival has sweets and for what? Sweets are sacred, there are people who take a little bit of sweet and give it to the whole family to eat. Because a little bit of sweet that you eat is a grace that you will receive in your life. Health is the most important thing, health to continue taking. You eating sweets is a holy medicine for you. My mother would take the sweet and give it to the whole family, a little bit. It was faith. Sweets of various types, pumpkin, sweet potato, papaya, are the three most popular.

Santa Efigênia has many devotees, however, none of the groups surveyed were able to talk about its history. Mr. Maximiniano says: “I don’t know how to talk much about Santa Efigênia, I know more that she’s a Black Saint too, right!”

In Tiradentes (MG) another narrative caught attention: the life of the Slave Anastácia, after whom the guard is named, reported by Claudinei M. Nascimento:

C MN (2019): Slave Anastácia as far as we know a little, right, is that when she was captured in Africa they killed her husband and she swore that she would not belong to any other man. It's so bad that she died with that gag in her mouth as punishment, without eating, without drinking until her mouth hurt everything and she became very sick, until she died. Because the Lord who owned her wanted... Grandpa spoke in the people's language, I wanted to

be with her and she wouldn't accept it, right? And she was resistant and she wants us to resist as much as possible with our culture, our people. Now we're going to have a really hard time, but it's just like her, even though she only has her mouth closed, she doesn't like it if anyone puts their head down, so we're going to have to fight. We will stay firm and strong.

The history of the fights between the Moors and Christians is also remembered by many. For José Roberto, from São João Del Rei (MG), “the Moor, he runs after the children, he wants to bother them, he represents evil”.

The Meaning of Congado

There are several meanings of the congado for those who live their faith in the rosary. The congado is the historical resistance of enslaved black people. It is the foundation, commandment and sacrament of this culture. It is a family tradition and memory of ancestors, of the suffering of enslaved black people. It is a fight, represented by the dance of the sticks. It's remembering that they are alive. It means working with people of different ages, genders, ethnicities, physical and mental abilities, without distinction. It is to praise Our Lady! It's loving Mary's rosary! According to Tiago O. Galvão, from Conceição do Rio Verde (MG), “those who don't dance the congado don't know what's good”. It's culture, it's dance, it's folklore, it's tradition, it's belief, it's religion. It is donation, harmony and also fun, because, as Osvaldir AL Toledo, from Cunha (SP) said, “there is no sadness here, we forget the problems”. The speech by Tadeu N. de Souza, from São João Del Rei (MG) summarizes this feeling:

TNS (2019): It means a lot to me because, firstly, I'm doing work that reminds me of the stories of my people, the Benguela black people. The Benguela blacks, are my relatives, right? We're remembering their stories and making sure this doesn't fall into oblivion, it won't stay under the carpet. As for people of religion, politicians, ordinary people, where this black movement always seems to bother certain people a little, and they want to brush it under the carpet, and this is the time when the drums have to beat louder and the gungas sizzle louder, to remember that we are alive. This is my intention to maintain history. The second intention I tell you is to praise Nossa Senhora do Rosário. Nossa Senhora do Rosário was very important, she was the mother of Jesus, she who brought Jesus into the world, who took care of Jesus, the son of God, right. So it's really important for us to praise

the rosary, to praise Mary, that's right, and to praise the other black saints. It's not because we're racist towards white people or towards white saints, you know? Because after we die, the soul has no color, all blood is red, that's not it. Now I'm going to mention the third fact, because I'm in this movement: love, there has to be a lot of love, love, love, love. So if there wasn't this triangle of things, for me it wouldn't work because I couldn't balance it. This is my fuel, this is my strength, my sustenance and my resistance. These three things: Wow, the culture that comes from my ancestors and the love I have for the thing. The Italians have their pasta, their wonderful noodles, their wine, and they won't let it finish, because we black people, will they let it finish? Just because we get hit in the stocks, we don't have to beat our drums. Our wounds have closed but our history is open.

Faith in Nossa Senhora do Rosário, Saint Benedict and the other saints is related to love, with belief in tradition, with miracles and graces achieved. There are several testimonies about these graces: “She is the mother and protects us”; “She gave me life again”; “If I had a thousand lives I would give them to praise Mary’s rosary”; “Faith lifts up those who are sick”; With her I achieve everything I ask for”; “Nossa Senhora do Rosário has a lot of power”; “The guy is stuck, with his living faith in Our Lady he doesn’t fall into the hole”; “I don’t sleep without praying the rosary”; “Without faith we cannot move mountains”.

The Symbols of Congado

There are several symbols present in the religious manifestation. Sérgio Lima remembers that in the Kingship there is the foundation, the commandment and the sacrament⁸. According to the interviewee:

S. L. (2019): Fundamentally, you have to know what the congado is, what the rosary is, know the role of a captain. The King of the year doesn't need it, it's more people who make promises, that sort of thing. Now King Congo and King Perpétuo already have to know more about that background that we talk about, they have to have wisdom, learning, know how to talk to others, they have to have a certain foundation. King of Congo and Perpétuo's crown is a heavy crown, it's not a toy, it's a lot of responsibility.

Crowns are a sign of respect. The foundation, sacrament and commandment of the congado are also present on the captains' staffs. The baton is adorned according to

⁸ See Noronha (2014, 2017).

the creativity of the person who carries it, being a trace of that person's identity and representing their role in the party. According to Sérgio Lima (2018), the baton “is to know that that person is governing the group, he is the authority, not just anyone who arrives and takes the baton”. According to this informant:

S. L. (2018): There are reports of people, the oldest ones who tell us, who went to pick up a stick and fell to the ground out of nowhere, because the energy that is here is a lot. This old stick, I don't know what people did, put on it, it has a lot of malice. Here we say that the strength is coming from the earth.

According to the interviewee:

S. L. (2018): You can observe that my stick has a head, every head is upwards, if you put the head downwards, the force that you are pulling towards the sky, you are pulling is downwards. It's like a river, you keep going, you don't see the water going downwards, you don't see the water coming back. So, that's why our stick is taken to heaven, which is taking the strength of the earth, which will pass through us, which will put the axé in it, which will ask for the blessing of heaven, the blessing will elevate. You can see that when a flag is on the ground, it first comes into contact with the ground, people will ask God: oh God, I don't want anything to happen. Then when you put it on the mast and it goes up to the sky, that's when it takes the order up. Then there's the wind, when the flag is in the sky it will carry good things, it will carry bad things, the wind can bring good and bad things, this depends on the faith of the person who made the request. It's a lot of history, it's living and learning every day.

Another important symbol in the congado is the sword, which is used by some captains to guard the crown, as Sérgio said:

S. L. (2018): because everything that comes, everything that comes ends up with them. If it happens to pass, there will be someone guarding the crown. There it will stop there, the sword is a power of strength, of firmament, all evil that stops there will be cut off. You can see that the sword cuts two sides, that the person can send evil from any side, from the right, from the left and the person can cut.

Mention should also be made of the mast. At the festival there are several flagpoles with the flag of the padroeira at the top. Essential in the celebration, the poles form the connection between heaven and earth (NORONHA, 2017), representing the bond between congadeiros and the divine. They are erected to start and end the festival

and cause moments of great devotion and tension, both due to their sacredness and the physical effort made to safely raise and lower these wooden or metal poles.

The Parties on the Old Path of the Royal Road in Minas Gerais and São Paulo

Along the Royal Road route we will find congada, mozambique and other parties. Religious festivals and cultural and folklore movements, such as those in Olímpia (SP). Large parties, with the participation of many guards, or smaller ones, with local groups. A big party, in honor of São Benedito, takes place in Aparecida (SP), in the month of April, and receives guards from Minas, Goiás and São Paulo, each with its specific characteristics. According to João Donizete dos Santos, from Aparecida (SP), the party began in 1909, being organized by the Brotherhood of São Benedito. The interviewee says:

J. D. S. (2019): At the time, in the past, they went to celebrate a lot in Guará and there was no Church of São Benedito here. And as they decided, one day they founded the brotherhood here and decided to hold the first party of São Benedito in 1909. Even the first party was held in the old church because there was no Church of São Benedito yet. Then they started to earn funds, they built the church of São Bendito, meanwhile the image of São Benedito was housed in the church of Santa Rita, which is why São Benedito celebrates, and goes to get Santa Rita to celebrate together. All groups from Congado on Saturday go to the Santa Rita church to look for Santa Rita to bring her to participate in the São Benedito festival, because she welcomed her when there was no church. And on Tuesday, when the party ends, they take Santa Rita back. The car the brotherhoods take.

Also, Izabel C. O. C. of Santos, from Aparecida (SP), comments on this party:

I. C. O. C. (2019): In fact, the city's festival is São Benedito. The party of Nossa Senhora Aparecida is for the pilgrim. But the festival of Aparecida, the festival of the people of Aparecida, belongs to São Benedito. From Aparecida and the region, because there are good shows and people come, people like Cavalaria, they like Congada.

Deponents claim that the party is organized by the groups themselves, with or without support from government bodies. Table 3 shows the calendar of these festivals and how they are held in their locations:

Table 3: Calendar of Parties⁹

CITIES	GUARDS	PARTY	DATE
1. BELO VALE	1. Associação Guarda de Moçambique de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Belo Vale	It takes place at the group's seat and at the community church. They perform a 12-day novena with prayer of the rosary. On Sunday, children perform the coronation of Nossa Senhora.	3 rd Sunday of October
	2. Guarda de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Vargem de Santana	There are 10 days of celebration, with novenas, mast raising, mass, procession and collective lunch. On Sunday is the biggest party.	June
2. SÃO JOÃO DEL REI	1. Guarda de Congado de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Santo Antônio de Rio das Mortes Pequeno	Two parties: Nossa Senhora de Santana and Nossa Senhora do Rosário. In the latter, eight days before the festival, the mast is raised. The party kings organize the party. The first and second crowns offer lunches and snacks.	June and October
	2. Guarda de Moçambique de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Sebastião	No information	–
	3. Guarda de Moçambique e Santa Efigênia	The group performs theater telling the story of Our Lady and choreographies.	–
	4. Guard of Congado São Benedito and São Sebastião	In addition to the January festival, they celebrate the Divine Festival.	January 17 to 20
	5. Guard of Mozambique Kicongo (Ijaci District)	Carried out by the group itself. Mast lifting 15 days before.	October 1 (changes in election year)
3. TIRADENTES	1. Guarda de Congo Nossa Senhora do Rosário Escrava Anastácia	Party once a year.	Last Sunday in September
4. IBITURUNA	1. Guarda de Moçambique de Ibituruna	King and Queen Major organize the party. Community helps and welcomes other guards.	Last week of June
5. CARRANCAS	1. Guarda de Congo Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Carrancas	Congadeiros themselves organize it. They raise the mast 7 days in advance.	Second Sunday in October
6. LAVRAS	1. Guarda de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito	They don't have parties anymore. The group travels by invitation to	–

⁹ During the Covid 19 pandemic, parties were suspended.

		presentations, for example, in nursing homes. There's a Congo choir.	
7. CONCEIÇÃO DO RIO VERDE	1. Irmandade São Benedito e Nossa Senhora do Rosário	Gather all the suits in the city and draw the king and queen of the year. Party held in a single day.	May 13
8. ITABIRA	1. Guarda de Marujo de São Sebastião	Meets at the town meeting.	October 9
	2. Guarda de Marujo de São Benedito	One day – Saturday or Sunday. Raise the flag one day and come down the next.	October 9
9. LORENA	1. Folklore and Religious Group of São Sebastião de Lorena	Doesn't have a group party, participates in others.	–
	2. Congada Moçambique de São Benedito from the Industrial Area	Participates in the congada meeting once a year. Party at headquarters, organized by the group.	July
10. GUARATINGUETÁ	1. Associação Cultural de Congada e Moçambique	Party on the congada's birthday, organized by the group.	April
11. APARECIDA	1. Festa de São Benedito	Interviewees have been organizing the big São Benedito festival in the city for over 20 years. There are several commissions and more than 1500 people working. The party has existed for over 110 years and receives visits from MG, SP and GO.	April
12. PINDAMONHANGABA	1. Congada de Pindamonhangaba	No information	–
13. CUNHA	1. Congada de São Benedito de Cunha	It doesn't have its own party. They throw parties for those who want to pay promises; in the square for the saints; the party of the Divine. The Parati party brightens.	–
14. TAUBATÉ	1. Congada de São Benedito do Alto Cristo	They hold the party before the one in Aparecida and celebrate the congada's birthday.	April and 12/24
	2. Grupo de Moçambique do Parque São Cristóvão	The party has grown a lot and has been held at the school since 2010. 3000 people.	July 14
15. LAGOINHA	1. Congada de São Benedito e Nossa Senhora da Conceição	They have held the Congadas Meeting since 2102, in April after Aparecida. Festival of the Divine in July, party of São Benedito 05/10, party of the padroeira in	April, July, October and December

		December. They also have the group Orgulho Caipira, which performs at festivals in the city with Dança do Sabão, Dança do Anguejo, Dança de Moçambique and São Gonçalo.	
16. PARATI	There are no groups	Festival of the Divine. Performed by the Cunha group – they call the congada Marrapiá	June

Source: The author (2020).

The rituals at the festivals are very similar: prayers of rosaries and novenas before the start of the festivities, dawn, search for kings, coronation of kings and queens, raising and lowering of flagpoles, conga mass, procession, collective banquets. These rituals can last from one to ten days, depending on the location and group.

The guards organizing the parties receive many guests. On the other hand, the groups commit to participating in the celebration of those who visited them. Exchanges of visits are very common. In this way, each group, in its region, circulates, whenever possible, between parties in other cities. There were several locations mentioned by them, in addition to the cities visited in this research, such as Minas Gerais, Divinópolis, Perdões, Bonsucesso, Carmo do Cajuru, Ribeirão Vermelho, Macaia, Nepomuceno, Carvalhópolis, Oliveira, Passatempo, Dores do Campo, Cana Verde, Jacaré, Porto Mendes, Retiro dos Pimenta, Resende Costa, Carmo da Cachoeira, Campo Belo, Cambuquira, Silvianópolis, Jesuânia, Campaign, Cordislândia, Itambé do Mato Dentro, Antônio Dias, Santa Rita do Barreiro. In São Paulo: Olímpia, Guararema, Engenheiro Passos, Redenção, Turbolândia, São Luiz do Paraitinga, Atibaia, São José dos Campos. Valinhos, Frei Galvão, São Miguel, Cotia, Catuçaba. In Rio de Janeiro, congadeiros report having visited Angra dos Reis and Parati.

Relationship with Municipal Governments, Churches and Schools

To carry out visits, the guards need transport, counting on the help of city halls and communities. Some reported having a good relationship with city halls and getting support for transportation and holding the party. Others report that they no longer have this support. For those guards considered intangible heritage, ICMS Cultural resources are transferred. But many say that the party is held by themselves and with money from their own pockets. In these cases, it is common for the community and party kings to contribute a little more.

The relationship with the parish priests is also different. Most report that priests are supportive and welcome the groups. Few said they have had problems with priests who do not understand or, sometimes, do not even recognize the manifestation.

Involvement with schools is highlighted by several groups. Many report that municipal schools never invite presentations or explanations about congados. However, many informants said they were only called on the day of “celebration” of the liberation of slaves, May 13th, and Black Consciousness day, November 20th. The interviewees highlight how important this is to break down prejudices and understand the history of black people in our country. In this context, Claudinei M. do Nascimento, from Tiradentes (MG) states that:

C. M. N. (2019): What happens, people only remember black culture on Black Awareness Day, then black people no longer mean anything. In our city it's not much different, the schools in our municipality don't give a damn about what we do. So much so that there was work to be done at school. The girls saw us at a party that was being held at school, they didn't film it, the next day they came here to interview me. I said look we went there yesterday you didn't take any photos now are you running around looking for photos? So our school couldn't care less. We do a lot of presentations for schools in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Brasília, Goiás, we do, but in the city... Now it looks like they're going to wake up a little. The director even called me to talk, it was time to wake up, right? So, we have a lot to offer, Brazil has almost nothing, Brazil has little to offer us.

Asked about the reason for this disregard for Congado, Claudinei responds:

C. M. N. (2019): It's not just like Congado, but everything that comes to things of African origin is very discriminated against. It's Congado, it's Umbanda, anyone who comes from this area of our African culture is very discriminated against. It's so much that we arrive at places to play, we arrive like that, because I really like the fact that we are paying homage to old black people and Slave Anastácia. Depending on the place, you have to arrive singing carefully, very carefully so as not to scare people. Then when you see that people also play on the same team as us, then you let go. We have to do it like we used to do, you put the Catholic saint on top of the altar table and put our African saints below and that's how we have to work a lot sometimes. But here in Tiradentes I'm working in the open.

In Belo Vale (MG), there is the Slave Museum, but little is done in conjunction with the school. One of the informant reports the difficulty of going to school due to his members' work. A group from São João Del Rei (MG) and another from Lavras (MG) cited an approach with two federal universities: UFSJ and UFLA. The interviewee from Carrancas (MG) said that his group always goes to school to show their culture. The city of Lagoinha (MG) highlights Ciranda Cultural and the work carried out in the two existing municipal schools, with monthly workshops, since 2014.

The Royal Road and Tourism

Many interviewees claim that the festivities contribute to tourism in the city, as it increases the number of people who travel to watch the congado. According to José Tadeu Nascimento, from São João Del Rei (MG):

J. T.N (2019): Oh sure, influence. Now that it has become a historical heritage site. The city is full of people. Even more so when there is the party of the Divine. I think it was the lack of a push from IPHAN and the historical heritage that was missing, sometimes they were outside the congado law. Now you know what the congado's fate meant. What amount of money comes for this, destined for congado. For them, sometimes they thought it had no value. Now they're watching. Now it must change, right?

However, in the same city we found another statement, from Tadeu N. Souza:

T. N. S. (2019): So, as I am going to tell you... The city's rulers don't show us, they show other things, they show the marching band, carnival things, other dancing groups, other things, but a living walking museum, they don't show it. We are excluded, and there is no point in saying that here we say, go to the square, go tourist, they don't give us this opportunity. Here in our city we stay in the kitchen, we never go to the living room, visitors stay in the

living room and we in the kitchen. But when we go to Tiradentes we go to parties there, we are very well received by tourists, it's an acceptance, they sing along, they ask questions, they want to interact. It is amazing. Here in São João it is very different. They don't even let us go to the Rosário church. Congado doesn't go in there, if he does there will be a fight, and it was the Benguela who built it.

In relation to Royal Road, the majority of congadeiros said that it makes no difference to enjoy the congado as a tourist attraction, as the festivals are not publicized.

According to the testimony of Sérgio Lima, from Belo Vale (MG):

S. L. (2018): Look, there are a lot of tourists here, not many, it's more local, you know. Because the Estrada Real passes here, I think it has nothing to do with it. Because hardly any people come. More people come to Belo Vale because there is the museum there, but from there they leave. Because this church is old, practically no one comes, just people from here, or someone who comes from abroad, as well as the lady who goes there, and is eager to see it.

Congadeiros, like Ademir F.G. Dias, from Belo Vale (2018), suggest the creation of a festive calendar, that public bodies give visibility to events and that there is publicity about the festivities:

A. G. D. F. (2018): I think it is little publicized in this sense, it is more among us, but it could be a vector, an attraction for tourism. Because it's a region, if you take the entire circuit of Vale do Paraopeba, all the cities have it. If you make a festive calendar, everyone will have one. From now on, after Lent, from April to December, every month there will be a festival, each saint, with a rhythm, with a dress, with a story. This would be very good, kind of publicity, right? Knowledge makes people who have a certain resistance break their resistance, those who are prejudiced, right. There is something different about respect.

A witness said that congadeiros are excluded and that no one is interested in their work. Only in Ibituruna (MG) was reference made to Royal Road in the city, in the statement of Maximiliano S. Neto:

M. S. N. (2019): The Royal Road has, we have here the Mercês Maria landmark, close to where you passed to go to Elza, next to the Rosário Church, there is a chain that is the Mercês Maria landmark, which is the beginning of the Royal Road, ok there for everyone to see.

Therefore, the hypothesis of an increase in tourism on Royal Road during cultural festivals was not proven. There needs to be greater encouragement from public policies in the development of actions to create a “real” Royal Road.

Final Considerations

Along the route of Royal Road, the Congado festival took place and continues to be present in several municipalities, a time when devotees change the social structure of these locations, occupying their spaces differently, with processions, masses, raising of flags, followed by of songs, dances and the sound of drums. These are social groups that, almost always, live in anonymity and, following a peculiar religious calendar, come together to remember a time and a mythical imaginary that is impossible for them to forget. Due to its grandeur and complexity, research on manifestation opens up numerous possibilities for analysis.

The congado, in addition to its religious importance, is an opportunity to learn a little more about ourselves and the society in which we live, contributing to the fight against colonialism and religious racism. Approaching the words of Nogueira (2020), I affirm that the congado has its episteme, because according to the author:

Epistemology is any notion or idea, reflected or not, about the conditions of what counts as valid knowledge. It is through valid knowledge that a given social experience becomes intentional and intelligible. There is, therefore, no knowledge without social practices and actors (NOGUEIRA, 2020, p. 55).

A first step to breaking with prejudice in the face of this manifestation is to get closer to its episteme, because, according to Nogueira (2020), not knowing it is also an ethnic-racial problem. Furthermore, the congado allows for the historical, cultural and social development of the locations where these manifestations occur. Therefore, recognizing the congado tradition as an intangible heritage, as in our state, is an important step towards the permanence of these festivities. Knowing and recording the

foundations of the demonstration, the his(e)stories of the groups through their memories contributes to this anti-racist fight and also to the heritage, historical, social and tourist development of the locations where the party is present.

For Leisure and Tourism in our state, research opens up the knowledge of an important dimension of human life, which is the festival, and the possibility of understanding more about our people, their traditions, their way of life and the be a congadeiro. Knowledge of these traditional manifestations can arouse the interest of people from Brazil and around the world, boosting tourism in the cities researched and in their surroundings.

In this regard, faith, an experience lived by individuals and groups, motivated by sociopolitical issues, resistance, such as combating prejudice and religious racism, or spiritual, healing, penance and gratitude, causes displacement to certain places considered “sacred”, which are often transformed into tourist attractions. The congado expressed along the four routes of this colonial road, especially the Caminho Velho, fulfills this role and can contribute to the effectiveness of the Estrada Real as a tourist product and, mainly, to the construction of an anti-racist society, especially regarding religiosities of African origins.

Long live Senhora do Rosário!
Long live São Benedito!
Long live!

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