

Festivities and urban space: music broadcasting and dance parties in 1950s Belém¹

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RESUMO

O artigo discute o uso de referências simbólicas de origem memorialística e jornalística atribuídas ao contexto socioespacial dos bailes dançantes de orquestras e *sonoros* em Belém, nos assim chamados ‘clubes sociais’ e ‘clubes suburbanos’. As formas variadas de organização de festas dançantes na cidade estiveram associadas à difusão musical radiofônica nos anos 1950, mas também se ligaram à atuação dos *sonoros* comerciais ou daqueles especializados em bailes dançantes. Formas diferentes de uso e acesso aos meios de comunicação/sonorização pela população urbana foram acompanhadas pela ênfase da imprensa local na distinção social. Referências simbólicas e valorativas do espaço urbano emergem nos registros de jornal e memorialístico acerca do panorama festivo da cidade.

Palavras-chave: bailes dançantes; *sonoros*; distinção social.

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the use of symbolic references, from memories and printed periodicals, ascribed to the socio-spatial context of orchestral and *sonoro* balls in Belém, at the so-called ‘social clubs’ and ‘suburban clubs’. The varied forms of organization of dance parties in the city were connected to musical broadcasting on the radio in the 1950s, as well as being linked to the performance of commercial *sonoros* or those that specialized in dance parties. The different ways in which the urban population used and accessed the means of communication were accompanied by an emphasis on social distinction in the local press. Symbols and values related to the urban space emerge in newspaper reports and memorialist recollections the city’s festive panorama.

Keywords: Balls; *sonoros*; social distinction.

This article examines the meanings attributed to the dance parties that were a part of the urban panorama of mid-twentieth century Belém. These meanings are evoked through memorialist recollections and journalistic refer-

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ences that focus on many different aspects of the dance parties of the time. This article presents and discusses some of these recollections, collected from people involved in the world of popular dance parties in 1950s Belém, as well as journalistic references from the city's major publications at the time.

The suburban dance parties were organized around presentations by what the contemporary press referred to as *picarpes* or *sonoros*, predecessors of the modern sound systems that can still be found in Belém.² These sound systems began emerging and developing in Belém between the 1950s and the 1970s. The *sonoros* that animated these dance parties were assembled, beginning in the late-1940s, in an artisanal manner by people with expertise in electronics. They were composed of a metal valve amplifier, a 78 rpm record player (the pick-up, which came to be known by its Brazilianized form, *picarpe*), a small speaker and a sound projector, known as the *boca de ferro* (iron mouth).

These *sonoros* or *picarpes* were related to the commercial *sonoros*, but they were mainly used at festive events, particularly dance parties. Many *sonoro* owners began their careers at neighborhood parties, at birthdays and weddings. Those who were successful could start charging to provide music for festive events at both established and lesser known suburban clubs.

However, the so-called 'social clubs' located in the downtown area of the city and/or catering to middle and upper class society, preferred live music performances by popular ensembles and orchestras.

In this study, I seek to identify and discuss the symbolic memorialist and journalistic references regarding the socio-spatial arrangement of the dance parties featuring orchestras and *sonoros* in the city, at the so-called 'social clubs' and 'suburban clubs.' The diversification of means of communication (and the means of playing music) in the mid-twentieth century is linked in a variety of ways to the organization of dance parties in the city. The different ways in which the city's population made use of these means of communication and broadcasting have ties with ideas related to social distinction. These ideas are evoked in the consulted sources as symbolic references to the urban space.

The memorialist records discussed below were collected from personal memoirs and compilations of journalistic reports. Interviews were also conducted with people involved in the festive scene of the 1950s dance parties. At the same time, a range of journalistic reports regarding the 1950s – primarily from *A Província do Pará* and *O Liberal* – were extensively consulted.

The memory of the parties and the urban landscape of the time is herein considered to be based on the individual experiences of the subjects in relation to the festive events. I was therefore guided by the work of Halbwachs,³ who

highlights the relationship between the individual who engages in the act of remembering and the collective, who are the people who were closest to that person and who exchanged/shared their impressions. Each of our stories, in this sense, is intertwined with memorialist impressions from a variety of sources (media, conversations, hearsay, experienced events), based on collective contexts and condensed into personal versions.⁴

The journalistic references are taken simultaneously as historical accounts and discursive creations. On the one hand, the news and advertisements in publications served as ‘historical witnesses,’ because they reveal the informative dynamic of the press as a means of communication, mediating the interests and points of view of a variety of social subjects.⁵ On the other hand, they reflect the choices and stylistic options of authors, taking into account their commitment to the editorial line of the publication and certain political forces of the time. By treating journalistic texts as discursive creations, it is possible to uncover their compositional processes and, in turn, their artistic and social influences.

RADIO, SONOROS AND POPULAR MUSIC

Beginning in the early 1930s, samba became the most popular musical style in Brazil, following the early twentieth century popular preference for maxixes, tangos and boleros.⁶ In the case of Pará, radio broadcasts played samba while also featuring Latin rhythms that had been heard since the 1920s on programs from foreign stations, such as Rádio Havana, from Cuba. In the 1950s there was a local audience for boleros and merengues, as well as salsas, congos, mambos and cúmbias, which stood out as unique characteristic of the region’s musical receptivity.

The mass production of radios in the 1930s contributed to the popularity of radio programs. The Rádio Club do Pará (Pará Radio Club), founded by Edgar Proença, Roberto Camelier and Eriberto Pio on April 22, 1928 – becoming the first radio station founded in the Amazon region – benefitted from radio’s increasing popularity. Its employees were largely recruited from the local newspapers. PRC-5 and ‘the voice that speaks and sings for the plains’ became Rádio Club do Pará’s prefix and slogan, respectively. It was created under the system of associated radio stations,⁷ paying a monthly fee and playing records that were borrowed from business owners, whose names, establishments and products were publicized in return.

The invention of valve radios in the 1930s helped lower the production

costs of receivers and helped broaden the access of the listening public. The increased financial contribution by sponsors to the programming made it a profitable business venture. At the same time, political groups of the era began to see radio as a formidable instrument for reaching out to society.

The 1940s are seen by radio professionals as ‘the golden years.’ The Rádio Club broadened its reach using the Ondas Tropicais (Tropical Waves) radio frequency, which allowed it to be heard in far-flung corners of the state. The radio started to perform a role that had previously been carried out by river traders – and subsequently by the postal service – passing along information to the residents of distant localities.

With respect to music, the Rádio Club hired its own orchestra, while also incorporating musical ensembles into its rotation, such as Edyr Proença’s (the son of Edgar Proença) *Banda da Estrela* and the Alberto Mota ensemble, which will be examined in greater detail later in this article. The station’s musical programs were performed in its auditorium, opened in 1945 in the Aldeia do Rádio (Radio Village) complex, the station’s first headquarters, located in the Jurunas neighborhood.

Competing with the city’s only radio station until the early 1950s were the *sonoros*, speaker services in the commercial areas of the city, devoted to advertising, interspersed with musical programming. The commercial *sonoros* featured speakers mounted on poles, connected to a network that led to a kind of central studio, installed within the area of business. The authors of the work *Ligo o radio para sonhar* (I turn on the radio to dream) mention the existence of three *sonoros* in the neighborhood of Pedreira and another in the neighborhood of Comércio, during the 1940s: *A Voz Suburbana* (The Suburban Voice) and *A Voz da Pedreira* (The Voice of the Quarry), which operated in the neighborhood market; *O Canto da Felicidade* (The Song of Happiness), on the corner of Rua Barão do Triunfo, and *A Voz do Dia* (The Daily Voice) on Rua João Alfredo, in the Comércio neighborhood.

In his memoir about Belém radio, journalist Expedito Leal⁸ emphasizes that the ‘mass communicators’ of radio in Pará in the mid-twentieth century adhered to a nationwide radio practice that followed the U.S. model of disk jockeys (DJs). Some of the Club’s broadcasters worked as *sonoro* announcers before joining the station. Accustomed to interacting with the public while engaged in commercial advertising, the broadcaster/DJs were able to maintain their same communicative style on the radio programs. Leal identifies some of the successful Belém broadcasters of the 1950s and 1960s as having come from commercial *sonoros*. The most prominent examples are the broadcasters

Costa Filho and Eloy Santos, who worked at Sonoros Rauland, the city's first mobile *sonoro* (installed in an automobile), and Haroldo Caraciolo, an important proponent of merengue on the airwaves in Pará.

Expedito Leal points out, in the section on Caraciolo, that “merengue was fashionable in the suburbs of Belém during the 1960s and 1970s, connected mainly to the dance style.” Merengue from the Antilles was very popular in the city, especially the hits from the orchestras Sonora Matancera (from Matanzas, Cuba) and Sonora Santanera (a Mexican group), and from the Dominican singer Luis Kalaff, known for his boleros. Caraciolo's interest in merengue originated from his initial experience as a *sonoro* announcer – not the commercial advertising *sonoros*, but the ones that played music at parties held at suburban clubs. Caraciolo, like other lead *picarpe* and *sonoros* announcers that played each week in the suburban clubs, came from the suburbs. Caraciolo began his career with “Sonoros Flamengo,” in the neighborhood of Pedreira. He then transferred to “Clube do Remo”, followed by “Botafogo”, which was also located in Pedreira. In the neighborhood of Umarizal, he worked for “Diamante” and then at “Big-Bem”, a *sonoro* that operated as an ‘affiliate’ of “Flamengo”.

In the mid-1960s, Caraciolo was hired by Rádio Guajará, originally to work as a commercial announcer. Soon after, he became the host of a musical program, where he made a name for himself by using slang and popular expressions, the trademarks of his communicative spontaneity that attracted the attention of listeners. Through this music program, Caraciolo was said to have created and spread the use of the word ‘lambada’ to refer to what he ‘would take’ during the intervals between his presentations. A lambada was a shot of cachaça that he would take at the bar next to the station as the merengue songs were playing. By the 1970s, the term lambada came to be associated with Caribbean dancing rhythms played by local music groups.

Caraciolo worked at other radio stations in the city during the 1970s and, at the end of the decade, due to professional problems, abandoned radio work and began working for *sonoros* dedicated to commercial advertising, where he would remain until the end of his life.

There is a clear line running through Caraciolo's career, from his experience with the *sonoros*, to the height of his popularity on the radio. Both his communicative style, which featured popular expressions, and his preference for merengue accentuate the characteristic elements of the festive environment of the suburban clubs where the *sonoro* ‘announcer/controllers’, as they were known, would work. The continuum of party *sonoros*, radio stations and com-

mercial *sonoros* that characterized Caraciolo's career all fell within the same realm of professional possibilities.

The evolution of the radio announcer profession followed the growing presence of party and commercial *sonoros* throughout the city. The *sonoros* did not merely fulfill a complementary position to radio, but instead occupied a particular space as a means of communication connected to festive events.

'STICK AND STRING' AND ELECTRONIC ORCHESTRAS

Ensembles and orchestras were given preference over *sonoros* at popular dance parties. According to Salles,⁹ the development of urban music in Pará, particularly from the 1920s onwards, was closely associated with the spread of instruments such as the flute, the banjo and the cavaquinho, which served as the foundation for small musical ensembles. In addition to the music being broadcast by Brazilian and foreign radio stations (choro, samba, tango, bolero and mambo), other dancing rhythms, such as the foxtrot, the Charleston and swing music, among others, became popular in Pará during the 1920s and 1930s, due to the popularity of American cinema.

These influences formed the basis of the musical references that underpinned the work of the orchestras and musical ensembles that were introduced as Jazz Bands in Pará. According to Corrêa,¹⁰ jazz became a 'real epidemic in the city' during the 1920s. According to the author, during the 1920s and 1930s, a variety of groups with jazz features emerged in Belém,¹¹ although their repertoire was diverse, and included tangos, marches, choros and sambas.

With respect to the performances of these 'jazzy' musical ensembles, their musical identity seemed to be more associated with the formation of these ensembles (in which the wind instruments, in particular, stood out) than with an exclusive connection with a musical genre. 'Jazzy' ensembles, in this context, corresponded more with a group of non-scholarly musicians who also played rhythms from Brazil and other countries, than with a musical specialization in an American genre.¹² Their performances first started in the 1920s, in the salons of the elite, and then began taking place at public events in the 1930s and 1940s, as they became more popular.

News reports highlighted the presence of orchestras at carnival parties in Belém beginning in 1945, where they played 'the sambas, marches and choros of the time.' The jazz bands and orchestras circulated among the more 'aristocratic' and other, less sophisticated salons. Furthermore, the presence of musical ensembles in the more modest salons signaled the occurrence of a special

event, for which the attendees most likely took care in preparing themselves. The newspaper advertisements cited by Lúcio Flácio Pinto stressed the importance of these parties by accentuating the fame of the musical group that would perform, stressing the ‘high-class’ public that would be in attendance and the dancing rhythms that would be played.

These ‘jazzy’ groups or ‘club ensembles’, as they were known in the 1950s, had their fame accentuated by the success of their performances in the ‘salons of the elite.’ The instrumental composition of the band – with a double bass, trumpet, saxophone, bass, drums and a Brazilian tambourine known as the *pandeiro* – became the standard for the ‘stick and string’ orchestras, as they were also known.

The Jazz Orchestras that were most publicized in the newspapers of Belem during the early 1950s were: “Batutas do Ritmo”, led by Sarito; “Jazz Internacional”, led by “O Mago da Viola” (The Viola Magician) Professor Candoca (subsequently led by Orlando Pereira, beginning in 1955); “Jazz Martelo de Ouro”, led by the musician Vinícios; “Jazz Vitória”, led by Raul Silva; “Jazz Marajoara”, led by maestro Oliveira da Paz; “Jazz Orquestra de Maçaneta”, led by Reginaldo Cunha; “Jazz-Band Pará”, led by Professor José da Paixão, and the Orchestra of Maestro Guiães de Barros, connected to the Club’s radio station.

The ‘stick and string’ instrumental ensemble would only change in the 1960s, when the orchestra “Alberto Mota e seu conjunto” included an important electronic novelty at their parties at the Automóvel Clube: the solovox.¹³ Two years later, the Automóvel Clube dance party became a regular occurrence, livened by the Orlando Pereira’s Orchestra, which featured their novelties the vibraphone¹⁴ and the ukulele. Their first musical performance took place during a twist contest, and they would perform again at a cha-cha-cha contest, both styles referred to in the local press as ‘fashionable dances.’

Due to the pioneering introduction of electronic instruments into these ensembles, the so-called ‘stick and string orchestras,’ which were entirely acoustic, quickly lost ground to the more modern orchestras, such as those led by Alberto Mota, Orlando Pereira, Lélío Pais Henrique, Maçaneta and Guiães de Barros.

The introduction of instruments such as the solovox, vibraphone and electric guitar were attractions in and of themselves during the performances of these musical ensembles. The main attraction of the ‘stick and string’ orchestras were the wind instruments, such as the trumpet, saxophone and trom-

bone. The electronic orchestras, in turn, were organized as addenda to the electronic equipment.

According to Costa,¹⁵ the high price of these instruments made it difficult for many acoustic ensembles to 'modernize', leading them to stop performing altogether. Meanwhile, familiarity with electronic instruments helped the careers of popular artists identified with the new musical genres being released on the radio and on records.

One interesting example of this is the early career of the musician Joaquim Maria Dias de Castro, born in Cameté, who came to be known as "Mestre Cupijó". In *Sociedades de Euterpe*, Vicente Salles writes that the early career of the young musician was marked by the 'anxieties and indecisions of modern youth,' resulting from the influence of mass communication, particularly radio and television.

When he was 13 years old, Joaquim Castro began playing in a 'pop music' group, "Batutas do Ritmo," while also practicing with the traditional band Euterpe Cametaense, which was founded in Cameté in 1874. He began composing sambas and mambos in 1951. In 1960, he formed his first ensemble, equipped with an electric guitar and a solovox, which is referred to by Salles as 'merely a matter of status.' The end of the decade brought a major turning point in his career. He 'discovered' siriá, defined by Salles as a typical dance of the Tocantins region, and he began making records with his folk ensemble "Ases do Ritmo." On his siriá records, Joaquim Castro began performing as Mestre Cupijó.

Salles is rather critical of the early stages of Cupijó's career. The future siriá master had been interested in the musical universe that Salles refers to as pop, in reference to the popular music played on the radio and on television. The 'anxieties and indecisions of modern youth' had led the young musician to compose and perform sambas and mambos with his musical ensemble, equipped with electronic instruments. His ultimate turn towards folk music is not questioned by Salles, since it could be seen as a natural development in the career of a countryside musician.

In fact, Cupijó's experience with so-called 'pop music' can be viewed as a relatively common occurrence, given the popularity of 'electronic' orchestras in Belém and the boleros, mambos and sambas being played on the radio. It was not 'merely a matter of status,' as Salles states, but rather a question of musical taste connected to the different stages of the artist's career. The change in his identity is largely related to the opportunities to further his career: the choice between playing in a dance party orchestra, similar to many that ex-

isted in Belém, or to becoming the precursor of a musical style (*siriá*) with strong links to the popular traditions of Baixo Tocantins, Pará.

A different route was taken by Aurino Quirino Gonçalves, who came to be known in the 1970s as Pinduca, the “Rei do Carimbó” (King of Carimbó). Also from Baixo Tocantins, Pinduca began his musical career in Belém in the 1960s as a member of the Alberto Motta Ensemble, where he became familiar with electronic instruments. The know-how that he acquired performing at dance parties led Pinduca to establish his own ensemble in the late 1960s. His group, which was known as “Pinduca e seu Conjunto,” featured ‘modern’ elements from the very beginning, incorporating the popular dancing rhythms of the time into his performances, including the twist (which was popular at the ‘society clubs’) and the merengue (which was very popular at the ‘suburban clubs’).

In the early 1970s, Pinduca’s ensemble began playing carimbó – the popular musical style and dance from the countryside – at dance parties on the outskirts of the city, becoming relatively successful. The performances by Pinduca’s ensemble were unique because the carimbó was played using the modern formation of the electronic orchestras, even though it was originally an acoustic musical style. Pinduca recorded his first carimbó record in 1973 and sold a whopping 100,000 copies that same year, mainly in the local market.

Pinduca’s record resulted in some relative national success for carimbó during the first half of the 1970s. At the same time, comments published in the local press during the mid-1970s tended to look unfavorably upon Pinduca’s innovations, often described as a misrepresentation or degeneration of the ‘creation of popular culture.’

The opponents of Pinduca’s music lost sight of the fact that his musical output was strictly in line with the interests of the public attending the suburban and social club balls in the innovations of sound technology. Carimbó played with guitars and perhaps even a solovox was an attractive ‘language,’ particularly for the suburban audiences of Belém, who were already accustomed to the *sonoro* dance parties and the popular rhythms being played on the radio.

SOCIAL CLUBS AND SUBURBAN CLUBS

The leisure options connected to ‘bohemia’ expanded in Belém throughout the 1950s. In addition to the cinema, the Arraial de Nazaré theater and the traditional parties (carnival, the *festas juninas* held around the Feast of St. John,

the feasts of other patron saints, etc.), the bars, and the elite and suburban clubs were important leisure options for the city's residents.

Some of these clubs were founded even before the 1950s. Among them are a few dating back to the early twentieth century, such as “São Domingos Esporte Clube.” In an article published in the newspaper *O Liberal* on May 27, 1987, São Domingos is described as the oldest club in the neighborhood of Jurunas. It was founded in 1915, and its name was a tribute to the São Domingos Chapel, located in the same neighborhood. In the beginning, the club was mainly focused on athletics and its members took part in several sports (soccer) tournaments in the ‘suburbs.’ The club also began to carry out initiatives focused on the welfare of the neighborhood’s residents, which ultimately led it to change its name, in 1940, to “São Domingos Esporte Clube Recreativo e Beneficente” (São Domingos Recreational Sports and Charity Club).

According to the article, the club operated under a system that relied on the payment of monthly dues by members, in which women were cooperating members and men were sitting members, most likely composed of couples who lived in the area. The club’s high point came during the 1940s and 1950s, when it ‘progressed,’ on account of the revenue earned from the ‘social parties’ it hosted. The article does not provide details regarding the nature of these parties, but it is possible to deduce that they were dance parties featuring musical ensembles and/or *sonoros*, tied to the festive dates of the club and the city (carnival and the *festas juninas*, for example).

From among the ‘social clubs’ cited by the press in the 1950s, several stood out in the regular advertisements of the time: Assembleia Paraense and the Automóvel Clube, on Avenida da República, in the neighborhood of Campina; Azas Esporte Clube, on Avenida Independência, in the neighborhood of Nazaré; Delta Clube, on Travessa Rui Barbosa, in the neighborhood of Nazaré; Clube Paragon, on Travessa Cintra, in Cidade Velha, as well as the nightclubs of the Central Hotel and Palace Teatro, in the back of the Grande Hotel, in the neighborhood of Campina.

Meanwhile, in the suburban neighborhoods, dance parties were promoted by a wide range of clubs, which served as the headquarters of trade unions and professional associations, as well as associations for sports and leisure.¹⁶ Some clubs whose locations were identified in the newspapers published in the early 1950s are listed below (including their neighborhood and street, when available): Artístico Esporte Clube (Umarizal, Avenida Alcindo Cacela, 663); Boa Fama Esporte Clube (Pedreira); Botafogo Esporte Clube (São Bráz); Esporte Clube Norte Brasileiro (Cremação); Imperial Clube (Jurunas); Leblon

Esporte Clube (São Bráz, Avenida Ceará); Municipal Clube (Cremação); Santa Cruz Esporte Clube (Pedreira); Sociedade dos Estivadores da Borracha (Umarizal, Rua Boaventura da Silva); Sociedade União e Firmeza (Jurunas); Uberabinha Esporte Clube (Telégrafo Sem Fio); Viação Beneficente Esporte Clube (São Bráz, Travessa de Maio, 175); Vitória Clube (Umarizal, Alcindo Cacela, 563).

Here we see the strong presence of clubs located in the immediate outskirts of central neighborhoods such as Cidade Velha, Campina and Nazaré. From Jurunas to Telégrafo sem Fio, from the banks of the Guamá River to the Guajará Bay, these clubs were spread across a range of suburban neighborhoods during the 1950s, marking the city's longitudinal territorial boundary to the East.

The presence of *picarpes* and *sonoros* was more common at the dance parties in these neighborhoods, while the city's successful orchestras preferred to perform in the so-called 'society clubs.'

The occasional performances by Jazz Orchestras in the suburbs were filled with merengue, boleros and sambas, among others. It was the same repertoire performed by Pinduca's ensemble, with the inclusion of that 'old' musical style and dance, the carimbó, which came to be played with electronic instruments.

In the years that followed, these preferences with respect to music and dance would become characteristic musical traits (of composers and music lovers) of this part of the Brazilian Amazon. The process later resulted in the formation of popular musical genres at the end of the 1970s, such as brega and lambada. Currently, the professionals involved in the world of sound system parties tend to see a continuity between the older and more recent musical preferences, to the point of characterizing *brega* as a 'lighter bolero' or a 'more finely tuned bolero.'

In his "Canto da cidade" column, published from November 11 to 17, 2001, the journalist Walter Pinto of the newspaper *O Paraense* also evokes memories of the suburban clubs that operated during the 1960s and 1970s. Pinto highlights the "big dance parties at the site of Clube Atlético São Paulo," which, in his opinion, was the "largest suburban club in the Marco neighborhood." Below is an important passage from among his recollections:

It was there that I had the pleasure of watching one of the greatest popular dancers of my childhood. The fabulous Agostinho, a thin black man who wore loose linen clothes and danced the merengue like nobody else. That guy Agostinho was an ace. You just don't see things like that anymore.

Amateur dancers like Agostinho were unquestionably a common presence at the suburban dance parties of Belém, particularly when dancing rhythms like the merengue became one of their hallmark features.¹⁷

The number of these suburban clubs swelled during the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. His recollection is invoked by the memory of some of the people who used to attend these dance parties. Valderina Lopes, a history professor and longtime resident of the neighborhood of Marambaia mentioned during an informal conversation (in April 2010) that there were several clubs in the neighborhood since the 1950s. According to her, there were 'lookouts' at the 'more renowned' clubs (also known in Marambaia as 'social clubs') who prohibited children and women associated with prostitution from entering the dance parties. According to Lopes, this concern highlights the difference between the 'family parties' and '*cabaré* parties' often cited by the people who attended these events.

The same distinction is mentioned by the owner of G. Amaral Produções, Gilmar Amaral (interviewed in February 2003), who points out that since the 1950s, the *cabarés* (cabarets) were known as places of prostitution, unlike the *gafieiras* (dance halls), which were geared towards dance parties. The professional dance party promoter Sinval Pereira, 56, (interviewed in April 2010) makes a distinction between *dançarás*¹⁸ (places to hold dance parties) and *boates* (nightclubs), where patrons were 'more interested in drinking.'

In most of the memorialist references to the suburban clubs, there are few allusions to the association between these party halls and prostitution. Perhaps this may be explained by the relative anonymity of the *cabarés* at the time and/or since it was an issue that was of little interest to the interviewees. The collective recollection of the *cabarés* retained negative associations.

We therefore have a very lively festive dynamic present in the social and suburban clubs of Belém during the mid-twentieth century, through which circulated party organizers, musicians and singers from ensembles, *sonoro* professionals, dancers and a captive audience that frequented dance parties in each neighborhood.

SUBURBS AND SUBURBAN PARTIES

The characterization of the suburban clubs in the journalistic reports of the 1950s shows connections to the representations made at the time about the urban configuration of Belém, which contrasted the city center with the suburbs. Beyond the spatial references, the city center and the suburbs could be

understood as evaluative assessments,¹⁹ stated in the press of the time as a mark of social distinction.²⁰

Using São Paulo-based geographer Antonio Rocha Penteado's research into the spatial configuration of Belém,²¹ carried out during the 1960s, it is possible to visualize the suburban setting where the *sonoro* parties took place. In his work, the city is presented as being divided into 'distinct functional areas,' beginning with the neighborhoods of Nazaré and São Bráz, which are 'elegant', filled with trees and 'surrounded by beautiful gardens'; the neighborhoods of Cidade Velha, Campina and Reduto, all of which surround the neighborhood of Comércio, are characterized as being modest and occupied by the 'middle class'; the third sector, which is the most populous, is the one occupied by 'poor residential neighborhoods' on the outskirts of the city, made up of: "wooden houses covered with leaves, covered with palm trees, some of which were built on very moist terrain and are raised on stilts, others of which sit directly on the ground."

This socio-spatial arrangement is relatively consistent with the journalistic and memorialist descriptions of the city regarding the marginal position of some of the so-called 'suburban neighborhoods.' In the 1960s, the outskirts of the expanding city were marked by the presence of the so-called *vacarias*, described by Penteado as "unsanitary backyard stables next to residences, or small farms." The *vacarias* provided milk and flowers for most of the suburban population and were mainly located in flooded sections, far from the urban infrastructure.

The suburban neighborhoods, with their homes made of straw, mud, wood and filling, according to the description provided by Penteado, testified to the "degree of poverty of the residents of the urban outskirts of Belém." The disappearance of the *vacarias* would only come to pass in the 1970s. The first to be deactivated were those closest to areas that were urbanized or in the process being urbanized.

At the same time, the ones located in the flooded regions and those that were located further from the city center, did not give way to any improvements in the urban infrastructure. This is more or less the situation that persists up to the present day, with a lack of infrastructure in the peripheral neighborhoods.

It was in this environment of poverty and a near total lack of urban infrastructure that the suburban clubs flourished until the 1970s. Despite the popularity of the dance parties in these clubs, which were located in the poor and peripheral neighborhoods, it was not common to find news written about them

in the press at the time. In fact, it was common to find news in the local periodicals that associated urban violence with the suburban dance parties, such as the in the article “Duas Desordens” (Two Disorders), published in the *O Liberal* newspaper on January 2, 1951:

It is common, almost a general rule, that after consecutive days of parties, the police records are full of incidents, particularly disorderly conduct. Oftentimes the rounds in the suburbs exceed all the others in the police records. The parties at some suburban clubs, where Prohibition is not respected, often give rise to serious cases of disorderly conduct, which result in injuries and altercations where, as a general rule, the aggressive parties wind up in the police station and those who were attacked wind up in the Emergency Room.

The news item specifically mentions two dance parties held in the neighborhood of Jurunas, one at “Sociedade União de Firmeza” and the other at “Imperial Clube”. In the end, it is emphasized that the incident took place at a suburban party, while in the streets, only one disturbance was reported. The author mentions “Prohibition,” which was probably enforced after a certain hour in the evening. It is important to note the emphasis given to the police rounds in the suburbs and the perception of suburban clubs as places of violence. This is the journalistic focus that placed news of suburban clubs on the police page, while the social columns were filled with announcements about parties in ‘aristocratic and elegant clubs.’

Although not often reported upon, suburban parties enjoyed widespread popular participation, at a time of significant population growth in the suburbs. Suburban parties were the preeminent spaces for performances by the city’s *sonoros* and *picarpes*. Whether at the regular weekend dance parties or at major festive events that mobilized the entire city, the *sonoros* and their variants would be present, creating the festive environments typical of suburban Belém.

The press in Pará did not limit itself to reports of violence at suburban parties or police concerns about *sonoro* dance parties. There was also a certain idealization of the popular festivities. Such is the case with a 1956 mention of the suburban parties for the Feast of St. John in the newspaper *A Vanguarda* as a place “where the happiness is more abundant, more sincere, more joyful.”

The *sonoros*, meanwhile, seem to be everywhere in which the festive effervescence was marked by a massive popular presence, whether during carnival or the *festas juninas*.²² The item below, from *O Liberal* presents the pro-

gram of carnival celebrations at the Club “Estrela do Mar,” in the neighborhood of Pedreira, on January 10, 1951:

Program of parties at the Estrela do Mar headquarters, located at Av. Marquês do Herval, 883 Saturday – 20 (Picarp) / Thursday – 25 – jazz-Guaraní / Saturday – 27 (Picarp)/ Thursday – 01 (Picarp) / Saturday – 3 (Picarp) / Monday – 5 – jazz Guarani

This programming includes a mix of performances by (unnamed) *picarpes* and a jazz ensemble, with more frequent performances by the former. The same registry mentions a performance by the future Mestre Cupijó’s jazz ensemble “Batutas do Ritmo” at the Sociedade dos Estivadores da Borracha’s pre-carnival party.

The various types of carnival parties came to be associated with the *sonoro* parties, composing a new form of celebration. This is the case with the carnivalesque ‘assustados’, common in Belém in the early 1950s. The ‘assustados’ were a type of surprise party created by a Radio Club program in the 1940s.²³ During the carnival period, radio employees and announcers would choose a residence and hold a surprise party, transmitted over the radio. The news archives consulted for this article showed that the ‘assustados’ moved beyond their exclusivity with the radio and began to occur much like the other carnival parties. This can be seen through the ads in the newspaper *O Liberal* on January 12 and 26, 1951, respectively:

Assustado

Guaranteed to please, the Queiroz brothers will hold an assustado tomorrow night, in the ample halls of Atlético Regional, at Praça Floriano Peixoto, 390. A powerful “pick-up” will play this year’s biggest carnival hits, and the club’s headquarters will be decorated, transforming the location into an authentic kingdom of Pandegolândia.

Virgílio’s Assustado

Next Saturday, at Rua Mudurucús, 1760, a pyramidal carnivalesque assustado will take place under the command of Virgílio, one of the most faithful subjects of Momus. For this party, which is sure to be a big hit, Virgílio hired the Queiroz brothers’ “Pick-up,” which guarantees its absolute success. We received an invitation.

The ‘assustado’ reinvented as a popular carnival party therefore included the presence of the *sonoros*, or ‘pick-ups’ as the journalist faithfully rendered the term in English. The ‘guarantee of absolute success’ was modeled on the suburban popularity of the *sonoros* at regular weekend parties.²⁴ This popularity was further increased by being featured in the press, which was duly compensated with an invitation sent to the newspaper’s offices.

Moreover, in the case of the Queiroz brothers’ assustado, the ‘carnival hits’ would be played by their own *sonoro* at the headquarters of the Atlético Regional club. And the 1951 party in honor of Momus would feature the sounds of the *picarpe* that belonged to the very same Queiroz brothers.

During the 1950s, *picarpes* could be found at unlikely events and locations, such as at the parties held at the São José Prison, according to a January 3, 1951 report in *O Liberal*:

Two days of festivities at the S. José Prison

At the “São José” Prison, from December 31 to January 1, parties were held for the prisoners, at the initiative of Dr. Orlando Brito, warden of the prison, with support from the State government, which provided a grant to improve the meals.

DAY OF SATISFACTION

The 1st of this year was filled with satisfaction for the prisoners of the “São José” Prison. Early in the morning, a powerful “Pick-up” was installed inside the prison, which transmitted recordings of the most recent musical successes... Throughout the morning there was music... Visits were allowed in the afternoon, which, much like the morning, featured musical recordings...

Of course, this vaunted ‘day of satisfaction’ served much more to ensure the satisfaction of the public security authorities, particularly the warden. The reports of ‘improved’ meals were excellent propaganda regarding the government’s performance in this area. In addition, the prisoners, most of whom came from the lower echelons of society, could use to event to engage in a leisure activity with which they were already familiar. The prisoners from the suburban neighborhoods of Belém certainly knew how to appreciate a good *picarpe* party.

SOUND SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN 'SONORO CITY'

The emergence of new technologies for the amplification, broadcasting and recording of sounds, which began in the late nineteenth century,²⁵ defined a new orientation towards the production and dissemination of popular urban music and songs. The insertion of gramophones, records and radios into the consumer market and the increasing ease of purchase and access to these products by the middle class had a decisive influence in transforming the musical preferences of various segments of Belém society during the mid-twentieth century.

As Hobsbawm points out, the 1950s and 1960s were a time of economic prosperity for developed countries.²⁶ The emergence of new productive technologies, which decreased the need for labor, was accompanied by an exponential increase in production and consumption capacity. At the same time, the expanding means of mass communication gave the working class²⁷ access to a more diverse range of magazines, newspapers, radio programs and records, which better suited the multiplicity of interests of this diverse and growing audience.

In the case of the peripheral countries in the capitalist system, access to the technological innovations of the industrialized world in the realm of communications remained, in the mid-twentieth century, limited to wealthy urban areas. However, this did not stop the poor population, settled in the suburbs of Brazil's major cities, from creating a means of inserting themselves into the new society of mass communication that was taking shape in the country at that time.

In the case of Belém, in addition to radio broadcasts of music, there was an extensive and diverse field of musical propagation and leisure at the dance parties held at 'social' and 'suburban' clubs. This was the historical makeup of a form of celebration, which gradually brought together diverse elements such as Brazilian and international musical influences, radio broadcasting, as well as the proliferation of *sonoros* and suburban clubs, primarily.

The newspaper reports helped register the meanings attributed to the 'aristocratic' and suburban dances at the time, the performances by musical ensembles, the presence of *sonoros* at dance parties, and the relationship between parties and urban space. The variety of meanings related to the city's festive dynamic was configured in such a way as to provide a clear sense of distinction and social stratification between 'suburban' and 'aristocratic,' between elegant leisure and entertainment for the masses.

However, the memorialist records presented in this article generally assume a nostalgic position with respect to the artists, communicators and frequenters of the dance parties of the past. The present-day city, which serves as the temporal and spatial reference from which the subject recalls the past, is far from the Belém of the 1950s, which featured a clearly defined separation between the city center and the suburbs. Recollections of the diversity of festive events put aside social divides to highlight the eccentricity of the older modes of celebration.

In the pages of the newspapers and the minds of those who share memories from that time, taking part in the dance parties is fully associated with a variety of forms of access to the urban space. This access can even be viewed from the perspective of Lefebvre,²⁸ as participation in the (at times symbolic) construction of the city and its collective appropriation. The use of sound systems and access to them, to orchestra and *sonoro* performances, and to dance parties in social and suburban clubs, are examples of the struggle for a 'right to the city' in Belem in the mid-twentieth century.

NOTES

¹ This article is the partial result of research carried out for the project "Expressões da cultura de massa e da cultura popular em Belém na segunda metade do século XX," coordinated by the author at History Department of the Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA). The project is funded by the Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at UFPA. The author thanks Elielton Benedito Castro Gomes and Edimara Bianca Corrêa Vieira, undergraduate students in the History program serving as research fellows in connection with the project.

² Sound systems known as "aparelhagens" are used by companies that specialize in parties with brega music, first introduced in the 1970s. For more information, see COSTA, Antonio Maurício. *Festa na Cidade: o circuito bregueiro de Belém do Pará*. Belém: Eduepa, 2009.

³ HALBWACHS, Maurice. *A memória coletiva*. Translation by Beatriz Sidou. 2.ed. São Paulo: Centauro, 2006. p.51.

⁴ See also the collective article by Alistair Thomson, Michael Frisch and Paula Hamilton, as well as the text by Henry Russo in the collection of AMADO, Janaína; FERREIRA, Marieta. *Usos & abusos da história oral*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FGV, 2006.

⁵ According to FREHSE, Fraya. *O tempo das ruas na São Paulo de fins do Império*. São Paulo: Edusp, 2005, p.23-32, newspaper texts can be understood as cultural productions, full of the values and symbolic repertoire of the time. These are revealed through typical expressions of journalistic jargon, the emotional tone of the author, the design of the headlines, subheads and layout.

⁶ For more on this, see VELOSO-PAMPOLHA, Augusto. *Figuras do sereno: desejos amorosos, transgressão e boemia na poesia das canções de sucesso dos anos 50*. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literatura Brasileira) – FFLCH, Universidade de São Paulo. São Paulo, 2003; TINHORÃO, José Ramos. *Música popular: do gramofone ao rádio e TV*. São Paulo: Ática, 1981; and TINHORÃO, José Ramos. *Pequena história da música popular brasileira: da modinha à canção de protesto*. Petrópolis (RJ): Vozes, 1974; VIANNA, Hermano. *O mistério do samba*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar; UFRJ, 1995.

⁷ Most of the information to follow about the history of radio in Pará is from VIEIRA, Ruth; GONÇALVES, Fátima. *Ligo o rádio para sonhar*. Belém: Coordenadoria da Prefeitura de Belém, 2003. For more on this topic, see also FERREIRA, Paulo Roberto. *Após o regatão, o rádio e a televisão* (Available at: “Almanaque da Comunicação”, www.almanaquedacomunicacao.com.br/artigos/1173.html; Accessed on: Dec. 5, 2010); and the website “O Pará nas Ondas do Rádio” (www.oparanasondasoradio.ufpa.br; Accessed on Dec. 5., 2010).

⁸ LEAL, Expedito. *Rádio Repórter: o microfone aberto do passado*. Belém: Meta, 2010. p.13. This book is a collection of biographical accounts of the trajectories of noteworthy professionals from the history of Pará radio. It is commemorative in nature, accentuating the importance of the communicators to their local audiences. The author also carried out interviews with some of the subjects of the book. The text does not concern itself with the truthfulness of the information or with comparisons between differing versions. The historical record, in this case, is intertwined with an effort to “rescue” the past and assign value to the memories of professionals who were very popular at radio’s height as a means of communication.

⁹ SALLES, Vicente. *Sociedades de Euterpe: as bandas de música no Grão-Pará*. Brasília: Ed. do Autor, 1985. p.105.

¹⁰ The information about the spread of jazz in Belém in the early-twentieth century was taken from CORRÊA, Ângela Tereza de Oliveira. *História, cultura e música em Belém: décadas de 1920 a 1940*. Tese (Doutorado em História) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em História Social, Pontifícia Universidade Católica. São Paulo, 2010. p.165-166.

¹¹ Such as “Jazz-Band do City Club” (1923), under the direction of Maestro Isaías Oliveira da Paz; “Jazz-Band Escumilhas” (1924); the group of black musicians “Los Creollos” (1927); “Dandy-Jazz” (1929), “Jazz Alegria” (1931), “Jazz da Mocidade” (1931), “American Jazz-Band” (1937) and “Yara Jazz-Band” (1938). All of these are cited in Ângela Corrêa’s dissertation (ibidem, p.166).

¹² See HOBBSAWM, Eric. *História social do Jazz*. Translation by Ângela Noronha. 7.ed. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2009 [1961]. Writing about the rise of jazz in the United States in the late-nineteenth century, Hobsbawm states that the music of New Orleans was the same as that of the military bands, in terms of the use of wind instruments and the repertoire of marches, waltzes and quadrilles. The proliferation of jazz bands in New Orleans was the fire expression of a genre as a mass phenomenon: with a population of 89,000 black inhabitants in 1910, the city had 30 bands. In the twentieth century, the appearance of orchestral jazz in the United States was associated with musical performances at dance parties, where

swing was the characteristic rhythm. The music of these so-called big bands in the 1920s and 1930s was, according to the author, a musical hybrid, jazz turned into a danceable pop style. (p.62, 69, 93, 83).

¹³ Monophonic synthesizer that can be coupled with a piano or organ to add a solo voice. It was invented in the United States around 1940. An example of the solovox as a novelty in terms of musical equipment in Belém in 1955 can be found in this passage from a memorialist work by Lúcio Flávio Pinto: “the Associação Desportiva Recreativa Bancrêvea, ‘the club for major social events,’ lit up its New Year’s festivities with Armando Sousa Lima, ‘the king of the solovox’ (brought directly ‘from the television and São Paulo nightlife’)...”. Ibidem, p.33.

¹⁴ Instrument composed of electrified tubular bells, with similar functions to those of a xylophone.

¹⁵ COSTA, Toni Leão da. *Música do Norte: intelectuais, artistas populares, tradição e modernidade na formação da ‘MPB’ no Pará (anos de 1960 e 1970)*. Dissertação (Mestrado em História Social) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em História da Amazônia, Universidade Federal do Pará. Belém, 2008. p.160.

¹⁶ Mainly athletic clubs (basketball, volleyball, nautical sports and amateur soccer) at whose headquarters the dance parties were held. This perhaps accounts for the continued practice in Belém of using the Portuguese word “sede” (headquarters) to refer to places that hold dances parties.

¹⁷ Expedito Leal presents broadcaster Paulo Ronaldo, “the phenomenon of Pará radio in the 1960s and 1970s,” as a dance hall regular and merengue dancer, “in the best suburban style” (LEAL, 2010, p.121).

¹⁸ The term *dansará* is featured in the seventh verse of the lyrics of poet Antônio Tavernier for the song “Foi Bôto, Sinhá”, by Waldemar Henrique. The text is from 1933 and it is replete with regional words and expressions representative of “talk used by the Amazon caboclo.” For an analysis of some of the lyrics to Waldemar Henrique’s songs, see ALIVERTI, Márcia J. Uma visão sobre a interpretação das canções amazônicas de Waldemar Henrique. In: VIEIRA, Lia Braga; IAZZETTA, Fernando (Org.) *Trilhas da música*. Belém: Edufpa, 2004. p.121-162.

¹⁹ Here I am following the perspective of Evans-Pritchard, in which space is taken as a symbolic construct, resulting from a process of appropriation that articulates the representations and values of its inhabitants. For more on this, see chapter II, “Tempo e Espaço”, em EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E. *Os Nuer*. Translation by Ana M. Goldberger Coelho. 2.ed. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1999. p.122-123.

²⁰ In line with the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, who identifies “social distinction” as a form of classification and stratification of social groups according to their amount of symbolic capital. See BOURDIEU, Pierre. *A distinção: crítica social do julgamento*. Translation by Daniela Kern; Guilherme J. F. Teixeira, São Paulo: Edusp; Porto Alegre: Zouk, 2008.

²¹ PENTEADO, Antonio Rocha. *Belém: estudo de geografia urbana*. Belém: Edufpa, 1968. This study was presented as a dissertation for the Free-Teaching competition in Geography

at the Universidade de São Paulo in 1966. The passages in quotations that follow were taken from pages 45 and 54.

²² This is also the case with this report from the newspaper *A Vanguarda* from June 26, 1955, entitled “Another Saturday of quality and originality, filled with balloons and fireworks”: “The early hours of yesterday morning marked the end of the big party at the small farm that Pedro Belfort and other residents of Rua Cuçurá... held in honor of St. John. The music was provided by Sonoros ‘Lira de Ouro’, which played the biggest hits from its excellent collection for the *junina* party. In a broad clearing, dozens of couples danced the quadrille, the baiões, the choros and the maxixes.” It is one of the few positive newspaper references to the presentations made by *sonoros* that was identified during through the research for this article. It is pointed out in the text that the collection being played was focused on the dance rhythms appropriate for the *festas juninas*, including choros and maxixes. The next year, *A Vanguarda* announced the presence of ‘the sound of boleros’ echoing in the streets that “filled with people and bonfires.” The boleros heard by the journalist were probably played by a *sonoro*.

²³ VIEIRA; GONÇALVES, 2003, p.65: “the program *Assustados da Onda do Rádio*. During the three days of festivities, a group of employees and announcers from the broadcaster knocked on the door of a random house and went in to throw a wild party.”

²⁴ Several *sonoros* are mentioned at the party for Rei Momo Virgílio, announced in the newspaper *O Liberal* on February 1, 1951: “The *assustados* are happening. On Saturday, Virgílio will be at Mundurucus, leading the frevo. Sunday, *São Domingos, Paraense, Botafogo, Regional* and rounding out the festivities Rei Momo with his court of Colombinas, Pierrots, Arlequins...” (emphasis mine).

²⁵ See: WILLIAMS, Raymond. Means of Communication as Means of Production. In: _____. *Culture and materialism: selected essays*. London & New York: Verso, 2005.

²⁶ See the chapter “Os anos dourados”. In: HOBBSAWM, Eric. *A era dos extremos: o breve século XX: 1914-1991*. Translation by Marcos Santarrita. 2.ed. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995. p.253-281.

²⁷ For more on this topic, see HOOGART, Richard. *The uses of literacy*. 6.ed. London & New Brunswick: Transaction, 2008. This book, originally published in 1957, – with *Culture and society* (1958), by Raymond Williams and *The making of the English working class* (1963), by Edward Thompson – is one of the foundational works for the development of “Cultural Studies” in England.

²⁸ LEFEBVRE, Henry. *O direito à cidade*. Translation by Rubens Eduardo Frias. 4.ed. São Paulo: Centauro, 2001.

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