

Statement of Research

The focus of my ethnomusicological research is between music and religion on folk Catholicism *folia de reis* or the Three Kings celebration and Brazilian folk and popular musics. The *folia de reis* is a popular Brazilian tradition of folk Catholicism that involves a group of participants who, between Christmas and Epiphany, go on a journey asking for alms for social-religious purposes. The tradition refers to musical ensembles comprising predominantly low-income rural workers from various regions of Brazil. Instrumentalists, singers, and other participants travel from house to house and farm to farm, singing and praising the birth of Christ. The *folia de reis* celebrates and reenacts the Biblical journey of the Three Kings to Bethlehem and back to their homeland guided by the Star of Bethlehem. The *folia de reis* tradition under investigation in this research is a tradition that traces its origins back to colonial Brazil and to the Iberian Peninsula. As they travel from Christmas Eve through Epiphany (January 6), their singing journey blesses the families, which they visit in exchange for food or money. The *folia de reis* tradition is classified as “popular Catholicism” (Catholic ritual practice external to the interests of the Catholic Church) and it is quite widely diffused in the southern, central, and northern regions of Brazil, primarily in the rural communities. From the early Portuguese sources through the manifestations in twenty-first century, one theme is common to *folia de reis*: the Three Kings are important personages among the rural populations of Brazil. Among rural inhabitants, the sense of being Catholic is frequently connected to faith learned through cultural practices outside ecclesiastical teachings. While *folia de reis* devotees are Catholic they also maintain many beliefs unconnected to official Church worship. Such characteristics are part of a long historical process of colonization. Many of the early settlers in São Paulo’s interior region were not literate. Superstitious behavior dictated the way faith and other social matters were interpreted and understood. The Church often assumes a tolerant position toward the *folia de reis* tradition (although the level of tolerance depends on the local priest).

My research focal point is the relationship between music and religion as expressed in *folia de reis* songs and its participants' personal faith. I analyze the relationship between song and faith is partially based on how *folia de reis* group members strengthen their spiritual world by praying and singing their songs along the journey to express devotion and fulfill their obligations to the Three Kings. Through the study and understanding of music and song texts, including musical instruments and other aspects of *folia de reis* material culture, I argue that the *folia de reis* tradition, empowered by all its characteristics (music, text, costumes, etc.) has the power to strengthen faith and forge community bonds in both its traditional religious context and its newer staged context of the Olímpia Folklore Festival. My second objective is to examine the religious impact of the *folia de reis* tradition in the city of Olímpia, located in the interior of *São Paulo* state. I address how their music affects the daily lives of the *folia de reis* participants in this town during the sacred journey and their participation in the Olímpia Folklore Festival (Festival do Folclore de Olímpia), the latter side by side with non-traditional groups.

For many Brazilians living in remote areas, the *folia de reis* tradition is the core vision of their worldview and of their understanding of life. Their isolation from mainstream national Brazil has given them a special understanding of their world, influenced mainly by daily chores and a bucolic life style. Indeed, the adoration of Jesus through music is their center of their life or *axis mundi*. My research analyses of song texts in the tradition reveals "hidden" elements of connection between humans and the divine. They also define the *folia de reis* tradition and enlighten the participant's faith. Song text content analysis reveals an organization of and provides explanations for a number of stages of the *folia de reis* event within its traditional Christmas time context. For purposes of my research, I place these stages on a seven-point continuum from religious belief to social conduct and call each point an "analytical topic", with one very important caveat – these topics are intertwined and do not function as individual concepts: Belief. This is the foundation of the tradition (*raison d'être*); Faith. A system of religious belief (in the doctrines or teachings of religion). Without personal faith there is no belief; Ritual. This is the established procedure of re-enacting the Three Kings' journey and their planned

stages. Also, set apart from everyday life, the ritual might include obligations and the participants' commitment to the journey's success; Family. This is not only limited to kinship (biological family), but also associated to the family of believers (religious family); Social Expectations. This is related to the participants' behavioral expectations to their families. It is also the community response to the *folia de reis* tradition. It teaches respect for one another; Social Conduct. This addresses participants' concerns and attitudes. It explains the role of the participants in society and the purpose of their mission as messengers of the Three Kings on earth; and Gratitude. This is a moment where the participants achieve a balanced vision of an ideal world mediated by material and spiritual exchanges.

This organizational scheme of analytical topics clarifies the meaning of religiosity in the tradition and illustrates behavioral expectations for all participants in the *folia de reis* ritual as regulated by the Three Kings. They are woven like threads throughout the *folia de reis* song texts. The following eight song text analyses adhere to this organizational scheme. Through song texts, the *folia de reis* group speaks on behalf of the Three Kings (even though associations within the hierarchical order are not limited to Three Kings alone, but also include the Holy Trinity and Jesus, the Three Kings are the closest associations to the living world.) Through the invitation to all physical and social activities constructed in terms of the specifics of the moment, the *folia de reis* tradition symbolically manifests not only the roles of the Three Kings on earth, but also embodies their very voices. This enables a direct contact with the divine and establishes trust among the participants.

Even with increasing urbanization, specialization, job mobility, and labor migration in Brazil, the *folia de reis* tradition has been able to maintain characteristics of the ritual journey similar to those of earlier times. Perhaps some of these recurring characteristics suggest that the *folia de reis* tradition has a wide vision of the world as regulated by the Biblical scriptures, a strong family base, and a solid foundation in Christian values.