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# The Unknown Carnival of Terceira Island (Azores, Portugal): Community, Heritage, and Identity on Stage

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# The Unknown Carnival of Terceira Island (Azores, Portugal): Community, Heritage, and Identity on Stage

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**Abstract:** Terceira Island hosts a Carnival that enjoys unique features in the landscape of European folklore. It involves a major share of the resident population, it takes place on stages scattered all over the island, and it involves a blend of dancing, music, and acting. This paper presents the preliminary results of a collaborative project between native and foreign scholars, with the activist goal of providing Terceira's Carnival with visibility in order to ensure its preservation. Documentary evidence and fieldwork activities undertaken in 2020 provide grounds to interpret Terceira's Carnival as a multi-modal endeavour that nurtures social cohesion through mythopoesis, subversion of hegemonic roles, and the distribution of leadership to folk elites. As such, we argue that Terceira's Carnival does not fit traditional scholarly views on European Carnivals. Additionally, we show that, thanks to its ability to trigger identity-making processes, this Carnival is a case for cultural sustainability: in fact, it ensures the preservation of communal bonds in face of changing global and regional social landscapes.

**Keywords:** Azores; carnival; cultural heritage; identity; Portugal; Terceira Island

## 1. Introduction

Carnival at large is a seasonal festival, possibly rooted in pagan rituals that were Christianized all across Europe [1] (p. 224). It is known world-wide mainly because of its most visible expressions, especially those that take place in Rio de Janeiro and Venice. But there are unknown varieties of Carnival that need to be further studied for a number of reasons, including their importance for the affirmation of local identities and for the sustainability of cultural diversity. The Carnival of Terceira Island, which is the second most populated of the Atlantic archipelago of the Azores (Portugal), is a case in point because of the unique way in which it interweaves music, drama, and dance into a satirical mix, with the contribution of a large portion of the community.

Through active participation of the local population in all the stages of the festivities—writing scripts, designing and making clothes, rehearsing, performing—Terceira's Carnival fosters active citizenship alongside education through art and constitutes a cultural and sustainable force that helps to keep alive the heritage and identity fabric of an island society facing the tensions between globalisation and the preservation of cultural diversity. In fact, the island itself, although it was first settled during the early days of Portuguese expansion,

currently enjoys both a distinctive Portuguese identity as well as a status among the other islands of the archipelago by virtue of its cultural heritage and of its geopolitical relevance (e.g., Lajes Air Field), and we argue that it is now touched by transformative processes that are more post-modern in kind than post-colonial, such as the admixture of traditions such as Carnival and the contact between the population and the internationalised media.

This paper presents the preliminary results of an interdisciplinary collaboration between native and foreign scholars (respectively: Azorean and Italian) that focuses on heritage studies and community education. As such, it merges bottom-up and top-down investigative needs. On the one hand, the participation of native scholars in the project could stand as a case of participatory research, which testifies the liveliness of cultural heritage care and preservation among the island community. On the other hand, however, the team expressed concerns that the participation of natives to the initiative—and, in particular, natives belonging to a specific social segment—would result in an attempt to control the narrative on the island's Carnival.

By taking into account the natives' needs, the possibility of the above biases, and the challenge of interdisciplinary integration, we drew on the Greater Humanities strategic framework. Originally developed by Clifford [2] and further developed by Marcelli [3], the Greater Humanities one is a manifesto that outlines the features of humanist research. Accordingly, it enjoys four dimensions: ethical, empirical, historical, interpretive. That is, all investigations in the humanities shall focus on phenomena that could be empirically appreciated and which enjoy a historical and temporal dimension of their own; furthermore, they should try to understand them (hermeneutics) in ways that solve current (and future) ethical issues. This gives some peace of mind to the cultural scholar since it assumes that no research in the field of humanities is exempt from ethical concerns: as such, it ought to include some level of compromise between participants, as well as the ability to side with them and defend their views.

Ethical concerns could be summarised with the following expression, coined by native scholars: “the unknown carnival”. That would be the Carnival being held on Terceira Island. Section 3 is dedicated to the understanding of the peripherality of such cultural phenomenon in light of its current exclusion from the UNESCO World Heritage List and in face to local (and regional) efforts to have it included in international inventories.

To achieve such a goal, the first step identified by the team is that of representation and description. Kaufman believes that linking intangible heritage to places through a process of sustainable bureaucratisation might cut the deal [4]. However, we maintain that we could extend Kaufman's concept of “space” to non-physical arenas, such as that of media or, as in this case, scholarly production. Therefore, for heritage to be preserved, visibility is necessary in all spaces, either physical or ideal. This brings about two empirical dimensions—one diachronic and one synchronic—the historical one, to which Sections 4 and 5 are dedicated, and the contemporary one, which is addressed in Sections 6 and 7.

Our historical investigation will help establish Carnival as both an identarian practice rooted in Terceira Island and as a creative practice. Other than setting the stage for the later stages of inquiry (Section 4), the historical sections make a point of identifying Richerson and Boyd's interpretation [5] as the most appropriate to understand the evolution of this phenomenon on the island (Section 5).

Our contemporary investigation illustrates the singularity, taxonomy, and structure of nowadays' Carnival in Terceira (Section 6). In the hermeneutic part of the contemporary inquiry (Section 7), it identifies three core processes that foster the social cohesion of the community: mythopoesis (the birth of Carnival heroes), folk elitism (the distribution of leadership in the community), and subversion of power (when the community feels threatened).

Finally (Section 8), we present an interpretation of what it means for a community to enjoy cultural sustainability in light of Terceira's Carnival. In particular, the connection between sustainability and identity is explained with the mediation of the concept of culture. These reflections are then connected to Carnival. Furthermore, Hilbers' and Turner's idea

that festivals rehearse only the (hi)story of a community [6,7] is challenged by using Terceira as a counterexample to their theory.

Given this paper presents the results of an early stage of this interdisciplinary project, it is mostly concerned with setting the stage for future in-depth analyses. This means the greatest length of it is dedicated to an interpretive assessment of both historical data as well as empirical data collected in the rapid appraisal activities undertaken by investigators in 2020. Because the Greater Humanities theoretical framework we adopt does not maintain interpretation and empirical accounts are ontologically separate, we elected not to retain a stark distinction between results and discussion, that is, contrary to what customarily happens with investigations that abide by objectivist theories of knowledge.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Historical Investigation

Historical research entailed the interpretation of source materials, which are referenced in the bibliography section of this work. Given this article represents the preliminary stage of a long-term project, referenced documents are a subset of all the collected sources. The most important archive, in this sense, is *File No. INPCI\_2020\_002* of the Portuguese National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage [*Inventário Nacional do Património Cultural Imaterial*], which collects written and visual materials concerning Terceira's Carnival [8]. Further materials were made available by the local Terceira Island Carnival Museum 'Hélio Costa' [*Museu do Carnaval da Ilha Terceira Hélio Costa*] and by the Public Library and Regional Archive 'Luís da Silva Ribeiro' [*Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Regional Luís da Silva Ribeiro*].

Drawing on the above archives, this paper presents the results of the interpretation of 38 primary sources. These were available only in print, including seven self-printed booklets, 14 folk collections of *danças* and *bailinhos*, 17 newspaper and magazine articles dating 1931–2020. The latter were proved especially relevant for the reconstruction of the links between Carnival and issues of cultural identity on Terceira Island.

### 2.2. Ethnographical Rapid Appraisal

In addition to documentary evidence, three investigators conducted participant observation on the island during the February 2020 Carnival. Fieldwork entailed: 10 h with the members of a specific play, *Balinho dos Rapazes das Doze Ribeiras*, both on and off stage (one participant observer); 41 h of presence in local theatres where *danças* were being performed in Carnival (six hours in Juncal, eight hours in Serreta, 10 h in Biscoitos, 16 h in Doze Ribeiras). Each performance lasted from 45 to 75 min and involved up to 250 participants per investigated theatre (each surveyed by two participant observers). Overall, the immersion entailed four weeks of presence on Terceira Island for broader data collection, including further observation of rehearsals and neighbourhood interaction before and after the Carnival events, which was facilitated by involvement with two associations for the promotion of cultural and social events (see Figure 1). To corroborate preliminary findings, we carried out two longer interviews with privileged observers: one President of a *Junta de Freguesia* (a subdivision of a Municipality) and one member of the "folk elites" [9] (a concept addressed Section 7.2).



**Figure 1.** Rehearsal of *A corrente do bem*, an example of “dança de espada” by the homonymous group of Vila das Lajes, 2020. The “master” is on the left.

Concurrently, 578 visual sources were collected: although media analysis results are not presented in this article, some images have been included to further illustrate the nature of the phenomenon.

Ethnographic research was carried out until we reached saturation of information concerning the guiding concepts of the study. Given the transient and temporary nature of the Carnival events, the team adopted a technique of rapid appraisal. As Beebe remarks: “[a rapid appraisal] is especially relevant when time constraints preclude use of intensive qualitative methods by a single researcher” [10]. Albeit being the subject of seminal historical research [11–16] it was assumed that the contemporary Carnival, owing to the fluidity of society in Terceira nowadays, did not have features that could be readily identified in advance. Furthermore, its horizontal nature suggested that a multidisciplinary team would be the best to tackle the subject matter. According to Chambers [17], these are some of the key requirements behind rapid appraisals. Liaisons with privileged observers enabled the adoption of a “system perspective”, whereas contact with Carnival participants, actors, and the broader audience contributed to the triangulation of data.

### 2.3. Limitations to the Study

In presenting our results, we recognize the need to overcome unwarranted distinctions between what is produced by local scholars and what is observed in the field or recorded in primary sources. Thus, the grounding assumption is that Terceira Island entertains a *discourse* on its Carnival, which extends across social segments and diversified media. Meta-anthropologically, even this paper constitutes an item belonging to such discourse, although it aims for greater awareness of this Foucauldian phenomenon.

## 3. An Issue of Inclusion

### 3.1. National Acknowledgment of Terceira’s Carnival

In 2020, “Danças, Bailinhos e Comédias do Carnaval da Ilha Terceira” were recorded in the National Inventory of Immaterial Cultural Heritage, which is aligned with global initiatives aimed at the protection of intangible culture, led by UNESCO [8]. This follows the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. A notable aspect is that the notion of safeguard, although prominent in the 2003 Convention, does not appear to have played a major role in the inclusion of Terceira’s Carnival in the Portuguese list of Immaterial Cultural Heritage [18]. In fact, as reported by interviewees connected to the Department of Culture of the Azores Autonomous Region, the listing of Carnival reflected

more a situation of wealth than of endangerment. In other words, as an interviewee contended, Terceira's Carnival is "alive and well". If anything, participants expressed concerns about its future: while the number of *bailinhos* increases, *danças de espada* are diminishing, and this might call for action in the near future.

The fact Terceira's Carnival was inscribed in the Portuguese National Inventory of Immaterial Cultural Heritage is also evidence of its relative sustainability. In fact, one of the greatest dangers concerning immaterial cultural heritage is the loss of local participation. That is not the case for Terceira's Carnival, which enjoys widespread popular support. This led to bottom-up initiatives for the national recognition of the phenomenon, and we argue it became a token in the negotiation of boundaries between the Azores Autonomous Region and mainland Portugal. The involvement of the Azores Autonomous Region in the process testifies that not only communities participate in the Carnival, but also to its recognition. Drawing on the 2003 UNESCO Convention, Sousa recommends participation to decision-making processes concerning heritage [19] (p. 10), and we argue participatory practices are the cornerstone of cultural sustainability [20]. At the same time, however, Terceira's Carnival has not yet reached an international level of recognition, with an exception made for expat communities. Such recognition would be more related to the new *global* dimension of immaterial cultural heritage, as enhanced by national and international agencies.

### 3.2. UNESCO and Terceira's Perceived Peripherality

Since 2008, UNESCO has paid particular attention to Carnivals, as a lively expression of local culture and identity: up to now UNESCO has inscribed on its intangible heritage list 14 Carnivals and 4 practices connected with Carnival from 14 countries. In 2019 Portugal obtained the inscription of the "Winter Festivals, Carnival of Podence", a village in the Municipality of Macedo de Cavaleiros in the northeastern part of the country. This Carnival was selected as a social practice connected with male rites of passage and characterised by a participatory activity embedded into transgenerational mechanisms of informal education. This was an important acknowledgment that marked the insertion of Portugal in the international (and therefore also European) "system" of UNESCO Carnivals. The inscription on a UNESCO heritage list is a fact that can change the image of a place, with significant effects on its social, cultural, and economic dynamics, including tourism. This explains the attention deserved to this Carnival by the "Visit Portugal" website [21], which presents and promotes it explaining that "The ancient Carnival held in the village of Podence is one of the most important traditional events of northern Portugal" with a "strong participation of the local community that has managed to preserve this tradition for centuries". Yet this new national and global dimension of Podence Carnival, as a main expression of Portuguese intangible heritage worthy of being regarded as part of the global intangible heritage, ends up redefining the space of Terceira's Carnival.

In other words, the inscription on the UNESCO list of this *mainland* Carnival contributes to re-affirm a marginal and peripheral role of the *island* Carnival of Terceira, both at the national level of processes related with the UNESCO nomination and at the regional and local level of political and economic stakeholders, who are usually interested in national and international enhancement and exploitation of local culture and events.

## 4. Terceira's Carnival: Historical Outlook

Terceira's Carnival is a unique kind of popular theatre, locally known as *danças de carnaval*, or simply *danças* [dances], it is deeply rooted in the island's culture. *Danças* are multimodal: they include dancing, music, and acting. Plays range in topics, and participants to *danças* classify them as either comic or tragic. *Danças* constitute a *sui generis* variety of Carnival, which neither falls into "traditional models from Europe, which tend to anthropomorphize bad ghosts through masks and special kinds of clothing" [12] (p. 87) nor into Rio de Janeiro's samba parades.

#### 4.1. Mythical Roots

To some extent, *danças* resemble satires from medieval Europe, including the Portuguese *cantigas de escárnio e maldizer* (scorn verses), as well as satires written by the Portuguese playwright Gil Vicente (c. 1465–c. 1336). The latter used to portray social and political issues with a satirical, reflective, and critical approach. This ideal connection with Vicente was endorsed, during fieldwork, by a secondary school teacher of Portuguese language and literature, who relocated to Terceira in his late 20s (circa 2014): as such, it constitutes an example of folk theory, through which Terceira's Carnival participants position themselves in relation to their country's intellectual history.

The exact origin of Terceira's Carnival is unknown. Duarte [12] suggests it originated because Angra do Heroísmo (Terceira's capital) was the main stopover of the Atlantic sugar trade routes. Hence, the Carnival might have borrowed its practices from Iberia, Madeira, São Tomé e Príncipe, and Brazil in the 15th and in the 16th centuries. According to the same author, in the 19th century some Azoreans who had emigrated to Brazil returned to their homeland and might have imbued Terceira's culture with the Brazilian Carnival of the time.

However, as Ferreira [22] pointed out, between 1840 and 1930, Rio de Janeiro Carnival was already experiencing important transformations, marked by an intense negotiation between different values and cultures. Among the recorded contrasts were: the struggle between public order and leisure activities; Portuguese and French influence; conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Such contradictions resulted in a system of "many Carnivals". Across the Atlantic, in the same period, similar processes took place in Europe's urban conglomerates [23] (pp. 6–13). Terceira, in its active relationship with Brazil and mainland Portugal, as well as with European bourgeoisies, might have been caught in between, with an interplay of sociocultural change and hybridization.

Apparently, in Terceira, Christian institutions played a role in the survival of such phenomena [12] (p. 97). Frederico Lopes [24] and José Orlando Noronha Bretão [11], in their studies on the culture of Terceira Island, state that the first record of *danças* can be found in a description of festivities organized by the Society of Jesus in Angra do Heroísmo in 1622 [25]. On a similar note, by the end of the 18th century, José Joaquim Pinheiro remarks the existence of "dances and pantomimes" in the Monastery of Jesus of Praia, Terceira Island's second town [8]. However, such a type of "dança, chacota ou invenção" did not coincide with Carnival [14] (pp. 35–37).

The establishment of "dances" as typical Carnival performances is attested in 1904, when a crew of seamen organized a Carnival dancing show to collect donations for one of their diseased comrades [13] (p. 332), [14] (p. 39). Nonetheless, Duarte [12] (p. 93) regards 1930 as a more relevant turning point: in that year, *Dança dos Marujos* was performed in Corpo Santo, which is a neighbourhood of Angra do Heroísmo, the main town of the island.

#### 4.2. A Rural Phenomenon?

In the 19th century, when Carnival supposedly began to consolidate its presence in Terceira, society became increasingly secular, and Carnival *danças* followed through. Concurrently, bourgeois social control over the island's spaces determined the need for specific licenses in order to perform on the streets [13] (p. 329). This relegated Carnival to the countryside. Accordingly, the elites of Angra do Heroísmo explicitly dismissed Carnival as an event for "ignorant people" [13] (p. 326) and, in open opposition to rural practice, promoted parades and balls with different structure and organization [13] (p. 324). This is in contrast with the Portuguese mainland's attempts to "civilize Carnival," such as those of Porto's bourgeoisie [26].

In the countryside, Carnival coincided with initiatives organised by individual hamlets, families, or groups of friends, which would tour local homesteads to deliver their performance *en plein air* [27] (p. 90). The hosts would reward them with wine and treats prepared for the occasion [14] (p. 25). The practice recalled in a song transcribed by Inocêncio Enes (1892–1982), who served for more than six decades as parish priest of Altares: "The

lyrics you had to listen to are [now] over; dear landowner, please send for someone to open us the gates" [28] (pp. 309–310).

This rural practice was still occurring in 1948, when the newspaper *A União* reported patrons were hosting *danças* in their front yards [29]. Collected historical pictures record the occurrence of parades in the streets (Figure 2), where music bands would play, and independent crews would catch the attention of the audience by staging dances on the go, usually exploring current topics in a humorous and frivolous way [8]. The memories are still fresh among the generation of those born between 1920 and 1940. For instance, during fieldwork a taxi-driver recounted: "[I used to] run behind the *danças* that took place in the street, to collect the ribbons that fell from the hats of the dancers, and eventually glue them together with saliva to make a multi-coloured ball" [30] (p. 151).



**Figure 2.** “Dança de espada” in the streets, circa 1970. Still frame of a rare colour clip, courtesy of Leonardo Adão.

#### 4.3. The Twentieth Century and Beyond

Social control became a key issue during the *Estado Novo* authoritarian regime, which was active between 1926 and 1974 (but officialised only in 1933): its reactionary policies opposed what did not fit with State propaganda [31]. As reported by Enes, *danças* and *bailinhos* were subject to censorship and other restrictions in that period. Instead, the democratic regime that followed *Estado Novo* allowed *danças* much freedom to express political criticism [18]. As reported by interviewed performers, after 1974 Terceira’s Carnival gradually shifted from street shows to stages, and the increased availability of transportation (either public or private) allowed acting crews to tour the island and perform in as many stages as possible. “This is all new!” shouted a truck driver to one of the investigators, to overcome the noise of the crowd: “Beforehand, people had no cars, so they would not travel much. So, I tell you: this is all new.” Figure 3 displays a charter bus of the Empresa de Viação Terceirense (Terceira’s public transport company) that specifically caters for acting crews.

As local communities further developed their taste for music, the number of *Sociedades Filarmónicas* (Philharmonic Societies) increased, and theatres began to crop up in all the parishes that could afford their building. By the 1960s, stage shows took the place of road parades [14] (pp. 43–44). Consequently, organisers began to invest more on set design [27] (pp. 91). According to an interviewee, the (relatively) cold winter weather played a concurrent role in shifting the stage of Carnival from roads to theatres.

The structure of the most traditional *danças de espada* (sword dances) and *danças de pandeiro* (tambourine dances) remained mostly unaltered, whereas *bailinhos*, whose themes are always light-hearted, extended the segments of acting in each play. This way of organizing carnival was still in place during the 2020 fieldwork activities.





**Figure 3.** Carnival bus: “507 Merry Carnival”. Transports have redefined Terceira’s inhabitants’ access to Carnival shows.

## 5. Scholarly Interpretations of the Evolution and Development of Terceira’s Carnival

### 5.1. Heers, Kezich, and Duarte

Heers [32] maintains that Carnival began as an urban phenomenon that only subsequently got adopted in rural areas. Enes, who originally endorsed the existence of 17th century cultural ties with Brazil [18] (p. 4), concurs with him and claims the same process described by Heers [32] applies to Terceira [14] (p. 3): born as a festival in Angra do Heroísmo, it eventually spread to the countryside of the island and did not necessarily originate from it.

This is in stark contrast with Kezich’s [33] inclusion of European Carnivals in the historical category of “winter festivals”. In a move similar to Kezich’s [33], Duarte [12] (p. 87), who focused his study on Terceira, frames its Carnival as a continuation of archaic pagan rites that still occurred during the European Middle Ages. However, Duarte also agrees that Terceira’s current Carnival is “hybrid” rather than traditional. Such a claim raises issues about the supposed ancient nature of the phenomenon. Thus, even assuming that Kezich’s [33] and Duarte’s [12] are broadly correct concerning mainland carnivals, Terceira’s Carnival displays the features of an outlier, and its existence and status should be explained otherwise.

### 5.2. Applying Richerson and Boyd’s Concept of Dual Evolution

A solution to this apparent deadlock comes from Richerson and Boyd [5], according to whom the spread of a cultural trait could take two routes. That is, two processes could occur at the same time. The first one is *guided variation*: individuals first replicate behaviours and then modify them through trials and errors. The second one is *indirect bias*: a group of individuals acquires a new behaviour in bulk, that is, without tinkering with it. O’Brien and Shennan [34] (pp. 10–11) further illustrate this point with reference to artefacts usage: by acquiring best practices in bundle, communities increase their fitness in more meaningful ways than they would through trials and errors.

However, Carnival belongs to intangible heritage, and claims concerning its outcomes for competitive population fitness are tentative at best. Thus, it is more likely that Terceira’s Carnival is the result of the concurrent action of both *indirect bias* and *guided variation*: on the one hand, ‘urbanites’ appropriated an already-formalized practice that originated elsewhere, possibly on the mainland; on the other hand, the broader rural population began to tinker with it and produced unprecedented outcomes of idiographic relevance.

As we have already suggested, such tinkering occurred against the background of a bourgeoisie concerned with imposing morals on Portugal’s populace. As reported by Enes [13] (pp. 310–311), in the 19th century and early 20th century Portuguese society, the higher classes used to regard popular customs as inherently dangerous: either because of their serendipitous unruliness or because they resembled the revolts that stemmed out of economic malaise. An example is given by early 19th century “night justice raids [*justiça da noite*]”, during which peasants would roam the country wearing hoods and destroying

the crops of those who had speculated on the sale of public land [13] (pp. 306–307). Similar turmoil took place on Terceira at the outset of the 20th century: in 1917 and 1920, mobs assaulted bakeries and shops [13] (p. 311). Consistently with this, early sources on Terceira's *danças*, which date back to 1865–1866, describe a series of open-air dances performed by soldiers, not commoners, since the laws [*Editais*] prohibited unlicensed activities in the streets [14] (p. 37).

Such events reinforce the idea of a dual evolution of Terceira's Carnival: in the urban area of Angra do Heroísmo, the adopted model was that of a modern and regulated festival, which included, for example, the "battle of the flowers" [13] (pp. 323–327), whereas the countryside of the island introduced its own innovations without the authorities' supervision. On the one hand, bourgeois inhabitants of Angra feared the country's revelry could degenerate into public disorders. On the other hand, marginalized fishermen and peasants felt the need to carve a niche that, although inspired by the urban plays and parades, would not reinforce the status quo of the capital's hegemony. Thus, it is at this stage that Terceira's Carnival enters the identity discourse and, as it will be seen below (Section 7.3), identarian processes reflect power challenges.

### 5.3. Originality at the Expense of Historical Continuity

Hence, the resulting practice is *heterogonous* rather than heterogeneous: at once, both 'adopted' and 'born of the same flesh'. As such, Terceira's Carnival is better understood as a lively and continuously changing phenomenon than as the remnant of a distant past [35] (pp. 149–163).

This does not necessarily defeat Kezich's proposition as far as continental Carnivals are concerned [33], but sets it aside as a genealogical approach governed by the explanatory category of homogeneity, whereas Terceira's Carnival enjoys its status precisely because of its idiographic singularity of rooted-yet-rootless activity. The same applies to Enes' perspective: although the archaic/civilised dichotomy plays a part in the city/countryside opposition concerning Carnival, the deriving dialectic is more telling of the later social upheavals he reports [13] (pp. 293–328). Indeed, although sources report that Portugal had a long-lasting tradition of dances surrounding popular events, such as bullfighting, Enes agrees continuity with *danças* in Terceira Island cannot be fully established [13] (p. 329). Consequently, research questions concerning sustainability and identity are better addressed by a postmodern interpretation of the practice than by a modern view that privileges continuity and tradition over innovativeness and change.

## 6. Today's Carnival in Terceira

### 6.1. Singularity

The postmodern character of many contemporary Carnivals has been discussed by Melotti [23] (pp. 20–21). According to him, cultural heritage, and therefore Carnival, is a cultural and political product, which can be variously negotiated but is always related to the choices and interests of local communities, main territorial stakeholders, agencies building national narratives, and producers of the "tourist gaze". Economic interests and identarian dynamics have contributed to re-activate and re-invent feasts and Carnivals, which are increasingly embedded in place-branding activities and in territorial and tourist marketing. Thus, this process testifies to a new role and meaning of contemporary Carnival: it often becomes a space where to stage a global identity based on consumption and leisure models. This happens in Carnivalized postmodern societies, which have extended the once unique (and ritual) experience of Carnival to the whole year.

Terceira's Carnival enjoys a theatrical nature: it is based on stage performances and deeply rooted community dynamics. Texts are constructed by the community, often related to community internal narratives, and performed by the community (see, e.g., Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** The Bailinho dos Rapazes das Doze Ribeiras rehearsing in the hall of their town’s folkloric group (February 2020).

Because its centre is the community, it retains an ‘isolated’ and self-referential character, which, at the same time, reflects the continuity of tradition and the ongoing transformation of the community involved in this tradition. Furthermore, the fact that the texts are written, spoken, and sung in Portuguese contributes to defining a linguistic and cultural boundary in its fruition, limiting its exportability and its inclusion in international and tourism dynamics. On the contrary, Carnivals based on masks, parades, dances, and floats are potentially more suitable to be inserted into over-local and transnational dynamics, and also to be used in tourist and political dynamics (as often happens with UNESCO Carnivals, including the Podence winter feast). We have to add that masked Carnivals, using (or more and more reinventing) traditional masks of animals, monsters, and spirits, are more easily subject to primitivistic approaches that favour both heritagization and tourism fruition in a process often ending in cultural self-crystallization.

In such a perspective, Terceira’s Carnival maintains a peculiar character, expression of its internal tradition, but (up to now) avoids self-crystallization related with heritagization and tourism processes.

Furthermore, this Carnival, being deeply rooted in lively and continuously changing community dynamics, is also a practice capable of absorbing, reflecting, and staging social and cultural change. This is a central point defining a very peculiar status that helps to explain its importance for the community, capable of mirroring itself and the whole society (including not only mainland Portugal but also Western society and, potentially, the rest of the world) through its Carnival stage performances. This is an open door to contemporary global postmodern culture. In other words, Carnival activity lets the community overcome the insular dimension and bridge a gap between the regional and national level as well as between local and global.

## 6.2. Taxonomy

Nogueira contends that Terceira’s Carnival structure is stable [30] (pp. 149–150). However, by drawing on Enes’ work [14] (pp. 39–40) and collected interviews, it is possible to claim the very classification of Carnival-related activities has changed over time. Enes [13] (p. 328) recounts that, in the 19th century, these shows had no name, or got their name after the costumes worn by dancers: in *dança dos ferreiros*, performers would be dressed as blacksmiths; in the *dança da bica*, they would be dressed as chickens; in *dança dos pretos*, they would wear black faces; in the *dança dos mitrados* they would wear the religious garments; and so on [36].

Later taxonomy divided performances into *danças da noite* (night-time dances), performed with tambourines, and *danças de dia* (daytime dances), which would become known as *danças de espada*. Furthermore, Duarte [12] (p. 88) mentions the existence of three types of *danças* in the 1960s, depending on what is used to direct dancers and actors: either a sword and a whistle (*danças de espada*), a tambourine (*danças de pandeiro*), or a stick with ribbons (*danças de varinha*, *danças de pau de fita* or *bailinhos*). According to Duarte, sword dances address religious or historical topics, tambourine dances are satirical or tragicomic, and the latter ones are always satirical comedies [12].

Nowadays, consistent with Enes' subdivision [14,18], all the interviewees, in stark contrast with the analytical subdivisions detailed in the above sections, maintain that there are four types of performances: *danças de espada*, *danças de pandeiro*, *bailinhos*, and *comédias* (stand-up comedy or just comic theatre). Occasionally, tambourine dances are included within the broader genre of *bailinhos* [12] (p. 89). However, the *Carnival Guide 2016*, published with the patronage of the Azorean Government, distinguishes *danças*, *bailinhos*, and *comédias* and puts tambourine and sword dances in the same category. Such subdivision was later confirmed by a 2020 fieldwork observation in Altares parish and is the one used by the Portuguese list of Intangible Cultural Heritage [8]. This probably reflects an incoming process of heritagisation and regulation of the feast by agencies and authorities.

The above taxonomies are evidence of the diversity of Terceira's Carnival. This means its practices are subject to continuing negotiation on behalf of all participants and stakeholders, and strict classification is eluded. This reveals a general feature of "popular culture", which, according to Slater [37], has a "dynamic character [ . . . ] that refuses to respect the fixed, if not always identical, boundaries that scholars draw" [37] (p. 471).

Although islanders display emotional attachment to the current taxonomy, its fairly recent introduction, which occurred in the second half of the 20th century, is further evidence of the fluid nature of Terceira's Carnival, almost as if it embodied a local (folk) theory of what it means to party and have fun, rather than constituting a specific type of ritualised festival. Such a view is so entrenched in neighbouring islands that Terceira is famed (and good-naturedly blamed) for being a party hub. As the saying goes: "The Azores is an archipelago that comprises eight islands and one theme park". Other islands see Terceira as a standalone territory and this is particularly felt in São Miguel, which is the biggest island of the archipelago. As an interviewee put it: "They [Terceirans] are so involved with their Carnival . . . But I do not feel a connection with it".

### 6.3. Pervasiveness

As of 2020, all kinds of *danças* are organized by groups of amateur actors, usually between 50 and 60 groups per year, who follow an itinerary of performances in more than thirty stages around the island, during a period of four or more days, just before *Ash Wednesday*. In fact, there are 35 permanent stages, which usually belong to local associations. In two specific cases, the stages belong to the Municipal Theatres of the island's main towns: Angra do Heroísmo and Praia da Vitória. These are the only two cases in which access to the performances is paid. *Danças* and *bailinhos* may also have some specific performances outside the main itinerary, for example, at schools and nursing homes. Some performances are organized by schools themselves, which reinforces the educational strand of Terceira's Carnival (Figure 5). Groups that comprise students, teachers, and other staff members rehearse and perform within their own elementary or secondary schools, and then integrate themselves into the main itinerary.



**Figure 5.** *Uma vaca feliz*, a “dança de pandeiro” by the Projeto Mute EBI Biscoitos. The creation of this “dança” is the result of a school project (2020).

According to the Portuguese National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Terceira’s Carnival involves about “1250 people”, counting “only those who perform on stage”, which perform in about 1000 shows all across the island [8]. The figure of 2200 min of performance, recorded in the Inventory, is more tentative: it assumes a single acting company performs in all stages of the island. This is not always the case.

#### 6.4. Structure

The basic structure is similar in all *danças*. A *dança* consists of a play that is written in verses; it includes live music and dances, as well as simple dancing choreographies at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the performance. The actors and the dancers are led by a “master” who wears showy clothes and sings in order to greet the audience, identify the parish where the *dança* comes from, introduces the topic and the plot of the play, and also presents a conclusion with an emphasis on “the moral of the story” [12] (p. 88), just before saying goodbye at the end. Dancers tend to be organized into two wings. In *danças de espada*, actors and dancers constitute two separated groups, whereas in *danças de pandeiro* and *bailinhos* the same performers can act, dance, and play musical instruments. The main difference between a *dança de pandeiro* (Figure 6) and a *bailinho* (Figure 7) is the fact that the “master” plays a tambourine in the former and uses a stick with ribbons in the latter.



**Figure 6.** *O Casino da Terceira*, an example of “dança de pandeiro” by the group António Ivo das Lajes, with three “masters:” two women and one man.



**Figure 7.** *Os Simpsons*, an example of “bailinho” by Rapazes das Doze Ribeiras (2019). Courtesy of Hugo Bernardo.

However, many *danças* and *bailinhos* have increasingly introduced changes to the traditional structure. For example, nowadays some of them have several “masters” instead of one, others have no “master” at all, sometimes a short theatrical scene precedes the first words of the “master”, and so on. Far from being relics of historical tradition, *danças* stage the complexity of a contemporary global consumption society, which is the element unifying island and mainland cultures, as well as Portuguese and global cultures. Texts and choreographies, for instance, exploit television, movies, cartoons, and advertisements to build original narratives related to topics and issues significant for the community. That is the case of *Bailinho dos Rapazes das Doze Ribeiras*, which, during the 2019 Carnival, performed *Os Simpsons* (Figure 7), featuring the characters of one of the most popular American series to make, as they explained, “social satire” [36].

## 7. Nurturing Social Cohesion

### 7.1. Mythopoesis: The Local ‘Heroes’ of Terceira’s Carnival

Cultural heritage is currently understood as a postmodern construct [38] (p. 140), which contributes to highlighting a series of features [23]. One of them is integration, which Smith refers to as cultural landscape, but could be extended to the immaterial setting as well [39] (p. 191). It was already apparent in the earliest recorded instances of Carnival being run in Angra do Heroísmo, which saw the creation at the outset of the 20th century of “parallel” events linked to it: sporting events, competitions, music festivals [13] (pp. 333–336), [14] (p. 20). Other types of integration relate to the understanding and meaning of Carnival: in Terceira, given Carnival is perceived as a “folk” festival, one would expect a stark detachment from scholarly views. Instead, interviews reveal Terceira’s supposed anti-intellectualism is good-hearted, and its supporters seek repeated engagement with historians and academics: firstly, because enthusiasm for Carnival is so widespread, participants come from all roads of life, and everyone disrobes of their institutional *persona* to wear the shoes of theatrical characters; secondly, because institutions, as well as the academia, are seen as sources of value and legitimacy.

As anticipated above, Terceira’s Carnival is characterised by both broad popular participation and guidance on behalf of privileged individuals, involved in either artistic work, organisation of the dancing events, or both. This leads to a process of mythopoesis that implies the identification and celebration of individuals whose contribution to the Carnival was felt all across the island.

During fieldwork appraisals, interviewees would go to great lengths to make the listener “understand” that local playwrights and performers have nothing to be envious of nationally renowned artists, and this is supported by both documentary evidence and social practice. On the one hand, islanders who authored *bailinhos* are treated with reverence. Their works are collected in edited books, and families pride themselves with having a copy at home: an interviewee went to the point of suggesting anthropologists should not interview one of the most famous authors, since he “loved his privacy” and “nuisances could trouble his inspiration”. On the other hand, the most skilled dancers are gossiped about, and people could travel to other parishes just for the pleasure of watching them acting: in Biscoitos, the audience would often display extensive knowledge of the career and skills of a given actor or dancer, even when not strictly connected to the Carnival.

The oldest known example of folk VIP connected to Carnival is represented by Chico Roico (namesake of Francisco Luís de Melo, 1896–1935), whose biography embodies all characters of Azorean entrepreneurship and creativity. Author of *danças* since his early twenties, he relocated to the United States of America to work as a mason, returned to Terceira in 1929, and kept writing until his death [14] (pp. 45, 49). Most of his activity pivoted around the hamlet of Vila Nova, although he appears to have been prolific even when he lived in the United States of America, where his *Dança da Mariquinhas* was performed [14] (p. 49). Inhabitants of Terceira hold such curriculum in high regard, possibly because it embodies the life cycle of many islanders, who at some stage had to move abroad to make a living. Such an interpretation was confirmed by an interviewee that followed a similar life path, although his activity focused on bullfighting rather than Carnival. The fact that Chico Roico completed grade 12 is dealt with as a badge of honour: indeed, the feat of completing secondary school while working was outstanding for his times.

A second generation of playwrights followed, with Vila Nova’s standing among the most notable ones [13]: Chico Chamarrita (namesake of Francisco Martins Enes, 1926–), Joaquim Faropa (n.d.), José Cardoso Quinteiro (n.d.), Turlu (namesake of Maria Angelina, fl. circa 1948), Manuel Brito de Lima (1915–1970), and Fortunato Melo André (born 1941). Most of them share the same “heroic” features that are often seen in Terceira’s popular narratives: humble origins, secondary education, a job in the trades, and years spent overseas to make a living.

Islanders bestow awards and honours upon these poets and playwrights. For example, in 1979, the Azorean gazette *Farol das Ilhas* suggested that the town council of Vila Nova should name one of its streets after Chico Roico. The article is signed by Enes himself, who, at the time, was carrying out research on the playwright [18] (p. 5).

Even local historians do not spare their praises. For example, Nogueira [30] writes: “Aqualva had excellent ‘masters’ of *danças de espada* and took high-quality scripts onto the stage, which are still recalled nowadays” [30] (p. 147). This confirms Enes’ statement concerning the Carnival as a human value-making process within the community, since active involvement with a *dança* “is always a source of pride for any youth, given it has represented, up until today, an important way to affirm oneself and to [obtain] the admiration of the community” [14] (pp. 44–45).

## 7.2. Steering the Crowd: The Role of “Folk Elites”

Consequently, Terceira’s Carnival appears to benefit both from the integration of generic practitioners and from what Wang [9] (pp. 77–79) calls “folk elites”.

Wang’s [9] study does not focus on Carnival. It is a study about the Rocket Festival in Northeast Thailand, which makes it hardly relevant for comparative purposes. However, his initial theoretical contribution, which is grounded on Pareto’s sociology, provides useful concepts of social segmentation that could be used to understand what occurs in the case of Terceira’s Carnival. In fact, it offers objective criteria for understanding social dynamics, no matter the size of the population: all communities identify “quality” individuals depending on their contributions, and such individuals play a prominent role in the preservation, transmission, and re-invention of the cultural heritage.

According to Wang, some of them are “self-related” and mostly concerned with the creation of folk art. In Terceira, playwrights such as Helio Costa and Joao Mendonca fall within such a category. Conversely, other quality members of the community are “other-related”: as Wang would put it [9] (pp. 79–81), although they are not creators themselves, they influence the way heritage is perceived by shifting discourse and reallocating the cultural capital. During fieldwork appraisal in Terceira, Cesar Toste appeared to match the role, since he is “master” of one of the two surviving *dancas da espada*, was member of the Azorean Legislative Assembly from 2016 to 2020, and, when serving as the Mayor of Lajes town, was responsible for the promotion of the local Carnival Museum (*Museu do Carnaval da Ilha Terceira Helio Costa*). He also contributed to the inclusion of Terceira’s Carnival in the list of Portugal’s Intangible Cultural Heritage [8].

Another example of an “other-related” character is Carlos Enes himself, whose intellectual activism focused on Terceira’s Carnival: on the one hand, his origins make him a privileged observer of life on the island; on the other hand, both his academic and political career as a Member of the National Parliament make him stand out as an influencer.

### 7.3. Subversion of Power

From a spiritual perspective, laughter is supposed to “clean the soul” and envisage a better future, which is facilitated by a “symbiotic relationship” between the actors who play *dancas* and the audience [15], considering also that actors frequently leave the stage and mix with the audience. Carnival functions as a means of social decompression by allowing for an inversion of behaviours [40] (p. 53). In this respect, inversion of gender roles is emblematic of both the revolutionary and the reactionary nature of Carnival: in 2020, when on stage, male performers might play female roles and vice versa; however, historically speaking, all the oldest members in the audience confirmed that *dancas* involved only males. Figure 8 shows an adult male actor interpreting the role of an elderly female, as in the classic *bailinhos*. Instead, Figure 9 shows a woman dressed in priestly clothes directing a choir, which is unseen in Catholicism, the main religion of the island.



**Figure 8.** *Qualquer Coisa Serve Para Mim*, an example of “bailinho” by Rapazes do Chino (California), a Portuguese expat company visiting Terceira Island (2020). The main character is a witty granny played by a male actor.





**Figure 9.** *Uma ilha em turbulencia*, an example of “bailinho” by Alta Sociedade de Brampton (Canada), a Portuguese expat company visiting Terceira Island (2020). The plot features a priestess, an uncommon sight in Portugal.

This means that Terceira’s Carnival shares with other world Carnivals the ability to transfigure the masculine into feminine and to subvert hierarchy [1] (p. 225); however, as a culturally and historically embedded process, it was not immune to patriarchal hegemony. This is in line with the best-known paradox of Carnivals: by making the ordinary extraordinary and by introducing tolerance towards the infractions in the public space, Carnival’s subversive role is defused because it is not taken seriously; retrospectively, this legitimates the status quo and its inequalities [40] (p. 54).

As anticipated by the guiding theoretical framework, another important feature of *danças* is the subversion of power roles [38] (p. 140). The liveliness of the event, paired with its ability to occasionally address political issues with poignant satire, did not win the sympathies of *Estado Novo*, which repeatedly attempted to regulate popular expressions and channel them through the filters of dictatorial propaganda, besides using censorship. Undeterred by the efforts of local *Estado Novo* administrations, Terceira’s Carnival continued to thrive. Enes [14] (p. 47) reports that, in 1932, *Estado Novo* took obvious issues with Chico Roico’s *Dança dos Deportados*, which recalled the 1931 rebellions enacted by convicts and deportees against the regime. Surprisingly, the local censors deleted only four lines from this *dança*, including the seditious line: “down with dictatorship!”. However, singers ignored the ruling and sang the lines in front of the censor himself [18] (pp. 4–5).

Between 1926 and 1974, because of its resilience, Terceira’s Carnival can be classified as one of the several “safe spaces” sought by the Azorean population in face of repression. The apex of political tension would usually be reached when an “old man” or “rat” [*ratão*] would interrupt the performance to publicly blame the actions of notables and politicians, just to be quickly dismissed as “a drunkard” [13] (p. 330), [18] (p. 4). *Ratão* means “big (fat) rat” but also stands for “comic persona”. In other Portuguese idiomatic expressions, “rats” are also those who stay put and keep their mouth shut (“*calado como um rato* [quiet as a mouse]”) but are nonetheless praised for their smartness, brilliance, and wit (“*es-perto/fino/vivo como um rato*”). Additionally, “rat” could be used to describe a rouge and a liar (“*enganoso* [deceitful]”), likely involved with thievery: consequently, whatever the rat says shall not be taken seriously (e.g., by the government authorities). Additionally, “rat” could be used to identify someone who is an assiduous frequenter of a bar (“*rato de bar*”), that is, another reason to excuse his words, since he is always drunk. Another important change to the traditional structure consists of the fact that nowadays *bailinhos* and *danças de*

*pandeiro* no longer include a *ratão*, which is evidence of the contemporary relaxed attitude towards satire and shenanigans.

The dialectic of bottom-up power critique goes side by side with current debate on what counts as heritage [38] (p. 140). In fact, empirical evidence shows that a typical feature shared by Terceira's Carnival is the continuous reworking of what the Carnival *is* (and *does*) on behalf of local associations *vis-à-vis* centralization efforts. Indeed, this Carnival displays a multifaceted nature that is negotiated by all participants. Its history is a history of cultural change on behalf of communities that were sensitive to different modes of expression.

## 8. Terceira's Carnival and the Hermeneutics of Sustainability, Culture, and Identity

### 8.1. Cultural Sustainability

Sustainability has occupied the centre of the debate leading to awareness of the challenges facing humankind in the 21st century. Primarily concerned with economic, social, or environmental issues, sustainability has widened its scope in order to reach other fields, namely the cultural arena. After UNESCO had declared 1988–1997 as the World Decade for Cultural Development, the concept of culture gained a renewed dynamism. Reports have increasingly highlighted unequivocal bonds between cultural processes and development on different levels: prosperity, diversity, security, and preservation. The ground was prepared for Jon Hawkes to signal culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability, in 2001. From that point on, several authors and institutions have offered different perspectives on the nexus involving culture and economic development, the preservation of natural resources, environmental balance, the fight against poverty, social inequalities, and/or exclusion from the centres of authority and power.

One of these perspectives states that cultural sustainability is linked to the autonomous development of identities able to resist uniformity-based models of thinking and acting [41]. Another perspective emphasizes the importance of the cultural sector for awareness-raising measures of environmental protection and respect for tangible and intangible cultural heritage [42]. A third perspective focuses on the financial viability of cultural actions and projects [43].

### 8.2. Culture and Identity

Our preliminary study touches on the first one of these perspectives, and it emerges that culture and identity overlap. They share a common field where questions about who we are, both in personal and collective terms, are raised, and methods of preserving cultural heritage are endorsed. As Hawkes points out, culture participates actively in strengthening values and priorities laying at the core of identity: democracy, inclusion, creativity, imagination, freedom, justice, peace, health, well-being, and vitality are some of the elements that help define who we are and the society we live in, therefore constituting the broad scenario where these concepts meet [44] (p. 7).

At this point, it might prove useful to clarify the sense in which each of the terms is used. By culture, we mean the sphere in which meaning is produced and disseminated [45] (p. 51), the arena where conflict, protest, and resistance [46] (pp. 56–61) coexist with conformity and acceptance of representations concerning the self and the fixation of social roles.

It comes as no surprise that, within this expanded territory, identity should occupy an important place. Recent theories of identity formation, namely those originated in media studies, expose the difficult task of studying identity as an isolated concept, estranged from culture, education, or politics. As underlined by Hartley [45] (p. 100), when analysing identity, these theories "often refer to representations and their cultural consequences", that is, they build their analysis upon the same sources that Cultural Studies use as working material. Identity politics, for example, "aims to provide a form of political participation for those who are excluded from the traditional means of representation" [45] (p. 101), a goal shared by Cultural Studies as well.

Despite this common ground, there is no risk of confusing identity with culture. Identity privileges the awakening of self-awareness and of self-assertion alongside the formation of shared spaces of belonging and the struggle to validate them *even if* they are different, if not *because* they are different. Identity is therefore relational and oppositional. Freitas Jr. and Perucelli [47] (p. 112) seem to agree with this perspective, as they declare that identity is both “a person’s predilections” and “the specific place of belonging which is shaped by culture, including the symbolic grid, beliefs and values that made history”.

The narrative and storytelling of Carnival are, thus, major factors in coming to terms with a community’s roots without falling into the mistaken idea that they define us forever. Part of who we are, or are becoming, is imaginary and symbolic, and therefore constructed inside discursive strategies. Identity is formed within “figured worlds” [48], spaces where people “figure” who they are “through the activities and in relation to the social types that populate these worlds” [49] (p. 19). Work locations, schools, and leisure spaces are important sites to “figure” and therefore to trigger action bringing self-awareness and transformation.

But attachment and identification are temporary. Identity is sutured by “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which the discursive practices construct for us” [50] (p. 6). All identities are consequently plural and dynamic, “multiply constructed, across different, often intersecting, antagonistic discourses, practices, and positions”, subject to a “radical historicization” and to an endless “process of change” [50] (p. 4).

### 8.3. Identity and Power

A point of fact is that “identity is about power. Power is at the root of who ‘counts’ as belonging to an identity, as well as who is able to self-define, self-identify, and deny to others their identity” [49] (p. 4). As stressed by Stuart Hall, identity can only function as attachment if it uses the power “to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’” [50] (p. 5). It is crucial to understand the mechanisms that produce and distribute power, be it material, social, or symbolic, in order to identify patterns of dominance/dependence, oppression/agency, and to revise what is validated or rebuked, who is heard and who is ignored, so that all identities receive equal treatment and benefit from the same rights and opportunities.

Human activities are repeatedly constrained by parts of the environment and, in turn, effect changes on it. Hence, whenever an act of power takes place, even spontaneously, the fabric of society is folded, perchance ruptured, meaning all making of Self comes at a cost (be it environmental, political, or both). As Heizmann and Liu put it: “sustainability issues are intrinsically tied to issues of identity” [51] (p. 4, see also [27]).

In the last years of the 20th century, contributions from Anthropology [48], Feminism [52], Cultural Studies [50], and Literature [53] offered a new perspective, following the very influential paper of Davies and Harré [54]. The basic assumption is that the individual’s positioning in terms of race, gender, and class often surfaces in speech acts and symbolic representations. Discursive practices and representations are, thus, an important tool not only for forming individual identity, but for empowerment, resistance, will, and agency. Cultural processes dealing with critical and creative possibilities in several representation systems, especially language, foster imagination, improvisation, and innovation, moving away from (even if incompletely) determinism and dependence.

The ability to entertain multiple dialogues is a means of endowing oneself with a voice that is actually heard externally, a voice that enjoys the satisfaction of authorship, and, at the same time, responds to a world in which struggles for power are constant. Identity formed in the context of activity and language can strengthen collective bonds, promote membership, and effect changes, while simultaneously generating a sense of personal accomplishment. In the same line of thought, Moran [55] defends that identities are shaped within the joint forces of the self and the others. The claim for association is always present, requiring individuals that are driven and willing to adjust to unstable environments. The performative aspect of identity has been highlighted by Judith Butler [52] in her

studies of feminist identity, but is equally applicable to other identities. Performance enables individuals to experience ways of acting in life, which expands their range of choice with regard to who they want to be and to become. Through cultural performance, the individual is put at the centre not only of cultural activity but of socio-political action, which, in turn, raises issues of citizenship. From this perspective, a citizen is a dynamic unity of the individual self and the communitarian self [56,57] that is, a human being who interacts with the Other in a given space and faces challenges. The challenge of ensuring sustainability for future generations is a case in point.

#### 8.4. Tackling Azorean Identity

As we turn to studies concerning Azorean identity, we notice the prevalent use of an essay by the Azorean writer Vitorino Nemésio [58], entitled “*Açorianidade*” (Azoreaness), which offers a definitive statement on being an islander and living in the Azores. The author highlights the importance of the clouded sky, humidity, the smallness of the islands, volcanism, religion, and the ever-present ocean.

Important as this text is, it does not account for conflict in Azorean society; on the contrary, it presents a static image of an ordered society threatened mainly by external factors, namely industrialisation and foreign practices. Social inequality, power struggles, resistance to dominance, internal change, and fracture are neglected within the general idealisation of a rural landscape which is perfect except for the natural catastrophes it is subject to, owing to its volcanic origin. But even this challenging element aids to compose an idealised description of the population.

Thus, it is epistemically more appropriate to shift attention from top-down approaches to identity, which use ready-made categories, to bottom-up processes of identity-making. Accordingly, we argue that the case of Carnival as it appears on Terceira Island can be understood on the basis of a non-essentialist view of identity, that is, one that emphasises the interplay between identity, power, and sustainability that we have summarised above.

Carnival is a popular festival, which could be classified as a “folk practice”. As such, it requires popular commitment to a common performative goal, which is not directly linked to issues of environmental fitness for the practicing population. Nonetheless, Terceira’s Carnival tells a tale of sustainability: on the one hand, it puts a stress on the island’s resources (either human or material); on the other hand, it offers an inclusive model of interaction, which is a key element of societal cohesion, wellbeing, and welfare. Moreover, this Carnival represents a case of community education that stands at the crossroads between formal practices and informal learning.

It is a regulated activity through which creativity is expressed, thus triggering individual innovations within the frame of seemingly fixed theatrical practices. It represents popular authorship and offers a critical view of social institutions, figures of authority, and centres of power.

Postmodern practices and sustainability entertain a complex relationship, and Terceira’s Carnival is no exception. In this study, we have identified a diversified web of connections between Terceira’s Carnival and social classes, cultural practices, folk art, intangible cultural heritage, identity, and sustainability. There is clear evidence of it mirroring and contributing to the design of a specific island identity within the Azorean context.

#### 8.5. A Counterexample to Hilbers’ and Turner’s Theory

Terceira’s Carnival challenges the entrenched views on the identity-making function of “community festivals”. In this respect, it does not meet requirements for the definition proposed by Hilbers [6] (p. 24). Hilbers draws on Turner [7] and claims “community festivals and celebrations are ritual events that tell the story of a people, often through music, dance, art, food, and iconography.” Moreover, he contends they blend storytelling and story-making, by making these practices become part and parcel of a community’s identity-making practices. Yet, in the view of Turner, Carnivals do not belong to such

category: he sets them aside because he believes they enjoy a non-compulsory nature and, as such, they cannot enjoy the status of “rituals”.

The case of Terceira proves otherwise. It enjoys both a ritual nature and a creative opening towards the re-definition of the community identity. Its flexibility is at the core of its sustainability, because Terceira’s Carnival enables participants to shift positions across the social spectrum and, alternatively, to either support the status quo or hurl the community towards the unknown. As De Matteis put it, festivals cannot be only about the (hi)story of a given community [59] (p. 20), and Terceira proves the point.

Does lack of historicity entail challenges in identity-making? Quite the opposite: Terceira’s Carnival enjoys a strong identity, not because of its specific contents, but because it is a *process*. Contents, such as the topics of Carnival tales, are fully negotiable; the structure is negotiable too, as demonstrated by our historical appraisal. This leaves identity-making to the enactment of a process.

If, for Turner [7] (pp. 86–87), “tribal” communities are so norm-driven that even the festivals’ subversion of social order is dictated by collective rules, “modern” communities, to the contrary, deploy practices that emphasise the inventiveness of emancipated individuals. Terceira’s Carnival is an exacerbation of the latter. By pushing such reasoning even further, it could be possible to frame Terceira’s Carnival as a practice that, through its emergent character, steers a society towards a postmodern fruition of cultural (co-constructed) reality, although maybe not in the ‘continental’ ways understood by Melotti [23].

Its theatrical element enhances creativity and adds cultural value to both individuals and the community. Its performances interweave music, drama, and dance into a satirical mix, which highlights the multi-faceted nature of collective prosocial undertakings that reflect the yearly social, economic, and political agenda. The point of view is not determined by authorities, the elites, or those who hold power, but by a combination of players from several social backgrounds. Rural minorities take the floor, and the subversion of power roles offers them visibility.

One of the most salient findings of this study is that Terceira’s Carnival fosters active citizenship, as it brings together people who otherwise would hardly meet around the leading concerns of the community every year; it promotes education through art, by creating an opportunity to practice storytelling, dancing, playing music, singing, and acting; it constitutes a cultural force, which, by means of sustainable conduct, manages to keep tradition alive without neglecting contemporary matters of general interest. To put it simply, it helps to preserve the fabric of an island society that faces the tensions between globalisation and cultural diversity. In the process, it empowers the participants, whose voice is heard and even written for future memory.

## 9. Conclusions

In this paper, we endeavoured to illustrate several points concerning Terceira’s Carnival. First, it constitutes a projection towards an idealised communal history, rather than the result of long-term historical processes. Second, the best way to understand its double nature or rural and urban Carnival is better explained by the theory of dual cultural evolution. Third, the analysis of its taxonomy shows that both its structure and understanding has changed over the past hundred years. Fourth, it features three concurrent processes that contribute to community cohesion: mythopoesis (local ‘heroes’), folk elitism (distribution of power), and subversion (reaction to hegemony).

Consequently, we argued that Terceira’s Carnival displays both modern and post-modern features and is employed by the islanders as a tool to negotiate their identities in face of ensuing globalisation. They are able to do so thanks to the identarian dimension of the process, which, in turn, makes it possible to create a self-referential sandbox in which islanders can stage their values. This makes Terceira’s Carnival a case of cultural sustainability: the practice, as it was observed in 2020, is healthy and far from being crystallised by administrative heritagisation processes. Notwithstanding its relative wealth,

this phenomenon remains marginalised owing to the peripheral nature of Azores islands and calls for greater attention towards its possible inclusion in international inventories.

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