

Technologies as a Means, Meetings as an End: Urban Interactions of a Migrant Community in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Mobilized Through WhatsApp

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Abstract. In this paper, I reflect on how uses of new communication technology can transform interactions that occur in the space of a city. I conducted an urban ethnography and analysis of online forms of communication for five months on a group of migrants from the Northeast of Brazil who migrated to the city of Rio de Janeiro, in the Southeast of the country. There were approximately 80 people who joined an online group on WhatsApp, and used the application to mobilize themselves, including attending events around the city, such as private parties, concerts, soccer matches and visits to the São Cristóvão Fair which is a space that attracts tourists, visitors, in particular communities from the North-east of Brazil. I argue that identity is enhanced as ties are strengthened.

Keywords: Appropriation · WhatsApp · Identity · Urban interaction · Brazil

1 Introduction

It's not possible to assert why people use WhatsApp in general. Like every form of cultural consumption, the uses of these tools vary. However, this paper focuses on a group that organize, through this virtual application, with one clear objective: to meet in the city.

In this paper, I reflect on how uses of new communication technology can transform interactions that occur in the space of a city. I conducted an urban ethnography and analysis of online forms of communication for five months on a group of migrants from the Northeast of Brazil who migrated to the city of Rio de Janeiro, in the Southeast of the country. There were approximately 80 people who joined an online group on WhatsApp, and used the application to mobilize themselves, including attending events around the city, such as private parties, concerts, soccer matches and visits to the São Cristóvão Fair which is a space that attracts tourists, visitors, in particular communities from the North-east of Brazil.

The initial idea of this research was to investigate the cultural consumption of migrants from the Northeast of Brazil in São Cristóvão Fair, located in the North Zone of Rio close to the port area of the city. However, during the first few months of investigation (from March to July 2015), I discovered the existence of several WhatsApp groups formed by regular fair-goers. By analysing this virtual phenomenon,

I realized it would be possible to understand the practices of the fair-goers beyond the space of the fair, identifying their circulation for Rio de Janeiro, using WhatsApp as a tool that enhances their urban interactions.

I have analysed how fair-goers make what I call the “overflowing of the Fair”, meaning, spaces within the city that start from the Fair, but then they go beyond, overflowing into different places in Rio.

The WhatsApp application is used as a daily means to connect, reinforces weekly meetings (forró shows at the Fair, barbecues at homes of the members, parties in low-income communities (slums), football matches, among other spaces). Social networks are composed of social subjects, using tools that facilitate such interactions (Recuero 2009), for example virtual platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp (social medias). I consider that technologies are means, and the meeting is the main objective for the group investigated.

I used an ethnographic method to analyse how a group of regular fair-goers of the São Cristóvão Fair use WhatsApp to share sentiments about what it means “to be from Northeast”. I adopted two methodological procedures: (1) virtual ethnography; (2) and participant observation in meetings organized by the group in the Fair and in other spaces of the city in which I accompanied them and conducted the research over five months (July–November 2015) and of a group of approximately 80 users in WhatsApp.

I consider the internet as a culture and as a cultural artefact (Hine 2004): it promotes specific practices among its users and at the same time, it is used as a tool to suit the wishes and needs of the contemporary world. Furthermore, I do not take into account only online data of the WhatsApp group, but also the everyday uses of the social media from the WhatsApp users, in addition to the sociability that social media provide.

2 Immersion in the Field

It is 10 p.m. on a Saturday when I disembark in São Cristóvão subway station. I’m going to the São Cristóvão Fair. I am looking for a taxi to go from the subway station to the Fair. Like many regulars who take this same route on the weekends, I adopt a similar tactic of sharing a taxi with strangers.. This time, I was fortunate to share the taxi with a girl who tells me that she takes part in a WhatsApp group of fair-goers. She is going there to find the members of that community and so I ask her if I can join the group and I am accepted.

During the field research, I allowed myself to be led by my informants and they took me beyond the space of the São Cristóvão Fair, that I had conceived of initially as the research focus. They invited me to know Rio de Janeiro from their perspective, and how they experience the city daily. I consider that my inclusion in the group was facilitated because I am also a North-eastern migrant who lives in Rio de Janeiro.

At the time of writing, I had mapped at least eight WhatsApp groups formed by fair-goers of the São Cristóvão Fair. I have participated in four groups, interacting more actively with one that is central to the findings presented in this paper.

After a month I was integrated into the group “Os Fechamentos”, I decided to make it the main object of my investigation. To start the observation, I sent the following message on September 14, 2015: “Good morning, everyone. Ok? I am doing research

on the São Cristóvão Fair. The research is about fair-goers and their relationship to the Northeast. I want to participate in this group to know the fair-goers better. Would you allow me to do this? The idea is to follow the group here on WhatsApp and at the Fair when you go there, and then I would like to interview some of you. In the research, I will not mention anybody's name or any other personal data. Thanks!"

No one on the group responded to the message, but all participants continued treating me friendly during physical meetings and calling me "professor" like a joke. When I met group members in person at the parties, I personally introduced myself as "a communication researcher who is researching the Fair and the WhatsApp group." Everybody received me well. I conducted interviews with four group members about their life stories, their relationships with the group, and how they use WhatsApp.

Among thousands of files posted in the online group during the five months of daily monitoring I did, I chose to analyse 175 audio messages (songs, audios shared from other people and voice recordings of themselves), 453 images (party advertisements especially in the São Cristóvão Fair, personal pictures of members of the group, photos of the group taken in events) and 957 screenshots of the conversations. As a criterion for selection of audio, images and screenshots that I collected, I only considered information that would help to analyse how the participants engaged in dialogue using the online platform and the space of the São Cristóvão Fair and other areas of the city and how some notions of what it is "to be from Northeast" that are present in their discourses.

3 Ambivalent Identities

I started my research in the São Cristóvão Fair. Located in the North Zone of Rio, near the port area, the São Cristóvão Fair currently receives around 300 thousand people every month. They are generally attracted by forró concerts, pagode1 and reggae2, northeastern food restaurants and the stalls with handmade products. These handmade products mostly are items from the Northeast (in general clay, wood and lace products, as well as food products such as "coalho" cheese, coconut candy ("cocada", in Portuguese), brown sugar ("rapadura", in Portuguese) and "cachaça" – a traditional North-eastern drink used to prepare "caipirinhas3").

The São Cristóvão Fair has never been a place solely supplying regional foods and products in general. It has since the beginning been seen as social space. The forró rhythm appears as a central element to this process of socializing as a group with a regional element as a factor of identification and mobilization.

As noted by the Fair organizers, it is clear that there exists a strong appeal to the concepts of "tradition", "roots", "cultural essence" with several myths about "traditional culture" (clay pots, decoration of June Festivals (a sort of folkloric party very common in Northeast), salted steak ("carne do sol" in Portuguese), cowboy clothes, vegetation from the "sertão" (the most arid region of Brazil, in Northeast), etc.). It is important to note that these representations about the "traditional Northeast" were invented not by this region itself, but by various cultural products (movies, literature books, and music) that were actually made in the Southeast (in wealthier cities like Rio

de Janeiro and São Paulo), with the goal of creating a stereotype about the Northeast as “poor”, “traditional” and “rural”(Junior 2011).

It is important to highlight the connection between identity and representation. Hall (2010, p. 345) relates “identity” and “representation” by saying that “[...] identity is within the discourse, within the representation.” For the author, the identity “[...] consists in part by representation. Identity is a narrative of himself, it is the story we tell ourselves about who we are”. “Identities are a guarantee of class that the world doesn’t fall apart as quickly as it sometimes seems. They are a kind of fixed point of thought and of the being, a basis for action, an even existing point in a changing world. That seems to be the last class of guarantees given by the identity to us” (Hall 2010, p. 339).

However, these concepts do not seem to have centrality in the discourse and practices of consumers during this research. They rarely appear. Even with reference to the Northeast as a place of origin, there are various representations; implying symbolic forms that refer to a cultural hybrid that breaks in many ways with folk discourse about what would be “north-eastern tradition”. I consider that post-modern subjects who live in a global urban centre (like Rio de Janeiro) experience transient and ambivalent identities (Bauman 1999). In relation to the subjects investigated, this regional identity is temporary, because they recognized themselves as being from the Northeast, but move around the city in various ways like “residents of Rio de Janeiro”.

The initial members of the WhatsApp group met at the São Cristóvão Fair, a place where there are many references to “north-eastern tradition”. Although the meetings began at the Fair, people have moved to other areas of the city that have no direct connections to that region of the country. So we can consider that the “North-eastern identity” may be understood as an initial element to the mobilization of the group. Depending on the extent in which the group was organizing meetings, they gained new mobilizing elements. Parties, happiness, friendships, and flirting are some elements that unite the group, which do not depend on connections to the Northeast such as those found at the São Cristóvão Fair.

4 WhatsApp: Extimacy as Urban Routes

As with other social media, WhatsApp intensifies the exhibition of privacy, the “extimacy” that previous virtual social networks have afforded, like Facebook and Twitter. From the term coined by Lacan and Tisseron (2001) defines “extimacy” (“extimité” in French) as the “desire of a person to communicate or expose your inner world to the other” (Bruno 2013, p. 68).

Provided you have a mobile device connected to the internet, the application user can keep in contact with several people at the same time, in private conversations or in groups with up to 100 participants simultaneously. Around the city, users can send photos, videos and audio recordings, indicating that they are and not leaving any physical encounters to chance.

As the most popular instant messaging application in the world, WhatsApp offers a multiplatform service, with sounds and text messages (with the addition of emoticons, photos and videos stored on the phone or captured moments before sending), and the

voice connection service. The application also lets you know if the other participant viewed the sent message.

My objective is to identify how this application has contributed to the interactions that are established beyond the virtual space and around the city.

The group “Os Fechamentos” (meaning “ever-present attendees”) has in its name the main objective that its members give it: the idea is “to be close”, “to be present”, to be “always together”, “everybody together and mixed” (“tudo junto e misturado”, a very common and popular expression in Brazil nowadays). Several times, one of the group administrators complained when people refuse any physical meetings: “Aren’t you a ‘bro’, [swear word]?!”.

It is not possible to define the profession and the home district, among other elements that could form the socioeconomic profile of the investigated group because the virtual community has about 80 people, many of whom I did not conduct questionnaires. Nevertheless, some people with whom I spoke to during my observation told me that they work as shop assistants, day labourers, security guards, housewives as well as high school and college students.

Formed by assiduous fair-goers, mostly north-eastern migrants aged between 18 and 40 years old, the group has about three thousand posts per day. That number increases to around four thousand per day from Friday to Sunday (due to the weekend parties). Many of the posts refer to physical meetings they establish in everyday life, with postings of videos and photos of past events. The number of posts increases considerably always after a physical encounter with photos and videos from the event and the comments about what happened. Displays of affection in the virtual group become more intense after the group meets physically. You can see in the following passage (fourth frame) where one of the participants wrote, “my ‘bad good’ little gang” in the caption of a photo of the group, in an ironic way (Fig. 1).

In the online conversations of the group, as well as in physical encounters, there are constant references to their place of origin, making comparisons between life experiences in their hometown in the Northeast and the lifestyle that they have in Rio de Janeiro. As there are some members who are natives from Rio, with little or no contact with the Northeast, the information about the region also has a didactic purpose (Fig. 2).

A representative part of the posts in the online group are audios with voice recordings of the members. Among the themes that are highlighted in the extracts below, participants mobilize the community to have physical meetings.

Good morning gang. Today is Friday; the week is starting now, the week of alcohol. Everything is our, [swear word]! LOL (group administrator calling for the weekend);

I want to see us charter a van and go to “Caldas Country”, Goiás state, from October 31 to 1st November. Several bands including “Henrique e Juliano”, “Garota Safada” and “Aviões do Forró” (a man proposing a trip to a party in Goiás, state in the Midwest of Brazil; he references, respectively, to a duo of singers from Tocantins state and a singer and a band from Ceará state);

[Swear word], our group is [swear word] weak, you cannot stand several parties. In the holiday weekend for us and enjoy, but you guys are discouraged. Damn, I’m saying, bro; I don’t believe that, guys. You’re crazy, bro (a man complaining about the refusal of someone to go to a particular event);

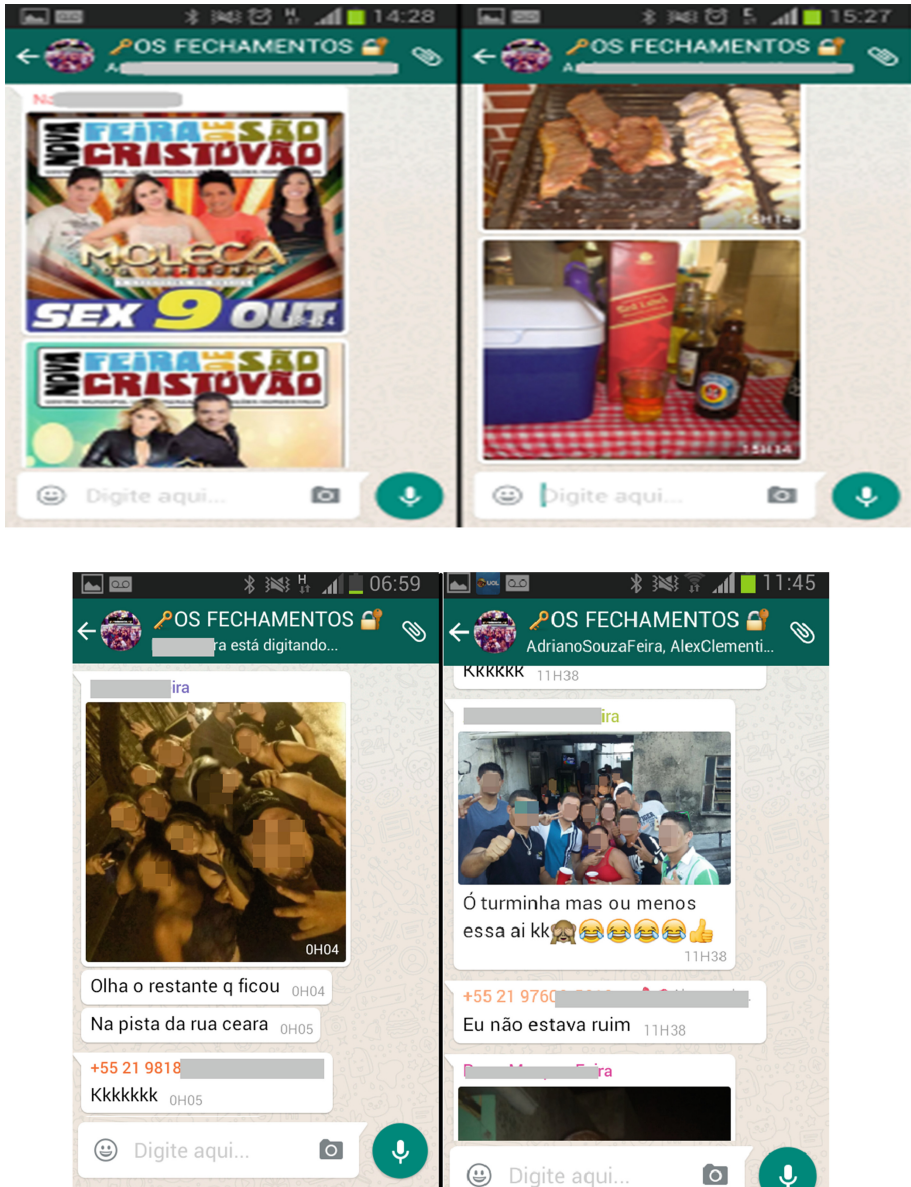


Fig. 1. Posts on WhatsApp group: (1) party advertising at the São Cristóvão Fair; (2) food and drinks in one of the group barbecues; (3) and (4) photos of members on two physical meetings (The conversations of the group are in Portuguese, the official language in Brazil. In the third column: person1: “Look at the rest of the people who stayed on the Ceará street”; person 2: “(laughter)”. In the fourth column: person 1: “my ‘more or less’ little gang” (laughter); person 2: “I wasn’t bad”). (Source: author)

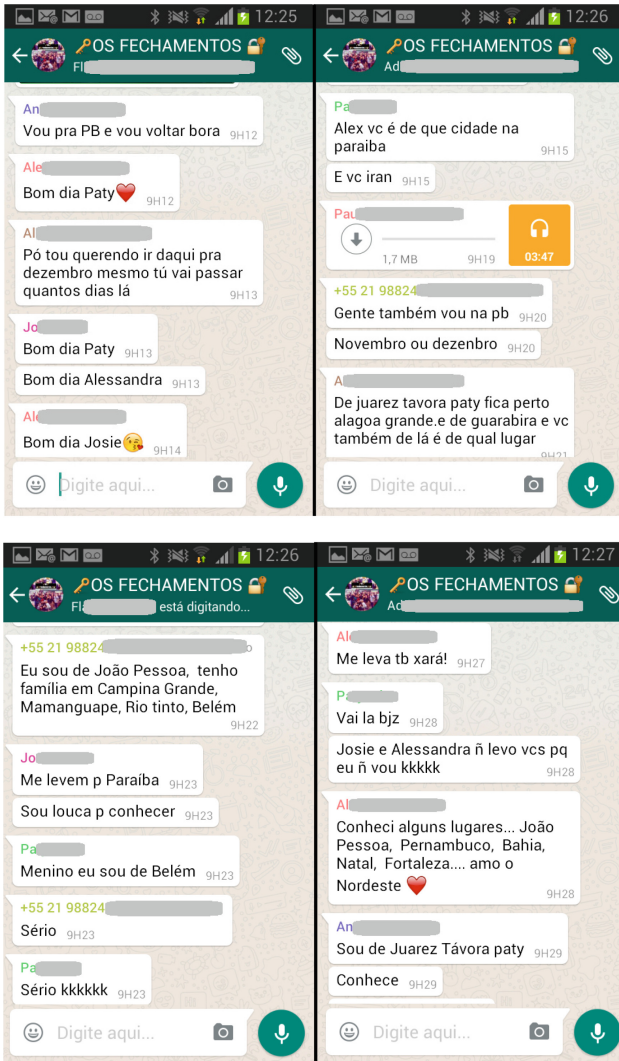


Fig. 2. Conversations about hometowns; above, one participant is from Rio de Janeiro and the others are from the Northeast, but live in Rio (Column 1: person 1 “I’m going to Paraíba (state in north-eastern Brazil) and I will return, let’s go?”; person 2: “Good morning, Paty”; person 3: “[Swear word], I wanna go until December; how many days will you spend there?”; Person 4: “Good morning Paty, good morning Alessandra “; Person 2: “Good morning Josie.” Column 2: person 1: “Alex, which city in Paraíba where are you from?”; person 2: “People, I also will go to Paraíba, in November or December”; person 3: “From Juarez Tavora, Paty, it’s close to Alagoa Grande and Guarabira. And are you from there too? Are you from which place? “. In column 3: person 1: “I’m from Joao Pessoa, I have family in Campina Grande, Mamanguape, Rio Tinto, Belém”; person 2: “Take me to Paraíba, I’m eager to know”; person 3: “Hey man, I’m from Belém”; person 4: “Really?”; person 3: “Really (laughs).” Column 4: person 1: “Take me too, my namesake!”; person 2: “Go on, kisses, Josie and Alessandra, I won’t take you because I won’t go (laugther)”; person 3: “I know some places... Joao Pessoa, Pernambuco, Bahia, Natal, Fortaleza... I love the Northeast”; person 4: “I’m from Juarez Távora, Paty; do you know?” (Every cities and states that are mentioned are in the Northeast of Brazil, inclusive Belém, that isn’t the capital of Pará state, but a city from Paraíba state.) (Source: author)

I got to go, I got to go, and I love it! [swear word]! (a woman proves to be upset because she isn't going to the concert of the singer Wesley Safadão¹ (from Ceará, a state in the Northeast) in the Barra Music Club, in Rio; in your audio, it's possible to hear a singer's song in the background);

Hey guys, you'll post photos, guys, you will be posting everything, guys, and I won't have seen him (the singer Wesley Safadão). [Swear word]... I not even won't have a cup as recordation of the concert (the same woman then);

My bro, I worked so hard every week, I'm just relaxing my mind, soon I'll go away, I'm just enjoying, just enjoying; listen to this (a man is responding to other one who complained to him for not having been invited to drink; in his audio, there is a funk song from Rio (popular-massive gender associated to Rio de Janeiro) in the background, it seems a bar, where women scream singing the song);

Hey guys, good afternoon to everybody, I wanted to invite everyone who is free and who is going to Caju (a neighbourhood) today. Today I'm going there, in my sister's house, by token of her, she called me to go there. From there, I want to take a beer there, in Caju. If someone wants to go, if someone is, we can have a beer (Caju is a popular community next to the port area, close to the São Cristóvão Fair, where lives a considerable part of the group);

Hey man, make a date on a Saturday for us hang out. Do you live in Caju or Rocinha? (Rocinha is a popular community in Rio, known locally as "favela" ("slum"));

I'm too drunk, I don't know how to get home, I ask someone to come get me (a man simulating being very drunk in his voice; in the background, it's possible to listening to a song of singer Wesley Safadão and people talking around).

In a hyper-connected society, new communication technologies cause considerable changes in the routine of subjects. However, to understand the connections between virtual and geographical worlds, it is necessary to carefully observe the contexts in which such technologies are consumed. In the case of mobile virtual communication, we need to consider the increasing complexity of the environments in which users enter in online communication. It is essential to analyse the practices online and offline as interconnected (Hine 2004). In the specific case of this research, analysis of the online group in WhatsApp only makes sense if we find the connections with the interactions that its members have beyond the virtual and how they use the territory of the city in their everyday life.

5 Urban Interactions Beyond the Virtual

Not only does the São Cristóvão Fair need to be understood beyond itself given the context of Rio de Janeiro. The daily practices of north-eastern migrants must be understood within the reality of Rio. Although they are from the Northeast, the meanings attributed to their actions and their discourses are in constant negotiation with their current experiences that are peculiar to the context of a new city.

¹ "Safadão" is "big shameless" in Portuguese, with a sexual sense.

Although it intensified in the late 1990s the “return migration” from the Southeast to the Northeast, is still quite significant to the permanence of migrants who arrived in previous decades and for the more recent flow of migrants. Such phenomena changes the urban landscape of Rio, reshaping the local culture in a significant way. In addition to material presence, North-eastern communities also interfere symbolically in the territory of the city.

During the five months when I followed the group, there were five barbeques on the rooftop of the house of one of the members; six visits to the São Cristóvão Fair with the group; a concert at the Barra Music Club by singers Wesley Safadão and Gabriel Diniz (both from Northeast); and three visits to the Parque União Square (or Esperança Square, in the Complexo da Maré, a slum in North Zone of Rio), where there were concerts by forró bands. Parque União Square is considered the second sociocultural space in Rio de Janeiro of the “North-eastern community” (after the São Cristóvão Fair)¹.

The first meeting of “Os Fechamentos” that I went to outside of the Fair was organized by one of the administrators of the group on the rooftop of his home in the São Cristóvão district. There were 30 people and each one gave 30 reais² to buy drinks and meat for the barbeque. There I met with people that I had only had virtual contact with until that point.

One of the members said she was “carioca” (an adjective used to describe people who are born in Rio de Janeiro), without any North-eastern relatives, but that she was fixated on north-eastern people and said that her last boyfriend was from Ceará state (in the Northeast). She said she could not dance forró and that she could only dance funk from Rio. She participated in a Wesley Safadão fan club, (a forró singer from Ceará). She reinforced: “I don’t have any family in the ‘North’”, as some locals from Rio call the Northeast; as this is how it was referred to within an earlier division of the country. “You just earned a family from Northeast”, says one of the group administrators to her, referring to the “Os Fechamentos” group as a “Northeast family” (Fig. 3). The following passage shows the relation of affection that members establish among themselves, the “North-eastern identity” being the mobilizing element.

The event mentioned above began at 3 p.m. on a Sunday and ended at midnight of the same day. From there, 14 people, “the stronger guys”, followed in two vans (public transportation) to the Parque União Square, where we remained until 5 a.m. watching ‘forró’ bands perform. Amidst the celebration of the “success” of the barbeque, two administrators - proving to be upset with the fact that only 30 of the 88 members of the group went to the meeting - warned that they would remove people who did not interact on the virtual space (the “lurkers”). And so they did, as it’s possible to see on Fig. 4.

Research developed by Preece et al. (2004) shows that “‘lurkers’ satisfaction with their community experience was lower than those who post”. However, it’s not possible to say anything about the lurkers in the community analysed, because it was not the focus of my research. It is only possible to say that those who post and, who have strong community ties, often remove some lurkers in order to encourage the participation of users who communicate little.

Soon after, one of the managers sent the following audio expressing his disappointment with “the guys”:



Fig. 3. Conversation between a participant from Rio and one from Paraíba state (this last in north-eastern) in the group “Os Fechamentos” (Column 1: person 1: “(laughs); carioca who loves forró; Wesley Safadão (singer from Northeast); Good evening”; person 2: “Good night”; person 3: “Good evening; I am also carioca, a carioca from Paraíba (this is ironic, because “carioca” is these who was born at Rio de Janeiro)”. Column 2: person 1: “(laughter)”; person 2: “Eri (emoticon with kiss)”; person 3: “I don’t have any family in the ‘North’ (says “North”, but she is referring to the Northeast)”; person 4: “You just earned a family from Northeast. Good night Marcinha”). (Source: author)

People don’t value things, you know? People don’t respect friends. Friends! Many people join the group, but don’t make friends... You have to know people here, to meet, to make new friends, to enjoy. It’s not only on the São Cristóvão Fair, it’s not only that. There’s a lot involved, understand? It’s a group, it’s respect, consideration, to make new people to value it. I don’t understand why people join it if they don’t know the meaning of it. Why participate? Just to hear things and to take from one place to another? For what? So it’s not necessary. So it’s better (to remove the “lurkers”), because the group decreases and gets only people who are always together. Those people who aren’t together will go out (audio of one of the group administrators, the day after the barbeque described above).

The discourse of the administrator reinforces the idea of “beyond the Fair”, what I call here the “overflowing of the Fair”. Consciously she mobilizes ties that revolve around something larger than the areas considered strategic to the unity of the group. The Fair and the WhatsApp group are tools that allow for what is central: the

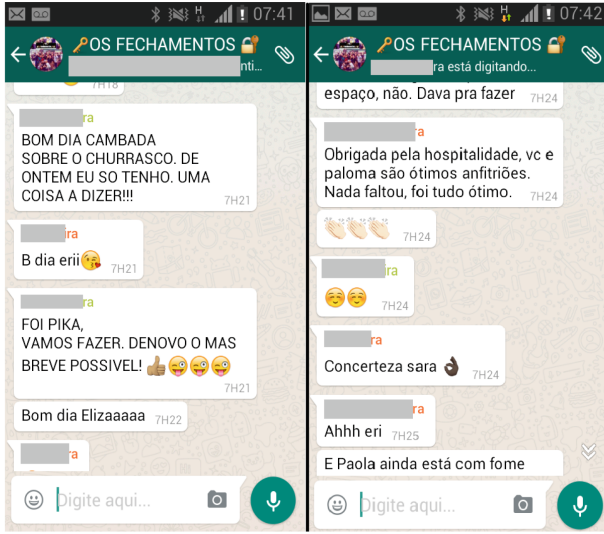


Fig. 4. Participants celebrate “success” of the barbeque; administrators remove “lurkers” (Column 1: person 1: “Good morning gang. About yesterday’s barbeque, I just have one thing to say: it was amazing! Let’s do it again, as soon as possible. Good morning Eliza”; person 2: “Good morning Eri.” Column 2: person 1: “Thank you for the hospitality, Eri and Paloma are great hosts. Nothing was missing, it was all great”; person 2: “Certainly”; person 3: “Hey Eri, Paola is still hungry”. In column 3, we see one of the administrators removing several participants who don’t interact in the group. In column 4: person 1: “Deyse removed lurkers”; person 2: “(applauds emoticons)”; person 3: “There are more people, Paola, I am analysing (laughter)”; person 2: “(laughs); I get it, I get it”. Column 5: person 1: “Guys, I’m proud of our event, it was sensational. Surely I will have the pleasure again to open the doors of my house to you. It’s a great group”). (Source: author)

meeting. They are not ends, but means. The “overflowing” built by the group includes the São Cristóvão district, the community of Parque União and the community of Caju, spaces where a considerable part of the members reside and where a considerable part of the meetings beyond the Fair take place.

The places where the meetings take place are important because they refer to the Northeast to some extent. However, they are not central. Having the meetings as elementary, the group has already held four meetings in a single weekend, with a lot of forró and not much funk from Rio. It all started on a Saturday night with a Halloween party held on the rooftop of a member’s house in São Cristóvão district, with about 50 participants, some of them costumed. In all events, the group decides whether to share costs or whether each person takes their own drink and meal. This time, the latter option won.

Around seven o’clock in the morning, a group of about ten “resistants” were “asked to leave” because the landlady wanted to sleep. Without wanting to finish the party, we put drinks into buckets with ice and we went out walking and drinking on the streets, screaming, taking photos and posting them instantly on the online group. We decided to take a bus and go to the house of one of the guys of the group, at the Parque União district. It is then, at midday, that this young man would organize a barbeque in another WhatsApp group also formed for fair-goers of the São Cristóvão Fair. The barbeque was on the rooftop of his house, a quadrilateral of about 50 square meters, with cemented floor, aluminium tiles, a toilet, a wash basin and a concrete counter. Under the rooftop, three residential floors: the ground floor, the house of his fathers; in the second, his brother; and in the third, his own1.

The “resistant” people of the Saturday party were gradually dispersing. Some left, others went home to get some rest and then came back, while three people stayed there until the beginning of the barbeque (which was what I did). At the end of the event in the evening, members of the new group plus the last night’s group went, “altogether and mixed”, to the Parque União Square nearby where there are ‘forró’ concerts on Sundays usually, with bands that had performed at the São Cristóvão Fair the night before.

Lucky for the excited group, the next day, was All Soul’s Day. At midday, a new mobilization began through the WhatsApp group:

A good party happens without programming, suddenly we make a date, at the last minute, and we make a good play. Where are the guys of the group? Express yourself here, [swear word]. Let’s have fun. Today is All Souls’ Day, [swear word], today is our day! LOL Let’s drink and celebrate, let’s have fun, make that barbeque, take a cachaça and chat a little. [...] There is vodka, soda and energy drinks. We have to buy only meat and beer [...] If ten people accept, the meeting happens (convocation in audio of one of the group administrators).

Each person should bring ten reais to buy meat. The drinks would be the remaining from Saturday’s party, and many drinks were left over. And once again, the people were “together and mixed”: about 30 people appeared on the rooftop of the house of another member of the group, in Caju district, to the sound of lots of forró and a little funk. Like all events, many photos and videos were posted instantly on the online group.

6 Final Remarks

The group does not make references to the Northeast all the time, but the regional identity element seems to be the moving-force of the investigated group. But this regional identity is not necessarily associated to the traditional culture. Another possible analysis is that online connections are strengthened when the physical meetings happen. It is not possible to understand the virtual community if we disregard the physical meetings that happen around the city.

The São Cristóvão Fair is used by many as a space of confluence for the “Northeastern community in Rio” and is a place of dialogue within technological tools like WhatsApp, which aggregates groups of fair-goers. The “to be together”, that was previously experienced mainly in physical spaces (such as the São Cristóvão Fair and other physical spaces in the city), may now be at hand, in a virtual way, in virtual social networks.

Spaces like the São Cristóvão Fair and the virtual groups in WhatsApp are the tools that provide the meeting of a community with specific identity elements. The peculiarity is in the imaginary about the Northeast. The way they think about their regional community and reorganize their sociocultural ties in the territory of a new city. It is a dislocated territorial community which uses strategies to keep in constant contact.

The identity component is enhanced as ties are strengthened. But this identity change was in the beginning associated to elements that referred to the Northeast of Brazil. Now, new data from my research has shown that the identity of the neighbourhood and of the “party-goers” changed as the group identified less with their place of origin and more as party-goers.

In the contemporary world, the identity groups need to reinvent themselves, although they have similar goals in relation to the similar communities in the past: the meeting. People from the Northeast who invented the São Cristóvão Fair in the 1940s in Rio de Janeiro used the tools available to them at that time. Today, the similar and current communities reinvent its wiles, using the new technologies of communication forged by and for contemporary cities.

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