

# Formal attire from one side of the “bridge” to the other: the wedding market and class and gender relations inscribed in the territory of the city

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## **Abstract**

In Brazil, the sector of events and ceremonies had nearly US\$5 billion in revenue in 2015, although more than just money revolves around this market. In this article, I accompany brides and grooms in the process of organizing their wedding celebrations between the geographic and economic extremes of the city of São Paulo. I demonstrate that in the Zona Leste [eastern zone] of the capital, in contrast to stores for the upper classes, the physical space of the market for bridal dresses is constantly claimed as a field of feminine power and that the time for preparation of weddings, in turn, is the materialization of a moral regime that is inclined toward collectivization. From relatives to God, everyone is involved in organizing weddings. Thus, I highlight how the territorial constitution of São Paulo – and the economic nuances impressed in the geographic distribution – alters social dynamics and transforms weddings into particularly distinct enterprises from one side of the city to another.

**Keywords:** gender, consumption, relatedness, periphery, wedding, São Paulo.

# Traje a rigor de um lado a outro da “ponte”:

mercado de festas de casamento e relações de  
classe e gênero inscritas no território da cidade

## **Resumo**

No Brasil, o setor de eventos e cerimônias movimentou quase US\$5 bilhões em 2015, porém mais do que dinheiro gira em torno deste mercado. Neste artigo, persigo noivas e noivos em processo de organização de suas festas de casamento entre os extremos geográficos e econômicos da cidade de São Paulo. Demonstro que na zona leste da capital, em contraste com lojas das classes altas, o espaço físico do mercado de vestidos de noivas é constantemente reivindicado como campo de poder feminino e que o tempo de preparação dos casamentos, por sua vez, é a materialização de um regime moral inclinado à coletivização: seja parente ou seja Deus, todos fazem a festa. Assim, destaco como a constituição territorial de São Paulo – e as nuances econômicas impressas na distribuição geográfica – altera as dinâmicas sociais e transforma os casamentos em empreendimentos particularmente distintos de um lado a outro da cidade.

**Palavras-chave:** gênero, consumo, relacionalidades, periferia, casamento, São Paulo.

# Formal attire from one side of the “bridge” to the other:

the wedding market and class and gender relations inscribed in the territory of the city

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## 1. Introduction

In 2015 the market specialized in events and ceremonies had US\$ 5 billion in revenue in Brazil and accompanied a record number of weddings. In the state of São Paulo alone there were nearly 300 thousand official weddings, an increase of 57% in a period of 15 years.<sup>1</sup> There are few studies that make this issue their central object of analysis in Brazil, but recent researches have documented that the growth in the sector is due largely to a renewal of investments in large wedding parties by couples (Marins 2016; Pinho 2017).

In a study whose objective is to understand the relations involved in the preparation of these celebrations, I accompanied weddings in São Paulo (SP) and Belém (PA) that had budgets from US\$ 6 thousand to US\$ 90 thousand,<sup>2</sup> while it is easy to find events of the same type that cost millions. And when speaking of wedding celebrations, whether the brides and grooms or professionals, more than money revolves around this sector: there are objects, styles, fashions, concepts, people and dreams in circulation.

Broadly speaking, the study<sup>3</sup> focuses on analyzing the context of approximations, differentiations and inequalities during the time spent organizing wedding parties. To do so, it focuses on conflicts and disputes over things, bodies, contours of gender and economic distinctions, family positions, emotions and reputations. Methodologically, I use a qualitative perspective, combining participant observation and in-depth interviews to the construction of the ethnographic text.

The fieldwork was initiated with observation in different stores that rent bridal dresses, an object which 1) distinguishes one wedding ceremony from another; 2) reveals an important moment of direct interaction between market professionals and brides in the process of preparing the event; and, 3) as an item essential to all enterprises of this type, allows a transversal entrance into different contexts of social class.

In the design of the study in São Paulo, I sought to give priority to a comparative look at different economic contexts and selected three different entrances to the field: a store that rented formal attire in São Mateus, a neighborhood on the geographic margin of the eastern zone of the city; another that rented bridal dresses on Rua São Caetano, which is known as the “Brides street” in the center of the state capital; and one in the Jardins neighborhood, in the midwest of the municipality, which is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. The field observation at these stores produced a vast material about

1 The Fundação Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados is an institution linked to the Secretariat of Planning and Management of the state of São Paulo and is responsible for statistical studies and surveys.

2 At the time of the study the minimum wage was approximately US\$ 290 in Brazil.

3 Doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Isadora Lins França, member of the Nucleus of Gender Studies of Pagu and financed by CAPES.

the cartographic diversity of the market, and allowed me to expand the network of interlocutors for the research. Added to the previous contacts that I accumulated personally, brides and grooms that I met during the fieldwork at the different companies also participated in the in-depth interviews and are part of the scope of this text.

In this article I seek to systematize, analyze and present the data produced from one side to the other of the “bridge” that regulates the circulation of wealth in the São Paulo capital.<sup>4</sup> São Mateus is the focus of the analyses, while the situations registered in Jardins, a more central and elite neighborhood of the city, reveal particularities of the market of wedding parties that serve as counterpoints and contrasts between the economic extremes from the eastern zone to the midwest of the city.

At a first moment, I use description to present the nuances found in the different economic contexts. While I perceived a continuity between the styles of dresses and the maxim that in relation to a wedding “the bride is the boss”, the economic and geographic distance between the two territories was visible in the process of attribution of value of clothes and appeared materialized both in the scenographic disposition of the stores and in the gendered nuances of the dynamics of service.

Moreover, the economic differences between brides, grooms and families also appeared to indicate significant differences in the organization of the weddings. In relation to this point, the text considers the debate about the costs and times of preparation of the weddings to highlight how the class differences inscribed in the territory of the city can reveal local specificities through a comparative perspective. A wedding is a family celebration that produces family, but in the periphery of São Paulo, to marry is also a project of collectivization that even God does not escape.

In general, I discuss the effects of the “time of the wedding” and reveal through the ethnographic narrative the mutually constitutive character between class and gender in these extraordinary contexts that give potential to the handling of relations.

## 2. The bride's celebration. And who is the boss?

### 2.1. On the east

Twenty-five kilometers, nine metro stations, a bus ride, and an hour and a half after leaving downtown São Paulo, the Mateo Bei street appears as the most important commercial avenue in the eastern zone of the capital city of São Paulo. Buses go slowly up and down the way, stopping for pedestrians who cross the street from stores on one side and the other. The vertical tangle of buildings downtown remains behind, yielding a landscape of shorter buildings, where only the CDHU<sup>5</sup> housing projects are taller. The farther from the center of the city, the more the landscape becomes horizontal.

The stores seem to stick together like the tight clothes on the plastic mannequins on the sidewalk. There is a store with products from the Corinthians football team, a “popular priced” dentist, stores with Evangelical products and supermarkets whose names I do not recognize. Among the street vendors with blue awnings selling cell phone chargers or panties, and the busy luncheonettes at lunch time, rises a white gate with iron bars that, at the end of a stairway, gives way to a mezzanine level store with “formal attire”.

4 I am borrowing the image of the bridge used by the group Racionais Mc's in the song “*Da ponte pra cá*”, to refer to the symbolic and geographic separation between the rich center and the “periphery” of the city of São Paulo. For a discussion about the territorial construction of poverty in the city, see Maricato (2013) and Rolnik (1988).

5 CDHU are the initials for the Companhia de Desenvolvimento Habitacional e Urbano do Estado de São Paulo [Housing and Urban Development Company of São Paulo State]. The institution is responsible for the construction of low income housing projects, generally at the periphery of urban areas. Because they regularly use architectural standards that call for buildings with just a few stories, painted in vibrant colors, with many small apartments per floor, the condominiums with these characteristics are always easily recognized as belonging to the CDHU “style” (even if at times they were not designed by it).

The doorbell is the password to unlock the gate. No one looks to see who arrived, but perhaps the noise alone is enough to give a sense of security to Lúcia, the receptionist. From the counter, an employee asked the clients to wait on the sofas in front to be attended by the sales woman.<sup>6</sup>

The entire first floor of the store was open with interconnected spaces. From the middle of the hall where the clients arrive, one could go to the right to the racks of men's suits or to the left to the racks of female dresses carefully separated by tones - the "hall of the bridesmaids". And although there was no door that separated one space from the other, a printed sheet of paper pasted to a column alongside the dresses warned: "Men may not enter".

From there on, with no men around, employees and clients accessed the closets with dresses of debutantes, and on the second floor, "the maids of honor room" and the "brides room" - each one in a closed space with all the dresses exposed on racks on the walls.

In addition to Lúcia, the store had five attendants to serve the clients, one employee to wash and iron the suits and the store manager, Solange, who helped the attendants when the store was busy and also sewed the bridal gowns. She was the one who designed, made the patterns, cut, sewed and embroidered the "first rental" dresses, a modality of service in which the bride chooses exactly how she wants the garment, but rents it instead of buying it.<sup>7</sup> Given the personalized service, this rental modality is also the most expensive: an average of US\$ 455 compared to the US\$ 240 paid for a used dress.

On Saturdays, the store was frenetic. The reception filled up in minutes and the saleswomen attended more than one client at a time. The public was predominantly female and always in groups, or at least in twos. A client would rarely appear alone, and male clients were even more rare. When one appeared, he was always accompanied by a woman: a mother, wife, aunt or girlfriend. Men never came alone. Moreover, all expressed discomfort, speaking shyly, in low voices or commonly letting the women speak for them. In this dynamic, when the saleswomen needed to agree to something they considered important, such as indicating where they had to make the adjustments or negotiate the rental price, they spoke exclusively to the women escorts.

On one of the busy days, one of the clients thought that his son's suit was already selected when he began to look for something for himself. He stood in front of the sample of ties and took one in a tone of blue that had become standard in recent years as a trend for marriages in Brazil: "Tiffany blue". He removed it from the display and showed his wife, who nodded her head in agreement. He went to the mirror and put it on over his tee-shirt. "It goes with the dress" she told me when she realized I was interested. She then asked her husband: "do you like it?" To which he only responded "it works right?", commenting to me later that "at times like this the wife decides, right?"

A bit later a young man arrived with an older woman. He wanted to try on the "prince" suit that he had seen hanging on a rack. It was to be used for the 15<sup>th</sup> birthday party of his cousin the following weekend. The aunt, the debutante's mother, was accompanying him to the store. The jacket was completely closed at the lapel and decorated with two external red shoulder pads with Golden fringes and a rope in the same color between the buttons. It took a while for the saleswoman to close the buttons and the aunt asked the boy if he liked it. "It's your decision, aunt, I'm just an object" he responded while hunching his shoulders and smiling, appearing not knowing what to say.

6 I attained authorization to conduct the fieldwork and circulate freely in the store through the mediation of a friend with whom I worked years earlier. Her mother was Sônia, who addition to the store on Mateo Bei, was also the owner of another establishment for renting "formal attire" in the Carrão neighborhood, at the beginning of the eastern zone and wealthier than São Mateus.

7 After being used, the dress is returned to the store and enters the display available to other brides.

The male clients in the store seem to want to make clear that they are not concerned with the preparation of their appearances for the parties. Except for Luís, who was the only groom to choose his suit in the personalized style of “first rental” during the entire time of my fieldwork.<sup>8</sup> He was also one of the grooms most engaged with the party who I saw at the store, and he immediately agreed to give me his contacts so we could continue the conversation in an interview at another time.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, even his engagement with the wedding and care in the choice of the suit did not relieve his shame in arriving alone at the store. He said that before pushing the bell at the steps, he had to breathe deeply and gather his courage. Smiling, he said it was more difficult entering there than in a *sex shop*, where usually “I pretend to be gay” when he is being attended.

Male discomfort in the territory of the clothing store, however, did not appear to hold back the uncle of one bride, who entered the store on another Saturday to pick up her dress. There were just a few hours until the ceremony. Fernanda was unhappy with the slow embroidery service she had asked for on that same day and her uncle, already a bit drunk from the celebrations before the wedding, stopped at the top of the steps, mumbling complaints.

One of the saleswomen left quickly towards the tailoring space on the second floor. And I ran behind. Solange was setting the last details of the sequence while Débora placed the petticoat and the mantilla in the protective cover. Seconds afterwards the intercom began to ring with Lúcia begging for help from reception: “run because a relative is here making a scene”.

Laura, the saleswoman with the most experience at the store, a very tall black woman near 50, raised her chest and took the dress downstairs and hung it next to the reception for the bride to approve the final, last-minute adjustments. The uncle, behind the counter, began to protest: “this is absurd! This dress should have been ready yesterday! I will come back myself to return it, this is absurd!”.

The aggressive shouting had paralyzed the atmosphere in the store. The saleswomen and clients watched in astonishment until Laura looked at the man and said in a tone as loud as his: “excuse me, can you stop shouting? Fernanda, is the dress ok?” The bride looked at the saleswomen with tears in her eyes without speaking. The man rose another step and appeared he would go back to shouting when Laura spoke first: “My business is with Fernanda. Fernanda is the bride. Is it ok Fernanda?”.

The bride closed the zipper on the cover of the dress and began to go down the stairs without responding, suspending the discussion. The mood was tense. Except for Laura, who watched Fernanda disappear on the stairs and smiled as if nothing had happened. She turned to the next client waiting at reception and asked: “can I help you?” In fractions of a second the woman jumped from the sofa and took sides with the saleswoman: “you can’t give in to men, no!”.

The territory of the store of São Mateus was constantly constructed and affirmed as a female space. The sign restricting men to certain parts of the store even appeared at times unnecessary given the discomfort expressed by male clients from the moment they stepped into the reception. The male circulation through that space was constantly limited either because they were uncomfortable being there or because of the boldness of the saleswomen. In this sense, Luís’ confession added to the scenes of the male clients who assumed that the women who accompanied them had the final word about the choices and the ability to move among the racks of clothes. Even if the clothes rented were not for women, it was understood that it was a space of women’s issues and they made the decisions.

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<sup>8</sup> And spent about US\$ 200 for this.

<sup>9</sup> I will return to this later in the article.

Moreover, the construction of the space as a female territory was also reinforced by the exclusivity of the store employees: everyone who arrived had to be attended by a woman. On a day with many client complaints, Débora joked while we went out for lunch: “here we may get angry, but we don’t get hungry”. And said that they had a message group on Whatsapp called “Victory at War”, explaining its “because we are almost a faction, right sister?” laughing at Laura,<sup>10</sup> who laughed in response. As we began to eat she explained to me: “before there was Ruan, now there is only us. Now the women decide everything”.

The women really did make the decisions about lots of things. One young man about 25 arrived, a groom, and spoke about his “bossy” bride. They had been organizing the wedding for three months - there were 15 days to go - and he was not able to follow the decisions about the party. “The decorations were going to be yellow, then she changed everything”. He said that “for two weeks she only talks about this” referring to the pressure from the bride for him to choose his suit. But added that “If I can’t see her clothes, then she can’t see mine”, evoking a notion of equality nearly as a type of revenge to the central position of his partner in the decision-making process about the wedding.

When I met with Juliana for the interview marked with her and Luís, the groom who was ashamed to enter the store, one of the first things that she told me after I asked, “how was the organization of the party” is that everything took place as *she* wanted. She added that all the “details” had been her “choice” and that Luís “didn’t even give an opinion”. The groom reacted to the discussion, and said that he did give opinions, but the “final word was mine”, the bride interjected.

The discussion with Luís and Juliana, residents of Jardim Conquista, a neighborhood next to São Mateus, appeared to be very similar to the experience of Mariana, a bride who I accompanied since the beginning of the preparations for her wedding. In one conversation, reflecting on the study, she even had the initiative to ask me to take notes:

I often said “my wedding” as if it was only mine. At times, I forget the groom and don’t think of “our wedding” and in the real sense of marriage. I think a lot of “my”, in “my party” in what I want, what I want to have, what I want to add, in what I like, in what I don’t like and fuck the groom [laughing out loud].

## 2.2. To the midwest

Mariana was 25 and a client of a bridal store in Jardins, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. Although she began to organize her wedding in 2014, the ceremony would only be held in 2017. There were three years of planning and paying the costs accumulated in the process in advanced installment. And although Mariana was speaking from a class situation very different from Juliana, the bride in the Zona Leste whose husband was a client in the store in São Mateus, they shared a common understanding that the wedding presupposed a space of centrality for the brides.<sup>11</sup> During the process of organizing the party their relations were suspended to a temporality lived as a function of the wedding, and in which the women were the bosses.

<sup>10</sup> In late 2015, a time when I was in the field, the nightly telenovela “A Regra do Jogo” [The Rules of the Game] by João Emanuel Carneiro was on Rede Globo, Brazil’s largest national television network. The production had a realist narrative that portrayed a criminal faction that associated elements of morality to a language of kinship among its members: for this reason there were references to “Victory at war”, a greeting used among the “brothers” of the “faction”. The articulation between fiction and reality provoked by the narrative should be emphasized, whether in the inspiration that the fictitious group had on reality (see <[www.campograndenews.com.br/cidades/capital/policia-prende-quadrilha-da-capital-que-imitava-grupo-criminoso-de-novela](http://www.campograndenews.com.br/cidades/capital/policia-prende-quadrilha-da-capital-que-imitava-grupo-criminoso-de-novela)>) or from the organizational elements of known groups in the Zona Leste that appeared to inspire the telenovela. See: Marques (2009).

<sup>11</sup> A reference that has a direct dialog with certain contours of femininity, such as that of “Princess” which I found, in a previous study, in relation to small children and Disney films (Escoura 2012), and which was later examined by Blank (2017).

In Jardins, the broader lanes for the constantly passing automobiles and the sumptuous stores with imported cars in the windows appeared to squeeze out the old colonial style house in which the bridal shop was located on the Rebouças avenue. With classic architecture and an address considered a symbol of the peak of the coffee boom that made São Paulo the financial heart of the country, the store was one of many in the specialized and prestigious sector of “haute couture” in the neighborhood, the term used to refer to clothes specifically for formal parties.<sup>12</sup>

The store only offered bridal gowns. Not even clothes for the grooms, or the bridesmaids were part of the store’s wardrobe. In fact, there were no dresses on display in the store, except in an outside window. Brides arrived by appointment and choose their dresses from models presented in magazines that served as a catalog for the store’s selection.<sup>13</sup> Mariana, her mother and I were sent to the sofas in the waiting room. In Provençal style, with carved wood, the furniture was much more comfortable than the aluminum seating in São Mateus. The economic difference was also inscribed in the space by the imposing crystal chandelier that hung from the ceiling and a fireplace that, on that hot day, served only to accommodate two Barbies dressed with miniature replicas of dresses from the store.

Five minutes after our arrival, a young woman came to call us. We went to another room on the ground floor of the large house and we were escorted to a table. Danilo, the designer named in the appointment, sat down in front of us with Bianca, who appeared to be a type of assistant, and began a series of questions: who was the bride, how were we related, what was the date of the wedding, the time of the ceremony, if it would be in a church or in an open space, and the number of guests. From that moment on, Mariana was no longer called by named and became “minha linda” [my pretty] in the interlocution with the store employees.

The bride’s measurements were then noted on paper, he investigated the styles of the models that the client had in mind and led us upstairs. After climbing the wooden staircase, we sat on a sofa in the foyer of one of the fitting rooms. On the way, I noticed three others, but all the other clients were inside, so I could not see who else was in the space.

Ten minutes passed before Danilo reappeared with two dresses in hand. The bride was disappointed with the number, she expected more options. But it was only the beginning. The designer left the dresses with Bianca in the closed room, surrounded by mirrors and focus lights on the four walls. The woman employee assisted the bride to put on the long dress. A few minutes later, the designer came back and asked if Mariana was already dressed before entering the room. He made a few adjustments to the client’s waist, placed her on heels and a small pedestal and later simulated a hairstyle with a large bun, to which the veil was attached. The bride was assembled. And before the door opened for the mother to come in, even a bouquet was put in her hands.

The scene was repeated another five times until Mariana chose a dress. With her choice made, we all returned to the room on the first floor to negotiate the US\$ 2,9 thousand contract for the dress in a first rental and US\$ 1,7 thousand for a second. Since the dresses are produced annually by their designers, there is no option for personalized models for the brides. Therefore, “first rental” is the term used for all the dresses in the catalog that were never used and “second rental” is for those used only once.

The work was always done with two employees: Danilo selecting, looking for and adjusting the dresses and Bianca removing them and placing them on the bride. At one moment of changing dresses the employee said that Saturday is also the busiest day there. Each day, each one of the pairs of employees

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<sup>12</sup> I would like to thank Bibia Gregori for the reading of this text and the comments about the diversity among the stores in the Jardins neighborhood, a theme that I began to explore in another context (Escoura 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Each year, stylists design models that will compose the collection for the season and after their release at large events in the city, the designs are available in the store’s collection.



serves up to five brides on interchanging hours on the schedule, which reminded me of the store in São Mateus. I calculated that each sales person there served an average of five (or more) clients per hour on a busy day like Saturday.

But in the same conversation, Bianca mentioned an even more important detail about the dynamic of the store. Both she and Danilo are graduates of schools of fashion and are professional designers. Nevertheless, she said that the company has a practice of only hiring men as “designers”, and not women. Her function there, in addition to helping the brides put on and take off the dresses or accessories chosen by the other professional, is to also store the clothes not selected and, as I discovered at the end of the service, to fill in the forms and the payment slips for the rentals. Bianca did not believe that this practice was without reason. To the contrary, she believed that this difference in functions among professionals with the same education is made by the store to reduce conflicts with the clients, given that the brides feel more confident when they are attended by a male designer and “if it’s a woman, the brides don’t have a good impression of her”.

### 2.3. Power and value in the cartography of the market

It is expected that neither time, money or involvement are economized when searching for garments for large wedding parties. It is part of the general expectation that the hosts and guests will be dressed in clothing especially selected for this type of event. The garments are under constant evaluation by others and many pictures are taken to register this moment of extraordinary production of their personal presentations. Without great effort, the stores of this type of product attract constant interest and many clients.

While the proximity of the models, materials and fashion among the objects offered intensifies competition among the stores in the sector, it does not erase the nuances that define their territories. In this sense, the configuration of the staff of each of the stores appears to display different negotiations of gender between one side and the other of the bridge that links the center and the periphery of São Paulo. While in the Zona Leste, in São Mateus, Laura inflated her chest and entered in direct conflict with her clients, in Jardins, a male figure entered the scene to mediate conflicts and guarantee an environment propitious to business. While “the women decide everything” in São Mateus, whether the brides in their choices for the party or the professionals in the spaces of the specialized market, in Jardins, the authority with knowledge and technical understanding of the bridal gowns, a crucial element of distinction of a wedding ceremony, is also in the hands of men.

In São Mateus, the only men that I heard about working in the stores that rent party apparel, all provided direct attendance, never producing the dresses. Design, modeling, cutting, sewing and embroidering appear to be exclusively feminine activities in that territory. In contrast, Martha Medeiros, Sandro Barros, Emannelle Junqueira, Junior Santella, Gloria Coelho and Lucas Anderi are some of the names of the brands of designers found in the tree-lined streets of Jardins.<sup>14</sup> There, the letters on the stores exemplify how male professionals also dispute clients in the luxury market of *haute couture* bridal gowns and that the specialized wedding sector is not restricted to female hands in relation to a certain class.

This difference presented by the field appears to correspond to the same professional dynamic found by Bianca Briguglio (2015) in professional kitchens: the higher the status of a profession in relation to class or qualification, the greater the chances it will be occupied by men. If the kitchen is popularly seen as a “place

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<sup>14</sup> These are some of the leading designers in the regular rankings of “the best Brazilian designers” promoted by specialized websites. These lists serve as a source of information for brides, and support the references of styles and fashion in dresses.

for women”, the maxim is questioned when the work is professional by formal training and the image of the “cook” is substituted by the “chef”.

Analogously, the “seamstress” is demoted when the “designer” becomes the locus of knowledge about fashion and techniques for making bridal gowns for the upper classes. Solange learned to sew in short term courses and through daily experience at work. She negotiates the design of the dresses with the brides, inspired by magazines and websites, and later, she makes the patterns, cuts the fabric, sews and embroiders the garment.

Danilo, in Jardins, does not cut fabric, or sew or embroider. But it is he, along with other male designers, who sketches drawings and indicates the technical qualifications of the dresses that will be made and presented to the brides. After the collection is planned, the tailors who work in the back of the store execute the creations of the designers. He is identified as the creator of the garments which, without exception, appear in the catalogs, indicating his authorship. But his authority was not only affirmed by his signature of the designs.

Offering an air of greater “professionalism” to the store, the male designers are called on as mediators of any conflicts and are presented as authorities in relation to the brides and dresses. In Jardins, the information about the materials and techniques used in making the garments, the requirement for an appointment to be attended by a designer, and their control over the store’s collection were elements that established their authority. “A designer is like the pope: you speak, everyone obeys”, one professional in the sector told me, months later.

In the specialized market for marriages, the knowledge and technique of the designer is distinct, because he is seen to be more qualified than a seamstress, and has a professional education. His authority is performed and demanded in the intense disputes not only for prices, but for the value of the dresses and defines part of the cartography of the market.<sup>15</sup> And although at first look the sector reiterates the maxim that the wedding is the bride’s party, the dynamics of the market reveal the imbrication of notions of class and knowledge that, as a consequence, alter (or reify) gender relations as well. The hierarchically more valorized schooling places the profession in a creative and intellectual field (Bourdieu 2007), which simultaneously brings prestige and more men to its work posts. If in one class, knowledge and sewing techniques are in the hands of women, and are claimed as a space of power among them and a generator of a territory where “men may not enter”, in another class “high fashion” is disputed by men and women.

### **3. A Family Party. Who makes the party?**

#### **3.1. Help from heaven, help from earth**

When Mariana was served by Danilo in the bridal gown rental store in Jardins, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city, part of the beginning of the conversation was about the date of the party: “May 2017”, said the bride, shifting bashfully in her chair. She was afraid they would judge her to be too anxious, given that she arrived at the store a year and a half before the ceremony. But Danilo, assured her: “we have various brides for 2017. They will reach the end of this year with everything paid for. And one year is not much considering everything that must be chosen and organized”.

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<sup>15</sup> Argument that I developed in a previous study (Escoura 2016).

The space, the decorations, church, decorations in the church, invitations, clothing rentals, photo and filming services, bar, buffet, fine deserts, cake, gifts for the guests, special invitations for the groomsmen, party decorations, DJ, lighting for the dancefloor, the honeymoon and the reception of guests from outside the city are some of the items of the “spectacle wedding” (Pinho 2017) that Mariana must organize and, in addition to the time needed to choose each detail of *her* ceremony, time is needed to pay for all of this.

Planning and hiring services since 2014, the bride intends to have a party with a budget of US\$ 24,200. Her mother and her mother-in-law are the only people who will help the engaged couple to pay for the expenses of the party. But since their contribution will not be more than 25% of the total cost, to be able to have all the contracts paid for by the day of the wedding, fulfilling the demands of the suppliers, the expenses for the party were paid in installment over three years.

However, it is not everywhere that the organization of parties takes so much time. In São Mateus, in the periphery of São Paulo, the groom who arrived at the store 15 days before the wedding to try on his suit, said that the preparation for the ceremony took three months. Luís and Juliana planned the wedding and restored their house in eight months and Taynara and Vitor, a couple with whom I accompanied the entire organization process, took five months to celebrate the “I dos” in front of the pastor.

When Luís entered the store to rent garments for parties in Mateo Bei, he soon said that he needed a doctor’s note to verify why he was missing work as a cashier in an urban bus, while he was there checking the adjustments to his first-rental suit. He spoke of the 1,500 cans of beer and 10 bottles of whiskey that were already reserved for the party, he showed a photo of his groomsmen and told the story of the moment he decided to get married.

Juliana was his second spouse, but the first with whom he had agreed to make a large wedding ceremony. Going against the conventions that expect the man to ask his girlfriend to marry him, one morning at breakfast Juliana asked: “when will we get engaged?” Luís felt cornered. They were already living together, but he realized that he needed to decide if he would get married or not. The doubt made him appeal to his parents, who, in turn, took him to a service at the Congregação Cristã, the church that they attended.

That night, the word of the pastor seemed to fit precisely into Luis’ story: “it is by giving up that which you love most in life that you will find prosperity” the pastor said. Luis said that he returned home contemplative. And I, at this point of the story, was scared that he had “given up” Juliana. But the ending was different: “I looked at my motorcycle and began to cry, it was what I most loved in life...” the groom said revealing a face that appeared to once again evoke the pain of giving up a possession. His parents hugged him as a sign of support and the next day he sold the motorcycle, beginning the preparations for the big party.

Giving up his motorcycle, an object that provided autonomy and urban mobility, as well as represent a valuable possession in the establishment of his masculinity in that territory of the city, Luis said that he celebrated his engagement with 180 people at a barbeque at his father-in-law’s house. Four hundred and fifty invitations to the wedding were distributed. The event would be held at a house in a rural region of Ribeirão Pires, a municipality in the metropolitan region even farther from the center of the capital. He first wanted a big street party in “Jardim Conquista”, the neighborhood where he lived. The groom’s wish caused an immediate reaction from the saleswoman, who was following our conversation. Laura laughed out loud in affirmation and, perceiving the absence of my laugh, quickly explained: “my child, that’s a run-down place”.

Months later I left for an interview with Luís and Juliana in the “run-down” neighborhood. On the way, I took the bus towards “Jardim Vitória” [Victory Garden], that runs through the middle of “Jardim Conquista” [Conquest Garden], a few kilometers after the São Mateus bus station. Luís, as we arranged, came to get me

by car at the “Travessa Somos Todos Iguais” [We Are All Equal street] and took me to the house of his “cumpadi”<sup>16</sup> Rafael – his best man and where they were having Sunday lunch. There, one of the first things I discovered was that Juliana did not like the idea of a street party, not even a little. “Never! Hello? Since I am going to get married, I want to do it right. Am I going to get married in the middle of the street? So the whole favela comes?”<sup>17</sup>

They used a cell phone to show me all the photos from the celebration that took place weeks earlier. Juliana said that from the moment they set the date of the wedding she felt she was under constant pressure, “There is a lot to do” she said. She emphasized how it was difficult to organize everything in time since “we don’t have a rich family”, but she had lots of help. The bridal gown, rented for about US\$ 760 on the “Rua das Noivas” [Brides street] in the center of the state capital, was a gift from one of the best men; another groomsman paid for the invitations; and the dinner was prepared personally by Luís’ mother, a woman who cooked often for church parties and who wanted to celebrate with her own hands the joy of seeing her “lost” son getting married. After “running around”<sup>18</sup> in life, highlighting that “I never again took one real [the Brazilian currency] from anyone” and making clear that he had committed some burglaries when he was “lost”, Luís, thought that the wedding was the proof that he had changed.

But the party was also proof of the importance of his relations and that those “days and nights working” had been worth it. The amount earned in the “passing of the tie”<sup>19</sup> was more than expected, and combined with the presents in the form of payment for services for the party, helped Juliana affirm that “with the marriage we saw how much we are loved”.

Help had also been the key element for the organization of the party of another bride that I met at the store in Mateo Bei. Accompanied by her mother, she had gone there to pay one of the installments for the rented dress. When she realized that Solange, the manager of the store, was showing me her oldest son’s wedding photos, the bride came over to comment on the images. With her eyes full of tears, she said that she could not hide her emotions. She often thought of giving up the idea of the party because of the “struggles in life”, but now saw everything materializing. She spoke about one desperate night when she opened the bible to a passage that said “tell me what you want, and I will make you happy”.

She asked for the wedding, and after that everything worked out for the party to take place. She got lots of things from friends, family and “brothers” in the church. She made the budget to serve gnocchi to the guests and the producer of the meal decided to give her the pasta as a present. She would only pay for the salad. And that day, unemployed, she had even more certainty of the divine revelation: “I did not ask for God to give me the conditions to have the wedding, I asked him to do it. And he is doing it”.

This account by the bride touched Solange. When we were alone again, she returned to the photos and concluded: “ours was like that too, it was more than we expected...It was God”. Then, she passed her finger over the images on the screen of her phone while she told me what they would also have at the party

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16 Term derived of “compadre”, in this case word used to indicate the relation between groom and groomsman.

17 I would especially like to thank Alexandre Oviedo for his comments, that called my attention to the conflicts present in the preparation of wedding parties. The tensions and disputes between professionals in the market, brides, the host group and guests, are central to the discussion of the study and in the analyses that follow. In development, I have affirmed the antagonistic dimension of the conflict in the composition of the relations and about how making a party is also making a war.

18 “Corre” [run] is slang used in the region to refer in general to forms of resolving problems. One of its common uses, and at times in the variation “fazer um corre” [do a run], refers to legal and illegal forms of earning money, whether in temporary jobs without working papers (“pick-up jobs”) or by committing small crimes.

19 Common at weddings of low income couples, this is a practice in which the groom goes to each one of the tables accompanied by the best men, at the end of the party, asking for money from the guests. The request is always made to the men and each contributor receives a piece cut from the groom’s tie. Some people see the piece of cloth as a good luck amulet, and it is not polite for a guest to refuse to contribute or to offer low amounts of money. If they do, stickers with sayings like “cheap” may be placed on his shirt. It was even Luis who told me, that at parties at São Mateus the DJs lend the credit and debit card machines so that the grooms can pass it among the guests, thus avoiding the excuse of a lack of cash for the contribution. This practice, however, generates controversies among wealthier brides (who say that it is a custom “for the poor”) and there is an effort on specialized websites to condemn it as poor etiquette by the hosts.

of her youngest son, Vitor. He and his girlfriend, Taynara, had decided to get married in October 2015 and had until March 2016 to organize the entire party. With Solange's mediation, the couple allowed me to accompany the preparation of the event.

"But this interview, does it have difficult questions?" the groom asked when I spoke about the study and proposed a conversation with the couple. I explained that in the type of study that I was doing, the interview was a time for them to talk about themselves, how they decided to get married and about the wedding preparations. But if what I expected was only an agreement from the interlocutors, what happened next went beyond any expectation.

Vitor liked the idea. He took his phone from his pocket, connected to the store's Wi-fi and opened Youtube. He typed something into the search bar and opened a video where a couple appeared telling their story. He explained that couples make videos to show during the wedding party, a type of "reporting" about the couple, with personal and emotional statements. Smiling, he confirmed the interview. But he added: "can we take advantage and film it for the *Love Story*?" I was a bit surprised. I could have my interview, but it would also be part of their party. The observation was in fact, a participant.

During the filming and the interview, in a large green park in the Zona Leste, Vitor told me that the wedding was budgeted in US\$ 6 thousand, but that only US\$ 2,400 would be paid by the couple – both were employees of a gift factory in the neighborhood. All of the other expenses would be paid by the parents, relatives and guests of the party who, as in the case of Juliana and Luís, transformed the items of celebration into presents for the couple.

Vitor and Taynara had considerable collective support to execute the party. And each time the couple discovered a novelty they liked in the market, they included it as a request for a present from the groomsmen and the bridesmaids. The dress would be made by the bride's mother-in-law, a present from the store where I did the fieldwork. In addition, Solange would cover the cost of the dinner along with Osmar, her ex-husband and father of the groom. Together, the two would give all the food as a present, the cost of the cooks, the rental for the pots, the dishes and even the flower arrangements for decorating the hall – as they did at the wedding of their older son. In addition, the photos and filming were a present from an uncle, the decoration service would be done by a friend, and paid for by another brother and even the "farofa" for the party would be made with the help of an aunt, who would bring the manioc flour especially from Goiânia for the occasion<sup>20</sup>.

Eighteen people came from the other state to attend the wedding in São Mateus. Nearly all of them arrived days in advance to help with all the preparations and stayed afterwards to help with the after-party affairs. Osmar was gathering soda bottles in his backyard and surveying prices in the wholesalers in the region. After buying processed products in the large supermarkets, he went with Solange and his sisters-in-law in the early morning before the wedding to look for fresh products at the wholesale produce market: vegetables, fruits and flowers. To save money, they used the family's entire cooperation network. Everyone participated in the party, including me.

I filmed the interview for the *Love Story*, and agreed to be the "ceremonialist"<sup>21</sup> of the event and on the day of the party I worked on the decorations for the church. Swept up by the collective dynamic that was implemented to realize the wedding, I helped organize the flower arrangements, I got the carpet for the church entrance, took the decorations to the location of the ceremony, installed the lights at the entrance

<sup>20</sup> "Farofa" is a meal prepared mainly with flour and condiments. As the qualities of the flour depend on the productive process of each region of the country, to bring it from another place corresponds to try to obtain a better "farofa".

<sup>21</sup> Professional function that has become more common in the past decade, as highlighted by Marins (2016). Among many activities that can be understood by the profession, the couple expected that I could organize the hosts and groomsmen during the ceremonial procession; supervise the entrance of the children with rings, articulate the moments of the ceremony with the musicians from the church and keep the bride and groom informed about the progress of the preparations while they were not present.

and received the guests. In addition to myself, the large staff of the organization also included uncles, aunts, cousins and a friend invited to design the party decorations. It was a task force that, from days in advance, used the couple's entire solidarity network and made the collective work the fundamental construction material for the wedding.

### 3.2. The time of the wedding and the ceremony that makes family

A wedding does not begin and end on the day of the celebration. Composed of a group of movements, events and memories, the "time of the wedding", as I have sought to define it, is constituted as a specific temporality, when the daily status of relations is suspended and they are managed in the name of a project to organize the large party. It is initiated by the couple's commitment to celebrate their union, but for the event to happen, the engagement of a much larger collectivity must be generated and administered.

Prepared with diligence, effort and financial and emotional "sacrifices" from many people, a large wedding can produce nuances in the relations involved. Differences and proximities are highlighted in the interactions and under the tensions from the decision-making processes, the hosts are defined and relations gain new impulses of caring. This is the expectation of creation of a moment in which many other relations, in addition to that between the bride and groom will be produced, commemorated and publicized.

Under a temporal focus exercised by the interlocutors themselves – which can begin, for example, from a verbal request for marriage, the acquisition of the couple's first property, or the discovery of a pregnancy while dating – the time of a wedding can be composed of a sequence of highly controlled, formalized and protocolled occurrences. The events range from a bridal shower, the choice of the bridal gown and the bachelor's party and go beyond the moment of the religious ceremony itself. But it is also defined as a temporality in which even the non-formal or protocol interactions fall under an order of extraordinariness.<sup>22</sup>

This character of a break from daily life is certainly one of the important elements that can characterize the time of the wedding from a ritual perspective. But it is not the only one. The frequent use of the word "ritual" by the brides and grooms to designate the "non-routine and specific phenomenon" (Peirano 2002: 17) through which they are passing, is often evoked to emphasize the sensation that the wedding constitutes a mark of a change of status, whether of the relations or of the people.<sup>23</sup>

Looking from a performatic perspective (Tambiah 1985), the rituals present at the time of the wedding have a symbolic effectiveness and generate a sphere of moral sharing of conduct. At the same time, the propriety of its ritual symbols (Turner 2005), is not only capable of providing a path of intelligibility to the codes that organize the relations but can also produce effects on the actors in this structure – as highlighted by Cristina Marins (2017) when analyzing desert tables and revealing the definitions of hierarchies in this type of occasion. When Luis sold his motorcycle, the symbol of his "crazy life" in the periphery of São Paulo, he triggered elements capable of reconfiguring his position in the relations. In name of one form of masculinity that sought to become another, based on valuing the "family" and rejecting the controversial version of the "bandit" (Marques 2009; Feltran 2014), he triggered his value within a ritual structure, as a groom to be, and thus also produced his value as a person.

22 Such as for example the relations with distant relatives and friends who, during the preparations for the weddings, always appear to be under constant tension and evaluation. Demands for affection are placed in other terms and any mistrust, discomfort or conflict can result in the cancelation of an invitation to the party and the risk of a later break in the relationship.

23 Breno de Oliveira Alencar (2014) has specifically addressed the theme of engagement and dialoged with Van Gennep (2011) by considering each moment of definition of the future couple as a "rite of passage", which repositions the couple in their family relations and attributes a new status to their identities. Although he ponders the historic changes in this process, even indicating how much the marriage was no longer a mandatory route for reaching a status of an "adult" person, and indicates that there are considerable differences in the male and female experiences around engagement, the author highlights how much this ritual is important to his interlocutors as a definition of a temporal mark in personal trajectories.

But if we can look at the preparations and the celebration of a wedding as a ritual, which breaks with daily life and reveals a moral structure and repositioning of people and relations, its precise dynamic, as a celebration, also reveals other analytical potentials.

Examining studies about festive dynamics among different Amerindian populations, Beatriz Perrone-Moisés (2015) inspires thinking of the party as a type of relational matrix that, in articulation with its antagonistic partner, war, reveals the different domains of relations. Returning to the analysis of the potlatch, “probably the best-known Amerindian party” (Perrone-Moisés 2015:10), she insists that the event can go beyond the closed analytical profiles in disciplinary subthemes – such as politics, economics and religion – and defends that the exchange of banquettes and kindness of the Kwakiutl produces the group itself and its relations.

The festival that allowed Marcel Mauss (2003) to consolidate his theory about exchange, if on one hand could be addressed as a moment of destruction of goods, distribution of property or of squander, on the other, reveals the imbricated correlation between prestige and generosity. To give a good party is a condition on which rests the political authority of a chief or the religious authority of a shaman. It is where wars are suspended, enemies transformed into friends and where the very limits of composition of a collectivity are defined. A celebration establishes collectivities by its capacity for mobilization, and therefore, to give a good party is recognized as a prestigious task. Among hosts and guests, the “code of hospitality” in throwing a good party is always a valuable and engaging social project.

None of my research interlocutors sought simplicity in their wedding events. Nevertheless, none of them had spectacular parties simply to present their guests to an ostentation of their wealth. Whether for the middle class bride, who worked for three years to save the amount needed for her wedding, or for the couples from the periphery, who married with just a few months of preparation, to have a party is always a costly project for those who undertake it.

Comparatively, the material indicates that while the organization of weddings in the middle class is usually prolonged in time, until the engaged couple have the economic conditions to offer a party to their guests, in São Mateus, even with parties for hundreds of people, the organization of the events requires much less time given that it was the guests who collectively gave the parties to the bride and groom.

In the periphery of São Paulo, José Guilherme Magnani (2003) produced his study in contrast to many of his contemporaries in social sciences by indicating how much in the life of “workers” (Magnani 2003: 140) is also dedicated to the time of the party. And here, the kilometers or hours of travel from Goiânia to São Paulo with manioc flour among the baggage, the nights without sleep looking for the best prices for produce and flowers, and the days cooking for their 450 guests are part of the dynamic directly translated into the maxim that “having a party is a lot of work”. For those who are not from a “rich family”, organizing a party requires “working day and night” as Juliana indicated.

Revealed by the “work” the generosity of the partners who dedicate themselves to preparing the party attributes new highlights to the relations and gives others impulses to emotions. A groomsman becomes “practically family” after giving a home appliance as a present, a relationship of hostility can be suspended by the help of a friend and the tie with an uncle is made closer after he raises a “scandal” by defending the bride who was picking up her dress. “Help” was a form of guaranteeing his place as a member of the group of hosts, by inserting himself in a collective within the ritual hierarchy and securing his place as a part of and not only a witness to, the commemoration. The wedding thus appears as an extraordinary space-time marker in which relatedness (Carsten 2000) had the opportunity to be created and affirmed: it was a family party that also made the family.

At the same time in which the parties in São Mateus had the potential to produce many relations, the amount of help received by the bride and groom was also interpreted as proportional to the strength of the ties that had accumulated. From the circulation of money, objects, and gifts, the organization of the weddings revealed how much economic exchanges and emotional dynamics cannot be seen as antagonistic domains (Zelizer 2009; Trindade 2015) and that goods were easily transformed into gifts, capable of materializing the social relations (Mauss 2003; Pinho 2017).

“With the wedding, we saw how much we were loved” Juliana said, indicating the effects of her wedding and a logic of attribution of prestige based on a capacity for collective mobilization from which not even God escaped. The religious figure, was, in São Mateus, repeatedly brought to the narratives to emphasize the moral value contained in the practice of collectivization. And while the declarations emphasized difficulties encountered during the organization of the wedding celebrations, they also reveal that the limits were not individually overcome: at a minimum, God helped.

At the time of the wedding, no one organizes a party alone. And in a correlation to language used in relation to the work of social movements in the same region (Aquino 2015), the result of this collective effort could only be expressed in terms of “conquest” in light of “life struggles”. Get married – and in a wedding with hundreds of guests – signified a triumph for the bride and groom as well as for all the people directly engaged in the production of the party as its host group. It was another form of obtaining “victory in the war”.

#### **4. Final considerations**

The period between the decision to marry and the wedding party is recognized as an extraordinary time, intentionally suspended from daily life and that, as this study revealed, serves as a space for the administration of relations. With strong collective involvement, it offers a temporal mark in which relations gain new potential for reconfiguration and repositioning. In this “time of the wedding”, as I have defined, the relations produce notions of difference and alliance that generate questions about gender, class and family, as well as positions of power.

A wedding mobilizes many more relations, beyond the one between those who say “I do” at the altar. In this article, I sought to demonstrate how different contexts of class, materialized in the territory of the city of São Paulo, produce distinct logics of differentiation of gender in the sector specialized in weddings and in the very process of organization of the weddings.

In the material presented about a peripheral neighborhood, in contrast to the elite neighborhood in the capital of São Paulo, the production of space of the stores for renting bridal gowns appeared to be permeated by a distinct form of organization of relations of power and gender. In São Mateus, although there are specific sections for renting male clothes, the store is constantly – and aggressively – affirmed as a place of women. Meanwhile, in Jardins, the male voice stands out as a place of power legitimated by the performance of a professional knowledge when attending the exclusively female clients in the space. Notions, on one hand, that “here women are the bosses”, and on the other, that “the clients prefer men” create two distinct contexts of interaction between professionals and brides and suggest that, when marked by class, the territory of the stores is also produced by antagonistic notions of gender.

Thereby, what the field suggests is that the division of class between São Mateus and Jardins significantly changes how notions of gender are administered. And, in this sense, corroborates with discussions about intersectionalities (Haraway 2004; Brah 2006; Piscitelli 2008) in which a marker of differences can never be seen as isolated amid processes of differentiation: it was class and gender mutually producing themselves.



In addition, the geographic and economic distance also suggests distinctions in the logic of the very production of wedding parties. While the middle class bride took on debt in the years before the ceremony to offer her party to the guests, in São Mateus the guests offer the party to the bride and groom, whether through presents or hard work in the preparation of the event. The collectivization appears as a moral regime, revealed in the circulation of relatives and gifts and in a language that at one moment triggers the notion of “struggle” and in another the name of God. At the geographic margin of the city, God also throws the party and making a wedding “thanks to God”, was a first way of saying that an event of that size could only be realized if there was support from many other relations – whether from heaven or earth.

Thus, in the periphery of São Paulo, the celebration of the exchange of rings was the victory not only of the recently married couple, but a conquest that was collectively achieved. In the code of the favela, where the vertical city gives way to a horizontal landscape, even the addresses indicate that the direction should always be towards the gardens of “victory” and “conquest”. In this enterprise, they are “all equal”.

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