



# Founders, ancestors, and enemies: memory, family, time, and space in the Pernambuco *sertão*

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This article concerns the use of narrative and genealogical frameworks among *sertanejos*, the inhabitants of the hinterlands (*sertão*) of Pernambuco in the Northeast of Brazil, in the process of grouping and differentiating families. It explores how accounts produced by different people are linked by shared memories of past conflicts – such as *cangaço* and *questões de família* (lit. ‘family issues’). Through conceived and lived relationships among relatives and the correlated concepts of ‘blood’ and ‘race’ current in this social formation, I look to identify the different meanings attributed to time and space, inscribed in the collective memory, and implicated in the moving configurations of ‘family’ in a cognatic universe.

The Northeastern hinterlands (*sertão*) of Brazil contrast remarkably with the coastal region in many of their features. The landscape is dominated by grey, shrubby vegetation (*caatinga*), which developed as an adaptation to the low average and irregular rainfall (Andrade 1980: 21). Agriculture is therefore confined to sparse, humid spots, while cattle- and goat-rearing is the main economic activity. The *sertanejos* (*sertão* dwellers) have been regarded as being very different from people in other parts of the country because of their pastoralist traditions, their isolation from major centres, and their higher level of miscegenation with the indigenous people (Cunha 1927 [1902]: 86–92, 121–4, 139). The harshness of the physical landscape matches a popular Brazilian image of *sertanejo* culture as ‘backward’.

The area focused on in this article includes towns, villages, and small settlements spread along the shores of the Pajeú river, which crosses the central portion of Pernambuco state from south to north. From the end of the eighteenth century, in the colonial period, this region was the setting for the installation of large cattle ranches. The Portuguese Crown encouraged the occupation of the hinterlands through huge land concessions (*sesmarias*) granted to people who proved able to explore them (J.C. de Abreu 1982 [1907]: 132–3). The *sesmarias* were divided into large farms leased to pioneers, whose descendants, often married amongst themselves, alienated and expanded their own assets over time.<sup>1</sup> A strong correlation between territorial portions and related families emerged in this process, with political inflections: as

representatives of families and places, local leaders were privileged by the central governments that invested them with official power or co-opted their political loyalty through favouritism. The correlation persists today and is reflected in the naming of some leaseholders as founders of settlements, or as the common ancestor of a large portion of their population, a very common practice with some spatial implications that will be addressed later in this article.

The scarcity of natural as well as of institutional resources, and the control of these resources by a minority group invested with political and administrative authority, is the accepted backdrop in most studies of the *sertão*, regardless of differences in theoretical approach. Such features of *sertanejo* life go hand in hand with accounts that emphasize clientelist politics and a culture of religious fanaticism and banditry (e.g. Cunha 1927 [1902]; Facó 1963; Graham 1990; Leal 1948; Oliveira Vianna 1949; Queiroz 1965; 1968).

The exercise of leadership can be imposed by force, but can also be diffused over the people living within one's land or nearby, through political, moral, economic, or religious commitments. Land ownership is but one facet of multivalent asymmetrical relations. From sharecroppers to big farmers, the current descendants of pioneers are spread throughout all social classes, although concentrated in the middle class. Segments of ancient families form the core of political factions named after their surname, but they find both endorsement and opposition among kin and unrelated people. In the *sertão*, personal allegiances feed chains of mutual support for any purpose, connecting people of different statuses (Villela & Marques 2006).

The region of my fieldwork was the central setting, in the 1920s, for the best-known movement of banditry in Brazil, the *cangaço*, in the form which it assumed with Lampião. The figure of Lampião, with his leather bandoleer and hat encrusted with gold coins, displaying jewels, guns, and daggers, is, in fact, a major symbol of the Northeast. His life history has been widely romanticized in books and films. Contrasts are everywhere in his life and personality, from his romance with Maria Bonita to the atrocities committed by his band of *cangaceiros*, the escapes and fights with the police, the parties that he threw, the prayers which he conducted, the luxuries that he enjoyed, and the risks that he ran. The meanings attributed to *cangaço* as a phenomenon of banditry, although varying considerably over the years, have always had political overtones. Hobsbawm's *Primitive rebels* (1971 [1959]) deepened debates about Lampião's character as both bandit and hero, resistant or subservient to local political powers (e.g. Barroso 1917; Facó 1963; Mello 1985; Menezes 1937; Queiroz 1968).

A topic much enjoyed by many *sertanejos* whom I have come to know, the stories of Lampião were often present in our first conversations. Some *sertanejos* liked to display their detailed knowledge about outstanding events or aspects of his life. However, most of my interlocutors were concerned only with stories that personally affected them, either directly or through someone of their acquaintance, especially their relatives in past generations. I have come to realize that Lampião was a useful trope for talking about themselves to people like me, an outsider not aware of relative positions and roles of people in their sociality.

In contrast to the extensive amount of literature on the subject, here I propose to explore some long-term social impacts of *cangaço* through the memories of people who outlived Lampião. Neither the *cangaço* nor the *cangaceiros* are the focus of this article. I am interested, rather, in the senses of relatedness that are triggered by people who tell

and listen to the stories of Lampião as well as other narratives about past conflicts. These disruptions are crucial points for the management of relations as they are lived and conceived. The narratives are a means for people to decide who is who, in the present, through the past, and for the future.

My focus in this article is actors' use of a genealogical framework, embedded in the narratives, to rebuild their past and, in so doing, to conceive and live their own sociality, situating themselves in time and space by the same token. Subject as it is to collective concern, dispute, and elaboration, memory supports claims of belonging and exclusions, therefore making and locating families and their members in relation to each other. In addition to this, I hope to show how different conceptions of time and space are implicit in such narratives, which in turn suggest distinct configurations and meanings of 'family' in this social universe. While kinship allows access to the past in the form of memories, those same memories mould kinship in the present.

The interrelationship between memory and kinship has been underexplored as a central issue in recent works (see Carsten 2007 as a main exception). This seems surprising, given the 'memory boom' of the last two decades (Berliner 2005: 197; French 2012: 338) and the renewed impulse that occurred in kinship studies with the critical debates arising after Schneider's work on the subject (1984; 2007 [1972]; see Carsten 2004: 18-20, 187; 2011: 21; Stone 2007: 241). In addition, the reliability of genealogical material for accessing the past has long been critiqued or readdressed (Bohannan 1952: 308; Evans-Pritchard 1940: 199-203; Irvine 1978; Leach 1954: 127) while the genealogical method (Rivers 1968 [1910]) is said to tell more, perhaps, about anthropologists' assumptions than about the people they study (Bamford & Leach 2009; Bouquet 1993: 48, 192; Strathern 1992a: 90-1).

In this article, I argue that the genealogical knowledge of my interlocutors functions as one of their essential tools for accessing the past and collectivizing memory. At the same time, the act of recounting memories has an effect on how kinship is reckoned in the present. Given the unboundedness of social groupings in overlapping cognatic universes (Freeman 1961: 202; see Edwards & Strathern 2000; Strathern 1992b: 87-91), kinship alone is not a sufficient condition for creating relatedness in the *sertão*. In previous works (Marques 2002; 2011), I have argued that locality and reputation are in a complementary relationship to kinship in the establishment of social belongings conceived by the actors as 'family' (see also Comerford 2003). The narratives about the past articulate these three elements. Therefore genealogies are not tantamount to families, but they provide a framework for the establishment of connections among multiple and disparate sets of relations to which interlocutors and referents belong. Through conceived and lived relationships among relatives, and correlated concepts such as 'blood' and 'race' current in this social formation, I hope to identify the different meanings attributed to time and space inscribed in memory and implicated in the process of grouping and differing families. In so doing I intend to show how the past is not only represented in a genealogical framework but also lived through relatedness.

In the text that follows, I provide excerpts transcribed from interviews and informal conversations.<sup>2</sup> All of these excerpts describe events and figures from the past and have been selected because they render each other intelligible. The article mirrors the paths which I myself had to make, connecting multiple accounts in order to apprehend the meanings of what was said and what was left unsaid in the narratives. This painstaking process of 'making sense' of the past seems to be no different,

though, from that used by my *sertanejo* interlocutors in the construction of their own repertoires of knowledge, which was always only partially shared with their compatriots.

### Fragments of memory

I heard my father, mother and grandma tell stories. My grandma died at the age of 101. My father at 93, my mother at 85. When we are children, I've heard it said the minds of children and young people are like tape-recorders. Everything is recorded, isn't it? I put a pan on the stove and I forget, but where things from the distant past are concerned, I remember everything.

Dona Dulce adores recalling events from her past and things told to her and others during her childhood. Her memories are a frequent topic of conversation for the numerous visitors she entertains in Triunfo, her home town since marriage. Dona Dulce was born in the Ema farm, close to the village of Nazaré, halfway between Floresta and Serra Talhada, and is said to possess 'considerable knowledge around here' ( *muito conhecimento na região*) – 'here' referring to an area extending unbroken for around 120 kilometres.

By *conhecimento* (knowledge), what is meant is that Dona Dulce knows and is known by many people, whether personally, or by whatever link or relationship that may be traced. As has been shown in other social contexts (Carneiro 2010; Lima 2011), conversations and visits are a powerful means of producing, maintaining, and renewing ties, including among people who do not live nearby, and sometimes even among those who have never met. Dona Dulce is credited with knowing many facts about people, and with being able to talk about them wisely and respectfully. It is notable that, in her seventies, she emphasizes the age of her parents and grandparents when beginning her narrative. By doing so she indicates something of the superior length of time over which her knowledge has been collected. The necessary conditions for becoming a 'person of knowledge' (*pessoa de conhecimento*) thus might be said to include having a good memory (like a tape-recorder), and enjoying intimate access to the stories of others.

In this region, everyday chats make use of a repertoire of knowledge, always partially shared by each interlocutor. People trace out provisional and shifting maps of relationships, which are constantly reworked in response to the flow of events, and the meanings attributed to them. A genealogical framework figures here as a basic organizing device for locating people in relation to each other, although kinship ties do not exhaust this set of social relations. While a memory of family ties acts as an important preliminary in this social formation, it is not sufficient. Swapping news about close friends, kin, or other people enables comprehension not only of how one person connects to another, but also of the state of the relations in which each person is embedded. Reciprocal knowledge of each other's connections expresses a level of intimacy and distance in both everyday and exceptional interactions, and indicates the potential content that conversations can take, as well as the subjects that should be avoided. Kinship knowledge functions here as a guide, allowing the person to move around safely in territories where social relations are more or less recognized. None the less, this repertoire of knowledge is not given but is constantly being constructed by each inhabitant within these territories. The visits, encounters, and conversations allow interlocutors to amplify this knowledge over time through new acquaintances or

introductions, accounts about an event or someone's state of health, another's involvement in politics, marriages, quarrels, a person or family moving home, and so on. Situated in the present, such information may connect to knowledge about the past and form part of the mnemonic map of sociality. To achieve a clearer image of these relations, therefore, characters and events of the past need to be kept in mind, and accounts about them have to be reiterated. We continue with Dona Dulce:

'Mané de Souza Ferraz married Florência Moura, or Florência Felismina de Sá, the sister of Davi, married to Teodora'. Teodora was called Dóia – here is her name. So in order for them to marry ... I heard the women telling the story. Dóia's father [Dona Dulce's great-grandfather] suspended a hammock in the doorway of the front room so she could not escape. If she wanted to escape, she would have to pass underneath his hammock. So that was it. She didn't escape. But then one day, [someone] said: 'Hey Dóia, go and round up those goats and I'll open this gate for them to pass through' ... And so she went. She clapped her hands and the goats headed for the pen. There the other woman [an unspecified accomplice] opened the gate, waited, and then Dóia left. She crossed the stream, and she married that Davi Jurubeba.

Dona Dulce gave this account while we read together the genealogical work published by Leonardo Gominho (1996), a book I came across during many conversations and on many shelves. Ordinarily it is used as a reference source of precise kinship relations, and the interest in publishing and reading genealogies testifies to a pervasive concern with kinship ties as well as with the events of the past interwoven with them. In the *sertão*, genealogical and episodal data are complementary in both written and oral narratives.

In the case of Dona Dulce – and others who 'know many stories' – however, corrections and details from their own memory were added to the content of the book. Dóia's elopement with Davi Jurubeba was also mentioned in my various conversations with other women of the family, who carefully described these same details, missing from the book but seemingly essential: the suspended hammock as an image of the lovers' intention to elope and Dóia's father's thwarted attempt to prevent it; the herding of goats into the pen as a cover for Dóia's escape; Dóia fleeing through the gate kept open by an accomplice to meet her boyfriend. The reiteration of the episode by various people revealed just how memorable it was. But why was it? Possibly it had to do with romanticism or a certain feminine defiance of patriarchal authority, but neither of these hypotheses were directly confirmed or disproved by my interlocutors. Dona Dulce, for her part, found this story highly amusing. Marriage by elopement is supposedly a practice of former times, related to 'ignorant' and 'rustic' (*matuta*) people. Hence it is amusing for those who reject such a practice as backwardness. Much blood ran in the *sertão* because of the kidnapping or flight of young women. In most cases, however, the marriage was consummated, as happened with Dóia and Davi, and the bride's father ended up giving his blessing. When no fatal outcomes resulted, potentially tragic stories from the past may become funny.

Other conflictive cases help us to understand the laughter, both for what it reveals and for what it hides. When Dona Dulce was just eight days old – thus in 1926 – her grandfather, Major João Gregório Ferraz,<sup>3</sup> received an undated letter signed by Lampião at five in the evening. Lampião, the most famous *cangaceiro* ever known to the *sertão*, had written to warn him 'that the instant he received the letter, he should retreat [leave the area] with his entire family'. The Major and all his 'folk', the married sons who lived on 'Ema Farm', immediately fled from their houses, taking shelter with

kin in other neighbouring settlements on the way to Serra Talhada. As Dona Dulce related:

[Lampião] gave orders and everyone obeyed. I know that people today say he was a great hero. I say: a hero for those who did not suffer what we did. There was so much fear in the region. One day everyone was there at my grandfather's house (my other grandfather, my mother's father). He was there, not [only] him, the folk of the family – you know, father, uncles, mother, sisters – everyone. In the distance, where a small chapel was located, they saw a troop. And they said – they could tell the *cangaceiros* from afar. They said: 'the *cangaceiros*!' Nobody remained. They left the doors open, their hammocks strung up. Even today the boys tease about it. Mother and father have since died, but they still talk about the event. While they were making their way to a house, I don't know where, there was a reservoir, a lake with very clean water. There a plant called *sarça* grows, like twine, I know you're not familiar with it. The twine grows like this, the leaves grow across the ground and form a mesh. So in the reservoir there was a lot of *sarça* growing. And one of them was running with a boy on her back, another with a child in her arms, everyone was running in flight. When they reached the reservoir, mother tripped over the *sarça*, like that. When she fell, father was running behind ... oh boy, how they tease! Father shouted: 'Have you been shot Lozia?' [Dona Dulce and her listeners laugh] It's not a lie, it really happened! Nobody can ever forget this, without him hearing a shot! [more laughing] He said: 'Have you been shot Lozia?' Mother got up, shook herself down and ran off. And they carried on.

Accounts of funny events are powerful mnemonic devices. In order to recount them to Jorge and me, the researchers,<sup>4</sup> in the presence of other members of her family and visitors, Dona Dulce took the time to explain a series of details, which would probably have been unnecessary had she been recounting the story to family alone. She explains, for example, that the story took place during the four years of *retirada* or 'retreat',<sup>5</sup> when her parents and their siblings went to live with the kin of Dona Dulce's mother on Lampião's orders; that *sarça* is a type of plant that grows on the bed of the reservoir during the dry season; that by 'the folk' of her grandfather she means his family – in this case his children and grandchildren; and that Lampião was no kind of hero. Her ability to say so rests on the fact that her family knew him personally, which is why they were all able to recognize the *cangaceiros* from afar. She emphasized that Lampião's band was so feared in those times that people fled from their homes to hide in the bush, leaving behind them open doors, strung-up hammocks, pans on the fire. Other details, which perhaps seemed obvious to her, or unnecessary to understanding the story, she left out.

It was a few miles away from Ema Farm, Dona Dulce's birthplace, where Lampião, formerly Virgulino Ferreira, and his brothers began a quarrel with a neighbour. When the first shootings began among them, an 'agreement' between the parties was reached, resulting in the 'retreat' of the Ferreira family from their former land. They moved to the outskirts of a recently founded village, Nazaré, where they were welcomed, despite the fact that it was home to many relatives of their first enemy, comprising Dona Dulce's kin. But the Ferreira brothers defiantly attending the marketplace carrying guns was considered unacceptable by some inhabitants who were keen to guard the peace of the newborn village. The Ferreriras were again expelled. From then on, Lampião and his brothers joined other outlaw groups in attacks and pillages. It was not long before he himself became the leader of his own band. The people of Nazaré remained among his fiercest opponents, joining the police force as a way of combating Lampião and his band of *cangaceiros*.

Dona Dulce knew that we were aware of these details, but there was still something that I could not understand.

A: But why did he [Lampião] tell you to leave the area?

D: To avoid becoming embroiled with Nazaré folk, who he knew were part of the family ... He already knew that Nazaré folk were his enemies, and some Nazaré folk had mixed with Ema folk, intermarried, you see – that was the thing. He was worried, so he set that condition.

Very close family ties connected ‘Ema folk’ to Lampião’s enemies from Nazaré, to the extent, I was told, that the physical similarities among them would certainly confuse any *cangaceiro* not personally acquainted with them. Despite the Major (Dona Dulce’s grandfather) being renowned throughout the region as a *pacato* (peaceful) and *manso* (docile) leader of his land and family, he could always come to the aid of his kin from Nazaré, in any form, including with armed assistance. Solidarity between kin is an obligation that very often speaks more loudly than the most resolute intention to maintain neutrality. Respect, menace, and fear are disputed meanings attributed to the few words written in that message by Lampião.

Those and other meanings led me back to the marriage of Dóia and Davi and helped me to reconfigure my own mnemonic map of the relations between Ema and Nazaré, or, rather, of their respective ‘folks’, who sometimes think of themselves as one and the same, and at other times not. Dona Dulce puts this as follows:

They are all kin. Now, Jorge, they are one folk: we were brought up there with the Ema family, close by, and there the family mixed with Nazaré folk. They formed the *ruinha* [‘small street’, i.e., a tiny hamlet] ... Now, we were never very close, you see. They had a very excitable temperament, so we expected that they would be riled by the slightest incident ... and my grandfather was a more serene man, a man more of peace, a man of harmony. So the marriages were always something of an issue, they were never approved of much. I’ll say something, though: nobody harmed a hair of the other. Whatever problem you might have, they get to know about it, and then all of them look to help straight away. Financial help or assisting folk when a word needs to be said. So we’re a people that aren’t very close, but united when need be.

The story of Dóia’s elopement condenses many of the meanings involved in the relations between ‘Ema folk’ and ‘Nazeré folk’, despite not being the only marriage between them. Davi Jurubeba’s own sister, Florência, married Manuel de Souza Ferraz, the brother of the Major João Gregório, who married one of Dóia’s sisters, Inês. The reasons why Florência is remembered are not primarily related to the circumstances of her marriage – marriages by elopement tend to be hypergamic in this region – but to her descendants: the ‘Flor’, named after their mother’s pet name. According to Ferraz (1978: 79), Florência became the head of her family after her husband’s mental health deteriorated following a fever epidemic. The couple’s firstborn son, João Flor, said to have been a strong, calm, and courageous man, was chosen for the post of sheriff of Ema Farm, to which jurisdiction the hamlet of Nazaré belonged. While performing his duties of keeping order, he took part in some of the first armed clashes with Lampião. It was his idea for his sons, nephews, and many other relatives to join the Pernambuco state police force from 1925 onwards with the aim of capturing the most famous *cangaceiro* leader (Gominho, 1996: II, 297–8). The ‘Flor’ and ‘Jurubebas’ provided Lampião with his most ferocious and relentless enemies. Nazaré became famous for this reason.

Eurico de Souza Leão [head of the Pernambuco police at the time] saw that only we in Nazaré could find a way to deal with Lampião ... Because every *cangaceiro* that had been killed, had been killed by the Nazaré ... So he [Eurico de Souza Leão] called [Major] Teófanês [the commander of the police forces in the interior of the state] and there was a solution, just one solution: ‘The only ones who fight

Lampião are the Nazaré ... We're going to take five men from Nazaré and let them choose the men they want, five *volantes* [posses], and go after Lampião's hide, to see if we can put an end to Lampião' (Lieutenant Davi Jurubeba, November 1999).

A famous combatant in the fight against Lampião, Lieutenant Davi Jurubeba is the grandson of the first Davi Jurubeba and Dóia, a first cousin of the Flor who, with him, commanded the five *volantes* who went in pursuit of the *cangaceiros* when the latter had returned from one of the most audacious assaults recorded, the siege of Mossoró, a larger town in Rio Grande do Norte, in 1927. Desertions and deaths multiplied in the band following the failure of this attack and the intensification of the police pursuit that occurred in its wake. Indeed, of the dozens of *cangaceiros* then led by Lampião,<sup>6</sup> just five crossed the São Francisco river with him, fleeing to the state of Bahia. Peace returned to the region and Dona Dulce's kin went back to Ema. Lieutenant Davi's account feeds the collective memory of the *cangaço* in this region, which describes Nazaré as the bulwark in the fight against the outlaw.

### The founding of Nazaré, Ema, and the 'River Shore'

Nazaré was founded a few years before the clashes between its inhabitants and Lampião began. Following the decision to hold a Sunday market at the site in 1917, the settlement grew into a village (Lira 1990: 8). Hence the village did not exist at the time of Dóia's elopement. The site formed part of Algodões Farm, acquired on lease in 1819 by the Major's grandfather (Dona Dulce's great-great-grandfather). This original farm estate was divided up in his will amongst his heirs, one of its parts being Ema Farm. So, although reiterated by Ema folk, were the observations concerning the displeasure caused by the marriages with Nazaré folk an anachronism? The meandering paths taken by the memory of Dona Dulce and her contemporaries points us in another direction, to a remote past, in which fragmentary recollections still have powerful effects, reinforced by later events.

The siblings Davi and Florência arrived at Ema Farm, from 'River Shore', sometime around 1869. The precise date is not usually remembered, but the reference to their origin at the São Francisco river is given special emphasis in most of the accounts that I collected among the Major's descendants. 'River Shore' carries the reputation of being home to '*brabos*' (wild/fierce ones) and explains the 'expectation' to which Dona Dulce alludes in relation to their 'very excitable temperament'.

The two siblings came to Ema following an 'agreement' intended to put an end to a *questão de família* (lit. 'family issue')<sup>7</sup> between the Mouras and the Gomes de Sá which had begun in 1865, and during the course of which fifteen people died. As often happens in *questões*, with each killing, more relatives of the victims became embroiled, some of them being related to both sides (cf. Marques 2002: 137ff.). The 'agreement' consisted of the 'retreat' of the entire Moura family from their former lands. The siblings found refuge at Ema Farm because they had relatives there through the marriage of the Algodões Farm tenant holder – thus the ancestor of 'Ema folk' – to Clara Moura.<sup>8</sup> While Clara Moura's name and origin at 'River Shore' is remembered, the exact relationship she had with those siblings is not. People also know that the siblings' family lived in a place called Tapera do Valentão where another *questão* had opposed the Gomes de Sá to the Teles de Menezes some three decades before.

All these families from 'River Shore' are interconnected by marriage, but old *questões* have divided them to the point where relatives may not consider themselves to be



members of the same family. Beyond the evidence of surnames, a kind of policy of forgetting and remembering is set in motion wherein genealogical knowledge is sacrificed to other concepts of relatedness. The grandson of the first Davi Jurubeba, the Lieutenant, unwittingly confirms this hypothesis when he attempts to explain to his interviewers why he believes that, of all those who fought Lampião, those from Nazaré stood out.

D: [Because the Moura] came from Tapera do Valentão. These Nazaré folk still come from Moura blood ... It was the blood of the Moura. Nazaré folk endured this because of their Moura blood. From the Portuguese who came from there. I was speaking to a Portuguese man from there, a friend of mine, and he said to me, he told me simply: 'look Davi, I live near to the Moura family, it's dangerous. They are ignorant, as brutal as the devil. Nothing can tame them.'

J: You yourself are from the Moura family, aren't you?

D: No, I just have some remote kin from the Moura. If you are too closely related, it's bad.

J: Why is it bad, Lieutenant?

D: It's bad because they kill people, they do anything. They're ignorant. If you encounter them in the middle of a path, you have to pass, they won't give way.

The Mouras who came to live at the Ema Farm 'signed' their names as Davi Gomes de Sá Jurubeba and Florência Felismina de Sá. However, Lieutenant Davi had already presented himself as a Moura: 'My name should have been Gomes de Moura! But there's the nickname of Jurubeba that they gave to my grandfather, I don't know where it came from'. Although the Moura surname disappeared, perhaps as part of an attempt to put an end to the *questão*, a memory of belonging to the Moura family was kept alive through the notions of 'blood' and 'race' (see Marques 2002: 143-50, 220-7). This memory traverses the generations and survives, although the precise details may be forgotten.

Genealogical connections can be traced in multiple directions in a cognatic universe. However, the trails are not equally valued or acceptable in the *sertão*. The paths are drawn in accordance with the concept of 'blood', a substance transmitted from parents to children. Bearing physical as well as moral qualities, 'blood' naturalizes social identities. Moreover, the mixture of 'blood' in procreation engenders different 'races'.<sup>9</sup> Following this rationalization, each sibling group would correspond to one single 'race', but in fact the boundaries of 'races' are much more fluid, comprising any group that claims its identity through personal qualities contained and transmitted by shared 'bloods'. The same idiom is used when someone refuses to belong to the same 'race', because of any kind of disagreement, by evoking a different 'blood' origin and composition despite the concurrent presence of the 'same blood' in his or her veins. To paraphrase Carsten (2013: S13) on other contexts put together in a comparative frame, the truths or essences revealed by 'blood' are far from stable and under continuous revision for its capacity to uncover further truths and to destabilize moral or political certainties. This instability is consistent with indefinite boundaries of family groups in the *sertão*. Eventually, the truth of 'blood' only manifests in becoming, and is established through the memory of events, people, and relations.

This long journey through the memory of my *sertanejo* interlocutors was necessary for me, an outsider, so as to comprehend the many bursts of laughter, lacunas, repetitions, and things left unsaid in their narratives. While any *sertanejo* from the region understands phrases like 'came from the River Shore' or 'from Tapera dos Valentões' as references to *questões*, only a certain level of intimacy maps the contrast between 'Ema

folk' and 'Nazaré folk' onto a supposed contrast between the 'docility' of the Major's descendants, and the 'ignorance' of the Flor, Mouras, and Jurubebas. The contrast allows me to understand what else is implied in the story of the marriage by elopement, in the 'consideration' shown between kin from different localities, as well as in the measure of physical and relational distance kept by people so as to avoid becoming involved in matters of no concern to them.

Dona Dulce's explanation of the displeasure shown by the 'Ema folk' concerning marriages with 'Nazaré folk' expresses a bifurcation within the descendants of Manoel de Souza Ferraz (the founder of Algodões Farm), from his grandchildren's generation onwards. Later translated in terms of locality, the split did not, however, produce any absolute spatial boundaries: the children of the brother and sister who came from the 'River Shore' inherited lands at Ema Farm and João Flor was appointed a sheriff there. But the foundation of Nazaré consolidated this process of segmentation with the rise of leaders who acted independently of Major João Gregório, head of the 'Ema folk'. The building of a chapel, the establishment of a new marketplace, and the involvement of the Nazaré folk in the fight against Lampião, in contrast to the timid participation of the 'Ema folk' in these events, cemented this new leadership and autonomy. This did not prevent the two 'folks' occasionally becoming one again. When some Ema people were involved in *questões de família* in the 1970s and again in the 1980s, they found armed help among their kin from Nazaré. Such information may be read between the lines of Dona Dulce's accounts.

In the accounts given by Dona Dulce, the 'Nazaré folk' and the 'Ema folk' are essentialized and acquire the a-temporal, static, or synchronic dimensions which we see in myth (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 40) or structural time (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 108), and in this sense her version does not incur an anachronism when these categories are extended to the context of Dóia and Davi's marriage. Nevertheless it would be wrong to suggest that Dona Dulce's narrative only represents an (illusory) inert past, or that she simply re-forms it in favour of the present, as this would lead us to a single, cumulative or linear, conception of time. In the memory of the *sertanejos*, the different moments of the past and the present mingle in a fluid, continuous, and lived time – in a duration, in the Bergsonian sense (Ingold 2007: 117–19) – lending meanings to the ongoing processes of collective identification (Peel 1984). In this way, we can assert that the past is active in the present, but also *vice versa*.

### Narrating the past

Before returning to the conceptions of time and space embedded in the narratives, I wish to emphasize the collective character of memory and, hence, the past as an object of debate among the subjects who elaborate it and are constituted within it as members of social groups.

The memory of the past is clearly put into operation in the present and is, to a large extent, nurtured by current usages. Lost from individual minds, many details of past events are recovered in the course of narratives. But it amounts to a collective memory, as Halbwachs defines it, in the sense that individuals remember in their contemporary condition as members of groups. When the memory of a more remote past is involved, only some events, dates, and persons are foregrounded, because human memory depends on the groups that preserve it and on the ideas and images of interest to these groups (see Connerton 1989: 36, 39; Coser 1992: 22). Memory becomes social insofar as it affects and is formulated within a collectivity through fragments dispersed in the

social environment, in the present, through which the past is reconstructed, but also accessed and activated. As Feeley-Harnik has argued (1996: 213), while access to the past is necessarily mediated by the present, we must avoid letting this universal condition ensnare us in 'presentism'.

By retelling emblematic episodes of people related to them, the *sertanejos* look to recover for themselves and offer interlocutors experiences, knowledge, perceptions, and emotions of the past by making it present in some sense. In narratives of conflict, events like those selected here, narrators also metadiscursively 'calibrate the relationship between narrative and narrated events' as well as the distances between narrator, characters, and audience (Briggs 1996: 22-7; see Bauman 1986: 54-78; Parmentier 2007: 276). Although the stories are to a large extent shaped by the expectancies and norms of a particular discursive community (James 2000: 181), the narrators also have leeway, through both the narrative content and the style, to create meanings, and evaluate the events, the actors, and their social world. Stories told by various narrators over time, and to changing audiences, produce a background for productive intertextualization, thus allowing the creative formulation of identity and difference, agreement and contest (Briggs 1996: 22). As Appadurai (1981) showed, the past is not merely narrated, it is also debatable through culturally defined codes. This property, we could say, makes it neither static nor freely manipulable. Through disputes, the past becomes accessible to the present, within which it takes part.

Anecdotes surfaced frequently in the narratives of my interlocutors. The same terror expressed by Dona Dulce's accounts of people running and imaginary gunshots translated into the tears shed by Luís Andreino, who, as a boy, one day broke the gourd in which he was carrying water to Lampião. But in this anecdote, the figure of the dreaded *cangaceiro* acquires a more ambiguous shape as he consoles the child with a light-hearted remark: 'It's nonsense to cry over this! Gourds are like the plank of a gate, when one breaks we replace it with another'. He then gave me 200 reis'. Luís Andreino's anecdote encapsulates a kindly and good-humoured side of Lampião, his awareness of the fear that he provoked even among those he had known since the time he was just Virgulino, and the delicate balance maintained in the relations between him and the narrator's family. Hence it was not simply a question of obeying him or fighting him, as Dona Dulce's narratives suggest. One Christmas Eve, Lampião's band went to attend a mass at the Cipó Farm, the residence of the Nogueira family headed by the narrator's grandfather: 'The chapel yard was filled, all of them kneeling'. At the end of the mass, the *cangaceiros* decided to throw a party and requested the old man's permission for the local young women to attend and dance. But his reply was intransigent: 'Here there are lots of young women, but to dance with *cangaceiros*, there are none'. His response is memorable for its sheer audacity. The outcome of the episode explains why cordiality was maintained and the refusal not taken as an offence by the *cangaceiros*.

Afterwards, he [the grandfather] made a deal with Lampião for Lampião not to mess with anyone from the Nogueira family ... He himself promised that no one [no man from the family] would join the police and no granddaughter of his would marry a soldier (Luís Andreino, September 1999).

Anedoctes can be seen as morality tales (Bauman 1986: 59; James 2000: 172). The moral component of stories derives from and founds the evaluation, establishing, and claiming of reputations. In this sense again, stories provide a ground for social

identity. To my *sertanejo* narrators, it involves not so much themselves as individuals but the group they belong to, ultimately their families. But a point I wish to stress is that these very groups or families are also drawn through narratives. In Luís Andreilino's account, the 'Nogueira family' encompasses just a portion of the set of kin who could be designated by this name or 'sign' themselves as such. The 'folks' from Ema and Nazaré are related to them by marriage. Many Nogueiras became enemies of Lampião after he entered the *cangaço*. This anecdote reveals a tension surrounding the reputation of the narrator's grandfather, a man whose loyalty was divided between his kin and Virgulino's family owing to a close personal tie through the latter's mother, raised in Nogueira's Cipó Farm. The old man tolerated the bandits' presence on his farm despite the risk of being labelled a coward or, worse, a protector of bandits (*coiteiro*). His grandson uses the story to emphasize that his grandfather was a respectful man (*homem de respeito*) – by the indexical images (cf. Peirce 1955: 102; see Briggs 1996: 15–16; Irvine 2004: 104) of *cangaceiros* on their knees at the farm chapel, and their polite asking of permission to throw a party. He paints the man as a responsible head of family, through his making of an 'agreement' that would prevent his family from mixing (by joining or marrying) either with bandits or with policemen. Luís Andreilino's narratives concerning Lampião are as eloquent about the state of past and present relations between the author's kin and compatriots as they are about the famous *cangaceiro*.

### Genealogical mappings: time and space

The genealogical framework enables the classification, localization, and qualification of spaces. The geographical features, the density of the plant cover during winter and summer, and the conditions of the paths and roads all lengthen or shorten journeys, separating people and bringing them together. But distances are also structural (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 109–10), as is implicit, for example, in the expression 'River Shore', according to who enunciates the phrase. The migrations, 'retreats', modes of transmitting land, concentration of support in a neighbourhood for specific political factions or for a family in *questão* – all of these processes, circumstances, and movements become intelligible through their translation into kinship ties and localities (Marques 2011: 343). The families are distributed across large territorial spaces, where internal subdivisions are expressed in degrees of kinship. Conversely, these territories acquire the qualities or reputation attributed to the 'folk' inhabiting them, thereby establishing relative social distances between these places.

The personal qualities assumed by a locality show how space is subjected to the principle of segmentarity. That is, spaces do not simply reflect processes external to them, but are also the instrument and surface, *par excellence*, for their inscriptions. The foundation of places through settlement formation always reflects an ideal of autonomy. The example of Nazaré in relation to Ema, discussed earlier, is no exception. But this search for an autonomous existence must not be confused with isolation: indeed the opposite, since what is desired with settlement foundation is the spatial production of a new centre of socio-political gravity, whose potency is proportional to the prestige of its founders and future leaders. The settlement grows by attracting new residents and visitors. In this region, families living separately in small clusters are none the less strongly interconnected through personal and kinship ties over an extended area of geographical space. Consequently, very extensive tracts of space can be socially subdivided into different nuclei with specific physical and moral

qualities and simultaneously recomposed into larger territorial units with which their inhabitants circumstantially identify. This identification partly follows a ‘circular segmentarity’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 233) regulated in compliance with the political-administrative structure: farms, villages, towns, districts, municipalities, regions. But as well as being nestled within each other, these localities are also connected through specific inhabitants in a kind of descent relation: Tapera do Valentão and Algodões Farm are birthplaces for Nazaré ‘folk’. Associated with personal attributes and familiar branches, the ‘River Shore’ is also identified as the point of origin for the occupation of the entire region, since it was there that the first farms were settled, and to whose ‘founders’ kinship connections can be traced for contemporary descendants.

Kinship relations have underlined all these accounts of the past. As the narrator ‘unravels’ the kinship networks (Marques 2002: 7) in which the actors of narrated and narrative events are inserted, the interlocutors become momentarily able to localize a particular sequence of facts as they unfolded chronologically. This localization allows the narrative’s translation into dates and much broader historical periods. Dona Dulce, Lieutenant Davi, and Luís Andreilino talk of themselves and their ancestors in a time dominated by the *cangaço*, a ‘critical event’ with many registers and with powerful reverberations in the *sertão* and far beyond (Das 1995: 4–6). Thereby everybody involved in the narrative event can locate the subject between the 1920s and 1930s. But this is the era of past generations too, so that the interested interlocutors – who, very often, are related by kinship to those appearing in the accounts – also locate themselves within a structural temporality (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 94, 104–8). In many senses, then, these events are not confined to the past since they orient and give meaning to relations and actions in the present and project them into the future, even among people unknown. The actors involved in the narratives are situated in relation to each other in terms of social distance, given not only by genealogical positions but also by the roles played in the events narrated, and the reputations that flow among kin.

Another temporality linked to collective memory is revealed besides linear and structural conceptions of time (cf. Peel 1984: 128). In the succession of the narrated events, the interlocutors perceive the replication in other people or themselves of behaviours, actions, and reputations attributed to a particular ancestor or relatives, and explain this reproduction in terms of the ‘blood’ shared between these people through the mixture of ‘races’ that engendered them. When memory is identified with genealogy, ‘time is included within the relations of filiation’ (Vernant 1988 [1965]: 115).<sup>10</sup> The *sertaneja* genealogies could be said to combine different temporal meanings of succession, continuity, and originality. ‘Blood’ explains the short temper of the ‘Nazaré folk’ of yesterday and today, the ‘tameness’ of the ‘Ema folk’, as well as reputations – ‘respectfulness’, ‘calmness’, ‘bravery’ – and predispositions of every kind – for political leadership, artistic talents, manual skills, mental imbalance, marital infidelity, studying, taking up arms, and so on. These are widely associated with particular family branches – ‘it is in their blood’, say the *sertanejos*. In this sense, a kind of simultaneity links past, present, and future.

As Carsten (2013) points out, blood conveys multiple temporalities. Ideas about the past and expectancies of the future are embodied – perhaps we should say ‘emblooded’ – in the actors themselves. Here I do not refer so much to conditions of re-enactment of an ancestral event through the narrator’s performance (see Peel 1984: 118, 123) as to

the persistence of an ancestor's intrinsic qualities manifest in becoming. The idea that everyone's 'race' results from 'mixed bloods' across generations merges senses of successiveness, continuity, and originality embedded in their conception or understanding of time as it arises from their particular form of producing or cultivating memory. 'I have kin, just some remote kin from the Moura', Lieutenant Davi tells us. He embodies some essential quality of these ancestors mixed with other qualities from his other ancestors and recognizes their influence on him through behaviour and attitudes manifested over time. The relation with the past is one of participation, rather than mere similarity or recollection. A very specific sense of re-presentation. It leads us very close to the idea of duration, as formulated by Bergson.

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation of idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another (Bergson 2008 [1910]: 100, emphasis in original).

The problem of whether the qualitative, unsegmented, and moving character of duration that Bergson defines as a form of ego's conscious state could also be a property of a socio-cultural time is an old debate in the discipline of anthropology which has yet to be resolved (Durkheim 1915 [1912]: 441; Hubert 1909 [1905]; see Gell 1992: 317; Munn 1992: 94-6). In Munn's critical review of anthropological concepts of time, she argues in favour of a socio-cultural temporalization of multiple dimensions not only perceived but also lived 'in' by people (1992: 100, 116). In turn, Bloch (1977; 2012) argues from a cognitivist position and takes issue with the looseness of anthropological assertions of time as a culturally relative category, and states that at least two levels of human mind are involved in the conceptualization of time. Our ability to 'time travel' would allow us to suspend temporarily the normal rules of time and space (Bloch 2012: 108-9). Although Bloch very loosely uses the notion of duration, this kind of 'suspended permanence' as derived from a 'shared imagination', and opposed to the successive 'normal' apprehension of time, seems to bring together the qualitative and social attributes of time. However, the idea of a collective memory is for him nothing but an illusion. Some metaphors would really provoke subjective states, he says, when, for example, the members of a group feel like 'being one'. But he also insists that 'we, as anthropologists, should certainly not take this ridiculous idea on board' (Bloch 2012: 213).

Whether the idea is ridiculous or not, I derive multiple dimensions of time and space embedded in narratives of *sertanejos* and take them seriously, since the subjective states which they provoke seem to be inseparable from the continuous process of shaping family belonging within their cognatic universe of kinship. The genealogical framework provides paths for both connecting and disconnecting people in many virtual directions. Neither a matter of choice alone nor one of prescribed rules of rights and duties, the actual engagement and disengagement of people depends on what they know about each other. The subject of this knowledge will be found in life histories as they are lived, witnessed, and narrated. Usually centred on individuals, the personal and moral qualities underlined in stories overflow from them, then sprout and become reproduced in other individuals, times, and spaces.

### Concluding remarks

Some events of the past acutely affect a larger range of people, whether they are lived or narrated, thus enabling a connection between the mnemonic repertoires of different groups and individuals. Stories of Lampião and particular *questões de família* mobilize supralocal solidarities and allow distance and belonging to be forged and reiterated. Obviously social life produces other moments of solidarity motivated by more peaceful goals. The point that I wish to make is that oral narratives concerning the past, like those transcriptions used in this article, are always elaborated in compliance with the maps of belonging and identification of their narrators, characters, and interlocutors, and that is what the genealogical framework is useful for. Together with everyday conversations, accounts of the past refer us to dispersed fragments of times and spaces, which are none the less able to communicate through multiple belongings, shared experiences, and knowledge. By the same token these maps of belonging are continuously affected, retraced, and displaced by events and by accounts of them. Threads of the past, present, and future produce the social fabric. Through memory, the loose strands of the fabric are incessantly being rewoven into destiny.

### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The 1850 Land Law restricted the acquisition of terrain to purchase and abolished the *sesmaria* regime.

<sup>2</sup> These accounts were collected in 1999. The arguments developed here are based on data obtained in successive periods of fieldwork, related to different research projects, in the municipalities of Triunfo, Serra Talhada, and Floresta.

<sup>3</sup> The title of Major attests to his high status as an officer of the National Guard, a civil corporation of the imperial regime with the attributions of public order and security. As terms of address and reference the titles survived the National Guard created in 1831 and demobilized in the First Republic (1889-1930).

<sup>4</sup> Also conducting his anthropological fieldwork in the region, Jorge Mattar Villela was present during the conversations quoted in the article.

<sup>5</sup> The 'retreats' are customary ways of resolving conflicts in the *sertão*, which almost always comprise disputes between neighbouring people or families. The parties involved reach an 'agreement', sometimes with the help of an intermediary trusted by both and without any power of arbitration, for one of them to 'retreat' to live in some place further away (Marques 2002: 67, 95ff.).

<sup>6</sup> The composition of a band of *cangaceiros* always fluctuated with peaks in the concentration and dispersal of individuals and small groups, depending on the attacks planned or the intensity of the pursuits (Villela 2004: 211). In Lampião's case the number varied from a few up to around 100 men under his command on some occasions (Villela 2004: 230). With more or less this number of *cangaceiros*, the joined bands of Lampião and Massilon Leite besieged Mossoró in 1927 (Lira 1990: 380).

<sup>7</sup> Although the expression *questão de família* refers mainly to quarrels that often lead to killings between parties designated as family groups, I prefer the translation 'family issue' instead of 'family feud' as preserving the more open semantical field of the word *questão*, the unpredictability of the composition of parties implicated, and the changes in the forms assumed by this kind of conflict over time (see Marques 2002: 76-81, 134-5).

<sup>8</sup> Gominho (1996: I, 115-17) published a summarized version of an account about this *questão* (called *questão do Sabiucá*) given by José Gomes Correia in an unpublished manuscript.

<sup>9</sup> For 'blood' and 'race' in other Brazilian social contexts, see O. Abreu (1982) and Woortmann (1995).

<sup>10</sup> 'Le temps est comme inclus dans les rapports de filiation'. Vernant wanted to distinguish conceptions of time in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, inscribed in their distinct use of genealogies. While Homer wants

to fix the genealogies of men and gods in a temporal framework, Hesiod seeks to find the foundation of being, looking at the past as its source (1988 [1965]: 114-15). Obviously I have no intention of equating *sertaneja* genealogies to Greeks' from either period examined by Vernant.

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## Fondateurs, ancêtres et ennemis : mémoire, famille, temps et espace dans le *sertão* de Pernambuco

### Résumé

Le présent article est consacré à l'usage des cadres narratifs et généalogiques chez les *sertanejos*, habitants de l'arrière-pays (*sertão*) du Pernambouc dans le Nord-est du Brésil, dans le processus de regroupement et de différenciation des familles. Il explore la manière dont les récits produits par des personnes différentes sont reliés par des souvenirs communs de conflits passés, tels que le *cangaço* et les *questões de família* (« questions de famille »). Par le biais de relations conçues et vécues entre parents et des concepts corrélés de « sang » et de « race » courants dans cette formation sociale, l'auteure cherche à identifier les différentes significations attribuées au temps et à l'espace, inscrites dans la mémoire collective et impliquées dans les configurations mouvantes de « la famille » dans un univers cognatique.

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