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## Journey to Juazeiro

### Approaches to an Urban Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil

One of the Brazilian interior's fastest growing consumer meccas, Juazeiro do Norte also remains the center of a seemingly traditional religious pilgrimage that draws several million visitors to the city each year. The pilgrims—who have become a national media icon for an older Brazil—pay homage to the priest Father Cicero Romão Batista (1844-1934) in a journey initially triggered by his role in a reputed miracle in 1889.<sup>1</sup> Much of the Roman Catholic hierarchy opposed anything that had to do with Juazeiro for well over a century and supported the attack by government soldiers, in 1914, upon the city, whose defenders repelled them.<sup>2</sup> Today, new challenges from Evangelical Protestantism in a region once considered a bastion of Catholicism have led Rome to consider the restoration of Father Cicero's long-suspended priestly orders.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Araripe Basin, in which Juazeiro is located, has become the first United Nations geopark in the Americas—a prestigious recognition of the region's identity as a home to ancient geological formations and remarkably-preserved fossils of interest to eco-tourists.<sup>4</sup>

The following pages offer a brief sketch of two journeys to the same hilltop on the outskirts of Juazeiro called the Horto or “Orchard”—originally a reference to the biblical Garden of Gethsemane in a city which Father Cicero saw as the “New Jerusalem.” This once heavily

forested area within the *sertão*, or arid backlands, is today home to the second-largest statue in Brazil—a massive likeness of the priest that doubles as a TV tower.<sup>5</sup> I begin here by using fieldwork conducted by me between 2004 and 2014 as the basis for imagining what a non-pilgrim visitor unfamiliar with Juazeiro might see on a spur-of-the-moment visit to the Horto.<sup>6</sup> I then describe the same journey as it might look through the eyes of a group of pilgrims whose actions provide answers to a number of the non-pilgrim's doubts. While the variety within each of these categories, as well as the considerable overlap between them, prohibits any sort of fixed division between pilgrims and non-pilgrims, these contrasting descriptions highlight the basic contours of the pilgrimage today.<sup>7</sup>

The imagined journeys suggest some of the ways in which the pilgrimage is an at once concrete and transcendent space. This space is increasingly mediated by new technologies and communicative networks which reflect the still largely marginalized pilgrims' growing insertion into a globalized consumer society.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is shaped by a history of resistance to both Church and State (the invading government soldiers) that continues to make Juazeiro a refuge for the pilgrims. The double mediation allows pilgrims to piece together new identities that rework the past to meet present-day needs. This "strategic multiplicity" (my term for this process) converts an at first glance alien and archaic-looking pilgrimage into a complex reflection of far larger social, economic, and environmental transformations in Brazil.

## Journey One

Most non-pilgrim visitors to Juazeiro—presently the hub of an urban center of some 430,000 people—are there for either leisure purposes or a wide range of business dealings.<sup>9</sup> Visitors from outside the Northeast (a region that includes nine of Brazil's twenty-six states and 28% of



Figure 1: Map of Juazeiro.

the nation's population) are likely to have flown in from the southern metropolis of São Paulo—today, Brazil's largest “Northeastern” city thanks to a flood of migrants in past decades. The fact that many present-day travelers to Juazeiro represent organizations headquartered in southern cities explains the growing number of daily flights between the northeastern interior and the industrial south.<sup>10</sup>

My focus in this first journey is on a young woman from São Paulo whom I imagine as working for businesses with agencies throughout Brazil and who will be spending several days in meetings with local representatives firming up the details of a new branch of a clinic or computer network in Juazeiro. Since it is her first trip to Juazeiro and

the Northeast, she is excited about the prospect. Eager to get a good start on the journey, the young woman leaves her home hours before the flight, but barely makes the plane because of the São Paulo traffic. Once on board, she looks up “Juazeiro do Norte” on the Internet in order to find out a bit about the city and the hotel where her office has made a reservation. She is intrigued by the hotel’s indigenous-sounding name—Iu-á—which the website identifies as the native term for the fruit to which “Juazeiro” refers. Moreover, while she had assumed that there must be various types of lodging in the booming city, she is surprised at hotel’s chic appearance as well as impressive size.<sup>11</sup>

Juazeiro’s tiny airport is more like what the young traveler had imagined, but the thoroughfare down which the taxi passes is packed with cars and buses. The hotel before which the driver stops suggests an upscale mixture of Scandinavian Modern with what she assumes must be Northeastern touches. Although the airy lobby suggests a cosmopolitan minimalism typical of Rio or São Paulo, reflected in the sleek reception desk and the bright red birdcage of a vase set casually upon the bar, other elements of the décor are less familiar. Noticing her interest, a young member of the hotel staff points out the tooled leather chairs by the local craftsman Expedito Saddlemaker, whose work, he says, recalls the Moorish-Jewish-Christian legacy of the *sertão*—something she vaguely remembers studying back in college. This same regionalist twist is clear in the stylized birds perched upon a tree in a manner reminiscent of Northeastern woodcuts, and a cowman’s leather jacket inlaid with bits of colored leather that provides a counterpoint to the handsome chairs.

When the young woman asks if people in the countryside still wear these jackets, the hotel employee laughs politely. “No, no” he says, the bright insets in the jacket are in no way traditional, and besides, today’s cowmen have largely traded in their horses for motorcycles and

prefer more modern means of protection from the thorny vegetation. However, his own grandfather was once a cowman and, as a child, he liked nothing better than to play with the old man's leather hat. Even today, as a part-time student at the new federal university in Juazeiro, he still enjoys hearing his granddad talk about the past.

Another wall in the hotel boasts a series of rustic wooden figures that the young hotel employee says recall the traditional votive offerings associated with the Juazeiro pilgrimage. "Have you heard of Father Cicero?" he asks and the young woman says she has seen numerous TV reports on the pilgrimage. "Yes, well some present-day pilgrims still leave these sorts of statues called "miracles" here in Juazeiro as mementos of his help," he says.

The young employee then invites his guest to take a look at the hotel's mini-museum, whose walls are hung with photos of the ancient rocks and the stunningly-preserved fossils that set apart the Araripe Basin Geopark. Another wall of this air-conditioned jewel box of a room boasts a large, soft-focus image of Father Cicero alongside pictures of the Horto hilltop, with its outcroppings of ancient granite—almost certainly the best-known of the nine geologically significant landmarks that constitute the geopark. If the young woman has time during her stay, the young man says, she may want to see the Horto, especially since today marks the beginning of one of the year's four major pilgrimages. "It's something you won't find there in São Paulo," he assures her. "You have the big Aparecida pilgrimage but this is different, more Northeastern."

"Are the pilgrims really as fanatic as you see on television?" the young woman asks.

"Well, they aren't all the same," the young employee says cheerfully. "Now then, it's true that most don't like being told how they should act in Juazeiro. If you're curious you might like to take a look for yourself."

The young woman goes on to spend the next few days in meetings and meals with associates in the hotel's business center and a nearby shopping mall. However, her last day is free and she remembers the young man's pointed, if cordial, suggestion about seeing the Horto and the pilgrims with her own eyes. The shots of the ancient granite in the Geopark exhibit continue to fascinate her and it would indeed be interesting to see firsthand the pilgrims she has watched so often on TV.

The taxi which the hotel clerk summons for the guest begins to wend its way down a long, broad thoroughfare packed with a multitude of cars and trucks, along with an occasional horse-drawn wagon. Jumbo supermarkets, auto and motorcycle dealerships, healthcare facilities and academies that offer professional courses mingle with a few older houses where a cow or two may graze beneath a towering mango tree. After several miles of heavy traffic, the taxi enters a cramped and rather shabby-looking downtown area jammed with stores selling electronic goods, appliances, and—on some side streets—large open sacks of beans and farm supplies. Many of these stores boast images of Father Cicero in the window or alongside the cash register.

As the taxi moves on past a large plaza the driver points out a life-sized brass statue of Father Cicero surrounded by a patch of beleaguered vegetation. The plaza is ringed by an assortment of self-serve restaurants, a busy cut-rate drugstore, a still-beautiful old residence and a new, upscale ice cream parlor that the taxi driver points out along with the raised platform used for musical performances that the city sponsors during pilgrimages.

The square is full of people whose straw hats mark them as pilgrims—something that the young woman knows from TV descriptions of the “traditional blessing of the hats”.<sup>12</sup> A man in a crisp white shirt is handing out pamphlets while several young assistants take people's blood pressure in a tent that the visitor assumes has been provided by

the municipal health service. Many of the pilgrims carry shopping bags and one man has tucked a large, brightly-colored saint beneath his arm. After a turn or two on one-way streets, the taxi continues down a street with an assortment of older homes, many of which have been converted into cheap *pousadas* or guesthouses. Vendors offering big blocks of raw sugar, cell phone chargers, and a rainbow of ribbons meant to be tied around the wrist to bring good fortune surround the taxi just as it passes a yellow church that the driver identifies as Our Lady of Sorrows—Juazeiro's patron saint. "Father Cicero built this church," the driver tells his passenger, "but the bishop later stopped him from saying Mass here." "Why is that?" asks the young woman, trying to remember something about the history of Juazeiro, but the driver only shrugs. He then points out the new pilgrimage reception center financed by the city. When she then asks why the massive multi-arched construction doesn't seem to have more people, the driver laughs and says that this would be an excellent question for the politicians.

The reception center marks the north end of the city and the taxi now starts up a new-looking road bordered by odd-shaped rocks and trees. As the car nears the summit, small houses, dogs and children come into view. Upon reaching the enormous parking lot filled with buses, the driver points out the short road that leads up to the large white statue of Father Cicero before he collects his fare.

As she nears the statue, the young woman sees crowds of people snapping cellphone photos. Newly-arrived pilgrims join the long line of visitors waiting to move up the statue's base to a platform that provides a more panoramic view of Juazeiro and its neighbors. Some pilgrims are dressed in brown robes with a rope belt; a few others carry rocks upon their heads or clutch plants that they have yanked out of the earth—all things that puzzle the young woman. Other pilgrims mill around the plants in a nearby nursery where a sign identifies Father Cicero as an



“ecologist.” There is also a poster bearing the state insignia that features a clay figurine of the priest surrounded by pink paper roses beneath a caption that reads “Juazeiro, Capital of Faith.”

Close by the statue, some musicians who have just finished performing religious music with a decided rock beat saunter off a portable stage as the priest in the chapel just behind it begins celebrating Mass. The chapel serves as the entrance to a museum where the young visitor joins a crowd of pilgrim visitors who are exclaiming over the life-sized resin figures that appear in scenes from Father Cicero’s life. Many of the walls are hung with wooden votive figures reminiscent of the statues pointed out by the attentive clerk in her hotel. Members of the museum staff urge along those pilgrims who try to duck beneath the ropes that separate them from the tableau. In the museum’s kitchen annex, pilgrims drink from metal ladles that they dip into large earthen water jugs. The young woman also snaps a photo of folk healers armed with aromatic branches as well as of a poet who recites verses about Father Cicero.

As the young traveler moves away from the museum area she encounters the remains of a crumbling wall within the earth that seems to have no obvious purpose. Not far from the old wall stands a highly modernistic sail-shaped church. A bit further on she glimpses the beginning of a trail. Still curious about the ancient granite outcroppings pictured in the mini-museum, the young woman decides to see where the trail leads. Soon, she is picking her way over rocks interspersed with brambles. From time to time she stops to rest at one of the makeshift concession stands that sell sun-dried herbs and bottles full of homemade medicines along with cans of lukewarm Coca Cola. Ragged children shout out hymns of praise to Father Cicero in the hope of a coin or two.

Almost an hour later, the young woman, who had not been expecting such a long and solitary hike, is relieved to encounter a group of pilgrims examining a rock into which someone has drilled Father

Cicero's name. A bit further on, several pilgrims—sure-footed despite their flimsy rubber sandals—laugh and shout as one of their number attempts to slip between two boulders that almost touch. The young traveler then moves on to an outcropping of rocks, of which a number have been converted into shrines and rustic chapels on which she is surprised to find that visitors have left their names. Some pilgrims are sitting on the largest stones, gazing out over the valley; others slip away to light a candle before one of the shrines or train their cellphone cameras on each other. One young pilgrim smiles and motions to the visitor to join her friends in a picture. The young woman reciprocates by snapping photos first of them and then the group as a whole. Someone asks where she is from, and when she says “São Paulo”, one pilgrim says that he was born there. “I worked there for seven years,” another adds. A girl wants to know why the visitor is all alone in Juazeiro and the young woman does not know how to respond.

The view is truly breathtaking and the young traveler asks her new companions if the unusual-looking stones are the ancient granite stones pictured in the photos back in her hotel. It is the pilgrims' turn to look surprised and after varied murmured consultations they call to an older man whom they say knows everything there is to know about Juazeiro.

“Are these the old, old stones that I saw in an exhibit on the Geopark?” the young woman asks when the man joins them, and for a moment, he looks as confused as the younger pilgrims.

“I don't know,” he then says in a firm voice. “I have seen this “Geopark” on signs but am not really sure what it might be. Now then, I do know that these rocks are very, very old. I also know that Juazeiro was created back before time started and that this space in which we're standing is the center of the world.”

After the young woman thanks him and asks for one last picture, she adjusts her hat for the trip back down the trail. “We were just about

to leave so we'll go with you!" one of the pilgrims says quickly and the group begins to pack up its things. Its members then walk with her along the path until they reach the massive statue of Father Cicero.

"Thanks for your company!" the young woman says as the pilgrims head down towards the parking lot where they will board their bus, leaving her to find a taxi. "May Father Cicero guide and protect you now and always," the older pilgrim says in parting. "May Father Cicero guide and protect all of you too!" she answers, a bit surprised at her own words.

## Journey Two

The great majority of pilgrims to Juazeiro travel with members of their family who have joined forces with a larger group to rent a flatbed truck or bus. Sometimes, local politicians up for reelection will foot the bill on the condition that group members sport T-shirts emblazoned with their face and election code. Though reliable statistics are hard to come by, somewhere around half of all pilgrims would appear to come from urban centers.<sup>13</sup> These cities—often, the peripheries of the nine Northeastern capitals, all considerably larger than Juazeiro—are located ten or twelve hours away by bus. The remaining pilgrims are likely to be residents of rural communities and smaller cities throughout the Northeast. Although agriculture remains the primary livelihood in many of these places, TV antennae, cellphones, and crack cocaine are an increasing presence. While there are, unquestionably, pilgrims who have more money than the ones described here, the majority of these travelers are very poor.

The pilgrim group that I envision has just arrived in Juazeiro from one of the Northeastern capitals—perhaps Recife or Maceió. The battered transport in which this group is traveling is likely to have broken down at least once along the way and since there is no air conditioning, the passengers are hot as well as tired. All are nonetheless

grateful for the absence along the way of armed assailants and of the highway police, who have a habit of demanding bribes in return for their silence in regard to real or fabricated traffic violations. Most of these pilgrims have been eagerly watching the road for the last hour as fields, littered with stone and cactus, have gradually yielded to more densely populated spaces. The passengers cheer when the bus driver honks his horn to say that they have entered Juazeiro—something that would otherwise be hard to know since the city now merges into its two smaller neighbors, Crato and Barbalha, to form a single urban space known as CRAJUBAR.

The pilgrims must now traverse a city jammed with buses and the rickety, but tradition-laden trucks which state transportation officials are seeking to ban. While the passengers in the other cars may be headed for different sections of the city (travelers increasingly rent entire private residences for a few days instead of paying for a hotel), this particular group has reserved rooms in a guesthouse near the church of Our Lady of Sorrows. The trip organizer—a woman who inherited the post from her pilgrim father—has chosen this location because it will allow the group to move from place to place on foot. Not only is the price right but the group has a longstanding relationship with the guesthouse's manager that makes the prospect of their stay there comfortingly familiar.

Like most lodgings in this tradition-permeated area of Juazeiro, the guesthouse is a turn-of-the-century family residence that has been chopped up into rooms arranged along a long hall. Though the building has seen better days, its high ceilings and mosaic-patterned floors set it apart from the pilgrims' own small and often precarious homes. The benches lining the long halls and the plastic chairs out on the sidewalk serve as invitations to the extended conversations so important to the pilgrimage. The guesthouse also boasts a kitchen in which those

members of the group with little money can cook food bought from vendors in the old-style central market and eat together.

In contrast to so-called “religious tourists,” who carefully follow the fixed “Itinerary of Faith” that the state government has helped finance in an attempt to entice wealthier travelers to the region, most pilgrims have no set order in which to visit landmarks that do not require the use of the group bus. As a result, once the newly-arrived travelers have freshened up, some of its members stop in at the church of Our Lady of Sorrows while others take a turn around the plaza. Still others walk the two or three blocks to the Socorro chapel, where Father Cicero’s marble tomb stands before the altar, or seek out the always-crowded Casa museum that was, at one time, the priest’s home.

A few pilgrims seek out a favorite luncheonette or stop in at a bargain shoe store where each year they buy a brand-new pair of bargain sandals to commemorate their presence in Juazeiro. One or two slip away from the group to visit one of the various Afro-Brazilian *terreiros*, or religious spaces in which Father Cicero occupies a place of honor on an altar filled with images of Christian saints and Afro-Brazilian *orixás*.<sup>14</sup> When evening comes, bored-looking adolescents hop onto a bus outfitted with a trampoline on which they bounce up and down as strobe lights whirl and they shout the lyrics to the pounding music which mingles Portuguese with English.

Because the Horto, with its statue of Father Cicero and the more distant Holy Sepulcher, are usually key parts of the journey, the trip organizer has arranged for the bus to make the trip up the back side of the hill early the next morning. Like the taxi in the first journey, the bus first passes the old yellow church of Our Lady of Sorrows and the imposing Pilgrims’ Reception Center which none of the passengers have ever entered since it looks too big and much too hot. The bus driver then begins his way up the long road lined with rocks and trees,

eventually depositing the pilgrims in the large Horto parking lot.

Some of these persons are planning to meet up with members of the smaller group of pilgrims that set out from the guesthouse several hours before dawn in order to make their way on foot up the front side of the Rua do Horto—for years the customary route to Father Cicero's statue. While a number of these pre-dawn pilgrims have chosen to make the climb in memory of relatives or as an act of penance, others see it more as an adventure. It has been several hours now since the group passed by the darkened plaza near the guesthouse where a few drunks sprawl out near the tent of the Evangelical pastor whose offer of free health care is designed to attract potential converts. Several of the pilgrims, including a small boy whom his father carries, are wearing Franciscan friar-style robes that they will leave before Father Cicero's statue as testimony to the priest's intervention during the toddler's recent bout with dengue fever. Another member of the group, who sports green and yellow World Cup sandals, once walked barefoot up the hill with a rock upon his head in payment of a similar vow or *promessa*. When a stylish young woman shudders at the thought of carrying a stone up such a long, demanding incline, the man assures her that he felt no discomfort whatsoever.

In the past, this man explains, the small houses past which the group is now walking were home to longtime residents who might regale pilgrims with firsthand descriptions of how Father Cicero used to stop to talk with their families as he rode up the hill on the back of a donkey. In that relatively recent time before armed gangs and drugs became a normal part of life in Juazeiro, many of the houses—almost all of which now display steel gates and heavy window bars—had makeshift wooden doors marked by straw or charcoal crosses that, when their owners were at home by day often remained unlocked.

While the reference to gangs causes one or two of the pilgrims

to peer nervously into the shadows, most seem unsurprised to hear that urban violence has found its way to Juazeiro. “These things are everyday today,” one older woman sighs. The group continues on its way, pausing to rest from time to time before the large ceramic Stations of the Cross spaced at regular intervals along the narrow road. As they pass by, residents of nearby houses do their best to sell them coffee, food and souvenirs. Near the hilltop, a small home painted with moons and stars leads the older pilgrim to recall how the house’s owner would sing hymns of praise that Father Cicero sent to her in dreams and whose words she would have printed for passing listeners to buy. The group then trudges on to the summit from which the priest’s statue looks down over the valley.

A few of the pilgrims sit down to rest close by the statue as the morning sun begins to poke its way into the sky. Most, however, prefer to forge on while the air is still cool. As they proceed, some recount stories about the landmarks they are passing. From time to time, they see other pilgrims, some of whom have pulled plants out of the ground to take home with them to make medicinal teas believed to cure a wide variety of ills. “So, why don’t they just buy these plants from the priests’ nursery instead of stripping the whole hillside?” demands a teenager whose high school class has just finished a unit on environmental sustainability. “Some people think that the plants that they take directly from the earth have absorbed far more of its healing power, and besides, these priests don’t need the money,” an older woman tells the girl, who shrugs.

The Horto itself, this woman says, once abounded in vegetation—indeed, a huge old *tambor* tree used to stand in the place of today’s statue. Today, members of the Salesian Congregation that inherited the hilltop from Father Cicero have cut down the trees and built things—the nursery, a series of kiosks for vendors—that no one could have imagined

back in the time when the hilltop was the priest's rustic summer home. However, some people say that the Horto, despite all these changes, remains home to an enchanted orchard.

Back in the past, the woman continues, a group of laborers was once hard at work on the towering church that Father Cicero had long dreamt of building.<sup>15</sup> Suddenly hungry, the men asked the priest for food and he brought forth a whole grove of mangoes, oranges, and guavas. Although this grove disappeared as soon as they had eaten their fill, it remains an invisible presence. So, for that matter, does the Noah's Ark-like boat hidden in the brush. One day, some claim, this boat will reappear to ferry Father Cicero's followers to safety as a second Flood engulfs the Earth.

The pilgrims exchange a few more stories as they pause before the crumbling remains of the wall erected during the "War" of 1914 to hold back the government soldiers sent to crush a rebellious Juazeiro. Some of them touch the stones as one young man recounts how his great-grandfather participated in the defense of the city when still a boy. As the group moves on past the Salesians' church, the same young man notes the old belief that the towering sanctuary whose construction a hostile bishop forced Father Cicero to abandon will one day rise upon this very spot to replace the modernistic building. "At least that is what people say," he says somewhat defensively when a young woman rolls her eyes.

As the sun moves up the sky, the pilgrims begin picking their way down the trail. After successfully navigating several long stretches choked with brambles, they reach the trail's final segment, stopping at the rock into which Father Cicero once carved his name with an outstretched index finger. Up ahead, they take turns trying to squeeze between two almost-touching boulders—a laughter-inducing acrobatics traditionally held to be a test of faith. When they finally enter the space



known as the Holy Sepulcher, some of the pilgrims perch on mammoth rocks that overlook the valley. Others take pictures, gulp down water from a bottle, or light a candle before one of the shrines constructed by the penitents who once camped out in this largely untamed place.

Since tourists usually remain in the part of the hilltop near the statue and almost no one walks the trail alone, the sudden appearance of a young woman in strange shoes and an even odder cloth hat takes the pilgrims by surprise. Seeing the young woman unaccompanied, one member of the group invites her to become part of the pictures they are snapping. After joining in their photos, the visitor snaps pictures of them too. One pilgrim asks where she is from and she says “São Paulo”—something everyone already knew, thanks to her accent. A young girl screws up the courage to ask about the young woman’s family—what they all really want to know is why she has come alone to a place that many pilgrims think of as the most sacred space in Juazeiro .

The young woman, however, does not understand what is on the girl’s mind or, perhaps, just doesn’t want to say why she has made the trip all by herself. Instead, she begins asking questions that the pilgrims find hard to answer. For them, the rocks are full of *mistério*—a word that implies not just enigma, but above all, a mysterious force. Since Juazeiro is the New Jerusalem, the Holy Sepulcher must be the place where Jesus Christ was buried and then rose into the sky, but this is hard to explain to a stranger from São Paulo almost certain to have far more money and a degree of formal education none of them can claim. The pilgrims are therefore relieved when the old storyteller comes up with an answer that appears to satisfy her, allowing them to concentrate upon new photos which will soon appear on Instagram and Facebook.

The pilgrims would have liked to spend more time looking down over the valley but when the young woman shows signs of leaving, they quickly pack up their own things since they do not want her to have to

walk the trail alone. What if she tripped over a rock in those strange-looking shoes and there was no one to offer help? What if she lost her way in the pounding sun or a thief suddenly jumped out from behind the rocks?

As the pilgrims head down the trail, pointing out the sights to the young woman, she is both close enough for them to touch and already a memory of their soon-distant time in Juazeiro. Once they reach the massive statue, the old pilgrim asks Father Cicero to guide and protect the unexpected visitor with whom they have shared these moments and the pilgrims are surprised and moved to hear her echoing his words. That night they will recall the details of their encounter with the stranger before some of the younger members of the group head off to the plaza to escape their families and the old man will remind the group that Juazeiro is, indeed, the center of the world.

### Intersections and Departures

A look back over the pair of journeys described above reveals readily obvious similarities and striking differences. The observations that follow are intended to lead readers back to my initial description of the pilgrimage as a double mediation that permits pilgrims to select and repurpose aspects of the past which they then shape into new identities within the present.

In each case, the trip to the Horto is part of a larger journey that began far from the Northeastern backlands. Although both the young woman and the pilgrims ascend the Horto, their routes are not identical. Not only do she and they have different expectations but a number of the pilgrims eschew the new, tree-lined road favored by taxis and buses for the older, far more heavily peopled and history-laden thoroughfare. Nonetheless, both the pilgrims and the young woman encounter many of the same sights and objects on their way to Father Cicero's statue





before coming face to face with one another in the Holy Sepulcher.

Both journeys also reveal tensions between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Because the young woman's hotel boasts all of the amenities generally sought by business travelers its distinctive regional touches awaken her curiosity without seeming offputtingly peculiar. Though the pilgrims choose their lodgings based in part on previous stays there, the things that set apart the spacious older building without making it *too* different from their own homes do much to bolster its appeal.

In addition, the two sorts of traveler share a reliance on more general frames of knowledge that predispose them to zero in on some aspects of the trip while remaining largely blind to others. The young woman's formal education, for example, allows her to appreciate the mixture of Moorish, Jewish, and Christian influences in a number of the sleek new hotel's more regionalist components. Likewise, the pilgrims' past experiences with the Evangelical proselytizers apt to offer health care (or free haircuts or bottled water) as a way of attracting potential converts to Protestantism makes them quick to perceive a competing religious presence that is lost on the young woman.

The continued existence of an older Northeast also provides a point of contact between the two journeys. The young business traveler's first live encounter with the region is shaped in part by stylized works of art that incorporate traditional folk sources as well as by photos of ancient geological sites that emphasize the region's unique environmental history. This history reappears in the pilgrims' stories of the Horto's Enchanted Grove and the rituals surrounding the almost-touching boulders between which they attempt to slip. While the first Northeast appears more "scientific" and the second more "mythic", both are evocations of an older past.

Yet another link between the journeys stems from the travelers' shared experience of a location—the Holy Sepulcher—in which the

human presence merges with a wilder sort of nature. The contrast between the solitary stone outcropping and the urban landscape visible from the hilltop creates a sense of timelessness that momentarily unites the young woman and the pilgrims. In both cases, the visitors' sudden distance from their everyday routines and physical surroundings provides a new perspective on the bustling city and their daily lives.

The face-to-face encounter between the pilgrims and the young woman provides the single most direct link between the two journeys. The photo, in which the travelers appear together, marks an unexpected proximity that continues as the pilgrims accompany the young woman back up the trail to Father Cicero's statue. The young woman's swift reciprocation of the old pilgrim's wishes for her well-being cements the momentary interchange that both will share with others back home through Instagram and Facebook.

These links between the travelers do not obviate divergences. The first journey to Juazeiro, for example is undertaken by a lone female who is seeing the city and the Northeast for the first time. It begins with her scramble to the airport in Brazil's largest city, followed by a plane ride and a stay in a first-class hotel. The business portion of the trip, which is largely planned and fully financed by the young woman's employer, is then capped by an impromptu, more touristic venture when she decides to see the Horto on her last day in Juazeiro.

The second journey, in contrast, begins with a grueling bus ride from the coast into the backlands. The trip up the Horto hillside (only one of the pilgrims' varied destinations within Juazeiro) involves not one, but two routes—the second and more traditional of which the young woman remains wholly unaware. Like the majority of present-day pilgrims to Father Cicero's city, the group described here is participating in a venture for which its members have almost certainly scrimped and planned for months. While pilgrimage groups may

include first-time travelers, there are always other persons who have made the trip before. Then, too, although most pilgrimages include space for individual activities that may involve jockeying for power, they also reveal a strong collective dimension that makes it hard for the pilgrims to understand why the young woman would have come alone to Juazeiro.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the pilgrims' journey evokes past trips made by older family members as well as by their own younger selves. Although the pilgrimage is likely to have multiple dimensions—commercial interests, entertainment and escape from routine through new experiences—it retains a strong religious association largely foreign to the young woman's trip. Pilgrims, to be sure, may range from dedicated followers of Father Cicero to curious adults eager for a cheap vacation and teenagers in search of a good time while they help take care of Grandma. However, even those pilgrims who evince scant interest in the journey's religious dimensions are unlikely to pass up a miracle if one were to come their way.

Other, less immediately obvious differences between pilgrims and non-pilgrims include the pilgrims' complex and elastic relationship to Juazeiro as an urban space, their conscious mingling of the concrete and the mystical, their sense of a shared history of resistance to powerful enemies, and—above all—their vision of the pilgrimage as a space of strategic multiplicity that facilitates the creation of new present-day identities characterized by a sense of both possibilities and limits. As already suggested, what constitutes “the urban” in the case of the two journeys is by no means the same. For the young woman from São Paulo, Juazeiro almost certainly looks like a small, provincial town. In contrast, the Juazeiro which the pilgrims experience is apt to seem like a big city. There is, however, more to the pilgrims' vision than might first appear.

One might, for instance, expect those pilgrims from the countryside to view Juazeiro as a big city while travelers arriving from the densely-populated coastal capitals would perceive it as a small town. In practice, however, both groups tend to see Juazeiro as a distinctly urban space. This shared perception reflects the pilgrimage's ability to swiftly transform the city into a mass of humanity during the largest celebrations. Big-city visitors' strong sense of Juazeiro as urban also reflects their customary consignment to the economic as well as geographic fringes of cities whose more economically-privileged core they may barely know.

Juazeiro may seem far more accessible to these largely marginalized persons than their own places of residence, in part because, despite the city's over-all expansion, the pilgrimage remains one of its primary economic motors. Most pilgrims arrive with free time and a bit of money to spend on small luxuries (a nightlight in the shape of Father Cicero or a cheap wristwatch) that will serve as reminders of the trip. The free entertainment sponsored by the city, and the ubiquitous images of Father Cicero in shops and restaurants, may make the visitors feel more welcome in Juazeiro than they do back home. In addition, the fact that many pilgrims are migrants from the countryside who do not identify with their new places of residence disposes them to see this backlands city as a refuge to which they can return at will. Juazeiro's distinctive topography also makes it easier to recognize than a birthplace that may have suffered drastic changes, leading pilgrims to think of the city as an infinitely expandable and thoroughly Northeastern family home.

Pilgrims, unlike most tourists, are rarely nostalgic for a picturesque folk culture that they associated with poverty and backwardness. They are likely to view what outsiders might dismiss as urban sprawl as confirmation of Juazeiro's ongoing promise of a better life for people like themselves. This outlook reflects the more mystical belief that the city continues to have a *dono* or spiritual owner who protects and leads



it onward in the face of the State's ongoing failures to address its poorer citizens' most basic needs.

These needs include protection from the new-style urban violence that surrounds the pilgrims throughout their journey, but from which the young woman's discreetly-policed hotel and air-conditioned taxis partially shield her. Another major need is health care—while many pilgrims have pressing problems that explain the appeal of the pastor's free blood pressure readings, they often have no choice but to trust in Father Cicero, whose longstanding concern for the poor contrasts with the ongoing indifference of much of the elite. Though this indifference is hardly limited to the Northeast, it is particularly strong there. As a result, while the young traveler understandably takes the pastor's tent to be a municipal initiative, the city offers pilgrims very little in the way of health care. Likewise, while the massive Reception Center appears to underscore politicians' allegiance to the pilgrimage, it turns out to be more about appearances than any real concern for travelers' actual needs.

Necessity is not the only reason that the pilgrims look to Father Cicero. The history of Juazeiro—largely unknown to most business travelers—is one of resistance to, and victory over, Church and State hostility. The city was a hamlet until the final years of the 1880s—a period that saw the abolition of Black slavery and Brazil's transition from an empire to a republic, along with the threat of drought which gave rise to a displaced population desperate for work.<sup>17</sup> Father Cicero's ability to find jobs for many of the pilgrims who began pouring into Juazeiro in the wake of an apparent miracle in 1889, made it a refuge that his followers would defend in the face of the state government's invasion in 1914, and the crumbling wall in the Horto remains a potent symbol of the city's unlikely victory over powerful enemies.<sup>18</sup> However, while Juazeiro was able to repel this attempt to put an end to its self-declared independence from neighboring Crato two years earlier, the

city's detractors continued to seek its demise. Though the particulars of the "War" and other attacks on Juazeiro are often vague to present-day pilgrims, past struggles may still shape their sense of the city as a spiritual metropolis that extends far beyond the limits on a map. Indeed, in its ongoing identity as the New Jerusalem, the city is a boundless answer to the pilgrims' lack of other sorts of mobility in today's Brazil.

This more expansive spiritual dimension is particularly obvious in some pilgrims' claims that the city remains the site of an invisible orchard, an Ark-like boat, and a forcibly abandoned Horto church that will one day spring back from the oblivion to which a hostile bishop thought he had consigned it. Although the Horto's eventual destiny is for its riches to become visible to all, it is enough, for the moment that these hidden treasures remain a legacy that lives on within the pilgrims and their narratives.

In part a reflection of the Northeast's long history of social injustice—a complex story towards which the taxi driver of the first journey gestures—this idea of priceless treasures that must remain concealed so that they do not fall into the wrong hands is also a response to a terrain in which water may lie undetected within layers of ancient rock beneath an arid surface and fossils may remain embedded in ordinary-looking stones. The ongoing presence of these telluric mysteries, within a city in which acres of new construction stretch out in plain view of far wilder spaces, is, unquestionably, one key to the pilgrimage's ongoing appeal to a younger, more environment-oriented generation.

The multi-faceted nature of this history and its deep—though often partially unconscious—roots does much to explain why the pilgrim group described here should find it so hard to respond to the young woman's questions about the hillside's ancient rocks. It would be difficult for many of them to describe their feelings about the Holy Sepulcher to themselves or one another, let alone to share these with a total stranger.

The young visitor nonetheless still feels attracted to the site and almost certainly intuits something of the pilgrims' sense of its defiant mystery.

Although it is easy to see the pilgrims as a single entity, they are—as the young hotel employee suggests—a wide array of individuals who may recount dissimilar stories, engage in contrasting practices, and display varying levels of faith. “At least that is what people say,” one young traveler asserts when a fellow pilgrim rolls her eyes in disbelief at his story of how the Horto church will rise again. These disparate reactions suggest a strategic multiplicity in relation to Juazeiro that would be very hard for even the most empathic outsider to fully grasp. By this, I mean that the pilgrims approach a shared past in ways that facilitate its use in the creation of new identities that serve the present.

This “strategic multiplicity” reflects individuals’ conscious juxtaposition of concomitant, sometimes competing, frames of reference that make the pilgrimage experience less like an old-style movie, that unfolds through time and spaces towards a clear finale than a computer session involving numerous windows between and among which the user moves while switching size and focus. Clearly multiple, it is also “strategic” in the pilgrims’ interest in making sense of the varied elements that they encounter—something more important to many than is any sort of total passage into a transcendent space. This “making sense” transforms an experience that might otherwise appear to be narrowly religious and exclusively Northeastern into a platform for intense discussion and debate among persons whose often colloquial-sounding stories of miracles and marvels chronicle far larger changes—as well as obstacles to change—within Brazil.

The young woman from São Paulo is also trying to make sense of her experience in Juazeiro. Her initial quest is for a geopark whose tantalizing saga of the “old, old rocks” suggests the possibility of present-day human access to a time long before cities, and indeed, all earthly life

forms. She is nonetheless impressed by the pilgrims' generosity, their willingness to include her in their photos, and their concern that she not feel alone in a space that many see as special, if not sacred. Above all, she is surprised by the sound of her own voice reciprocating the old man's parting wishes for guidance and protection as she and the pilgrims stand together one last moment in this center of the world.

[Endnotes]

1. The perceived miracle involved the transformation of a Communion wafer into the blood of Jesus Christ in the mouth of the beata or lay nun, Maria de Araújo. Father Cicero was the priest during a prayer vigil held on the eve of what appeared to be an impending drought. For an introduction to the extensive bibliography on Juazeiro do Norte and the pilgrimage see Ralph Della Cava, *Miracle at Joazeiro* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1970); Luitgarde Oliveira Cavalcanti Barros *A terra da Mãe de Deus* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1988); and *Padre Cícero Romão Baptista e os fatos do Joazeiro*, 2 vol. (Fortaleza: Senac Ceará, 2012.) The first of this essential two-volume works (*A Questão Religiosa*) contains historical texts; the second, edited by Luitgarde Oliveira Cavalcanti Barros (*Autonomia Político- Administrativa*) offers newer studies along with an ample bibliography.
2. The state government's attack on the city was largely a response to Juazeiro's declaration of its independence from neighboring Crato in 1912 and the election of Father Cicero as mayor. Juazeiro's victory in this conflict caused the fall of the government in Fortaleza and the new regime named Father Cicero as Third Vice President (a largely honorary but symbolically significant title) of the state. For a discussion of the "War" of 1914 see Marcelo Ayres Camurça, *Marretas, Molambucos e Rabelistas, A Revolta de 1914 no Juazeiro* (São Paulo: Editora Maltese, 1994.)
3. Rome suspended Father Cicero's priestly orders in 1894. It threatened him with excommunication in 1897 if he did not leave Juazeiro (which he did for a short time) and then issued orders again for his excommunication in 1916 and 1917 which were never implemented on the local level. See Della Cava, *Miracle*, pp. 177-192.
4. A geopark is defined as a relatively compact area with geological heritage of international significance whose mission is to promote local culture and sustainable development. Unlike a U.S. national park, a geopark has no firm borders but is more of a collection of key sites that may have other identities and uses. The Global Geoparks Network is a United Nations-affiliated program, first proposed in 1999,

that had 111 members in 32 countries as of 2014. See <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/global-geoparks/> and <http://geoparkararipe.org.br/> for further information.

5. The sertão—which is around the size of France and Germany combined—remains the source of much of Brazil's most celebrated literature. For an analysis of its importance in terms of Brazilian national identity see Durval Muniz Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do Nordeste e outras artes*, 3rd ed. (Recife: FJN, São Paulo: Cortez, 2006.)

6. For an earlier study that permits comparisons with the more recent narratives and practices from the early 1980s described in this article see Candace Slater, *Trail of Miracles: Stories from a Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

7. Much recent scholarship on the relationship between tourism and pilgrimage continues to build on Dean McCannell's *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976) in stressing the increasingly blurred lines between the two. See, for instance, Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman, eds., *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), Dallen Timothy and Daniel Olsen, eds., *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), and Michael Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations and Encounters*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011.)

8. Much of the anthropological writing on pilgrimage emphasizes themes of mobility apparent in research by writers including Peter Adey (*Mobility*, New York: Routledge, 2009) and Zygmunt Bauman (*Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.) See, for instance, the account of pilgrimage as a form of mobility in late modernity in the work of Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) and in a number of the essays in *Pilgrimage in the Age of Globalisation: Constructions of the Sacred and Secular in Late Modernity*, ed. Nelia Hyndman-Rizk, ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). New studies that offer useful comparisons to Juazeiro have begun appearing in the Routledge Studies in Religion, Tourism and Travel and the Ashgate Pilgrimage Studies Series. See, for example, John Eade and Dionigi Albera, eds. *International Perspectives on Pilgrimage Studies: Itineraries, Gaps, and Obstacles* (New York and Abingdon, G.B.: Routledge, 2015) and Avril Maddrell, Veronica della Dora, Alessandro Scafi, and Heather Walton, *Christian Pilgrimage, Landscape and Heritage: Journeying to the Sacred*, (New York and Abingdon, G.B.: Routledge, 2015.)

9. The state of Ceará's third-largest city, Juazeiro had an estimated population of 263,704 inhabitants in 2014. The combined metropolitan area of Crato-Juazeiro-Barbalha had approximately 449,000 people

10. For growth-related statistics relating to Juazeiro see Patrick Cruz and Fabian de Stefano, "O Novo Mapa do Consumo", *Exame*, (22 August 2012) p. 41.
11. For photos of the 138-room hotel, inaugurated in December 2013, see [http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel\\_Review-g1733557-d6131666-Reviews-Iu\\_a\\_Hotel-Juazeiro\\_do\\_Norte\\_State\\_of\\_Ceara.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g1733557-d6131666-Reviews-Iu_a_Hotel-Juazeiro_do_Norte_State_of_Ceara.html).
12. Some residents of Juazeiro say that this "traditional" blessing was actually instituted by Monsignor Murilo de Sá Barreto, vicar of the church of Our Lady of Sorrows and an important advocate for the pilgrimage, whose experiences with the parish radio gave him a strategic understanding of the mass media.
13. These estimates are based largely on interviews and numbers collected by the parish of Our Lady of Sorrows' Pilgrims' Assistance Center in Juazeiro beginning in the late 1970s and extending on into the present. More comprehensive figures are sorely needed.
14. The great majority of *terreiros* are centers for Umbanda (a mixture of Afro-Brazilian religions, Spiritism, and Catholicism that emphasizes Afro-Brazilian deities) but there are also centers devoted to Candomblé, which has more direct roots in African religions and the deities called *orixás*.
15. Work on this massive church, on which construction began in the 1890s, was definitively halted by the bishop of Fortaleza in 1903. See Della Cava, *Miracle at Joazeiro*, pp. 83-84.
16. The tension between "communitas" and "contestation" is a recurring theme in the scholarship on pilgrimage. See Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) and John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991) for opposing processes that intertwine in pilgrimages such as the one to Juazeiro.
17. Drought has been a key factor in backlands history and the Great Drought of 1877-79 killed around a quarter of the total population of Ceará. See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts, El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2000, pp. 61-90.)
18. The triumph of Juazeiro contrasts with the destruction of Canudos, a messianic community in the interior of the northeastern state of Bahia, against which Brazil's newly-installed Republic sent four military expeditions in 1894-97. For a comparison of Juazeiro to Canudos, see Ralph Della Cava, "Brazilian Messianism and National Institutions: A Reappraisal of Canudos and Joazeiro", *Hispanic American Historical Review* XLVIII (1968) 3, pp. 402-320.