

BETWEEN FORGED MEMORY AND PLACE OF MEMORY: São Cristóvão's Fair and tradition

CARLOS ALBERTO CARVALHO

Adjunct Professor of the Department of Social Communication of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in the undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Communication, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. E-mail: carloscarvalho0209@gmail.com

MARIA GISLENE CARVALHO FONSECA

PhD student in Social Communication at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Master in Media Studies (UFRN). Journalist (UFC). Member of the research groups "Tramas Comunicacionais" and José Saramago International Chair. E-mail: mgisacarvalho@gmail.com

Volume 37
issue 3 / 2018

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 38 (1)
dez/2018-mar/2019

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Carvalho; C. A.; Fonseca, M. G. C. Between forged memory and place of memory: São Cristóvão's Fair and tradition. *Contracampo*, Niterói, 37(03).

Submitted on: March 27th 2018 / Accepted on: December 27st 2018.

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v37i3.19449>

Abstract

Located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the São Cristóvão Fair proposes to be a space that reproduces some characteristics of the Brazilian Northeast. The flonation in that space pointed to an atmosphere built from forged memories, in order to create and maintain a fixed and often confused tradition, due to the hybrid elements that circulate there. We treat, in this text, with memory and tradition, according to propositions of Ricoeur (2007; 2010b), and memory places, founded by Nora (1984, 1993), to reflect on the narratives that are woven by the São Cristóvão Fair. We noticed that the Fair, when selecting elements that would compose the cultural and geographic dimensions of the Northeast, operates more with stereotyped references than with the diversity of this Brazilian region.

Keywords

Memory; Tradition; Northeast; São Cristóvão's Fair

Introduction

Located in Rio de Janeiro, in São Cristóvão neighborhood, from where it takes its name, the São Cristóvão Fair – officially Luiz Gonzaga Municipal Center for Northeastern Traditions – is presented like this on its official website:

The Fair synthesizes Brazilian Northeast and offers visitors everything the region has to offer, exhibiting, in almost 700 tents, its traditional richness. It also provides the well-known enthusiasm for which our “dear land” is known for: Northeast Sound, forró, xote, baião, xaxado, repente, embolada, martelo, arrasta-pé, maracatu and other very typical sounds. (...) The first encounters that gave rise to the São Cristóvão Fair, also known as Feira dos Nordestinos (Northeasterners Fair) in Rio de Janeiro state, date back to 1945. At that time, Northeastern migrants arrived in Campo de São Cristóvão to work in construction. The lively party arranged to celebrate their arrival, marking the reunion between those who arrived and their relatives and fellow Northeasterners gave rise to the Fair, which remained around Campo de São Cristóvão for 58 years. In 2003, the Rio de Janeiro city administration reformed the old pavilion and transformed it in the Luiz Gonzaga Municipal Center of Northeastern Traditions. Nowadays, the Fair is attended not only by Northeasterners that wish to appreciate and remember their culture, but also by locals and tourists from all over the country (A Feira, 2018, highlights by us).¹

The fair’s presentation, by giving a brief historical overview of its origins and motivations, listing the typical rhythms and foods from their “dear land”, and describing the migration dynamics that caused people to move from the Northeast to Rio in search of work, brings important elements to what concerns us in this article: memory, its dynamics of constitution/manipulation and the places where they, at least presumably, would be preserved as from communicational strategies, such as songs, dances and reproductions of landscapes displaced from their original territoriality. The investigations at the fair are part of a research on cordel poetry that takes place there. As a backdrop, the fair’s general atmosphere, the decoration, the products sold, the food, the shows and the exhibitions summon a discussion about memory, which allows us to outline possible meanings that emerge there.

The purpose of our discussion here is to reflect on the idea of forged memories, based on Ricoeur’s (2007) concepts of remembering and forgetting, and memory spaces, according to some premises indicated mainly by Pierre Nora (1984, 1993) and François Dosse (2013). The sophisticated irony of Umberto Eco (1984), when dealing with the “hyper-reality” that would define the monuments in the United States that try to recreate European scenarios such as castles and museums, also helps us in trying to understand certain memory games found in the transposition of a Brazilian Northeast scenario to the city of Rio de Janeiro. It is essentially, however, an effort to resort to the French historiographical tradition as a theoretical path that allows us to delineate some aspects of memory and tradition.

Following Paul Ricoeur, we commence from the assumption that narratives constitute one of memory’s main artifices, both in its constitution and in the ways of modifying it. Narratives are created from choices – not necessarily conscious – that select what shall remain and what shall be hidden, in what constitutes the dialectic between time and space extension, or the suppression of the details of an event, of a life history, the saga of a community, etc. Thus, narrating implies complex games involving memory and the dialectical movements of remembering and forgetting. In addition, the plan for forgetting tends to be much broader, for it is all that is part of the phenomena – including the cultural ones, which are our point of interest here – but that are not included every time. This is because no narrative gives an account of the whole thing we call “real”. However, what is narrated, what is created as narrative, is what will be configured and refigured, being able to reach, through repetition and sharing, the formation of traditions. Narratives, in the broader sense proposed by Ricoeur (2007), can take on, in addition to their

¹ A Feira. Retrieved December 27th, 2018, from: <<https://www.feiradesaocristovao.org.br/page2>>.

written traditions, forms like painting and architecture, which permits us to take the São Cristóvão Fair as multiple narrative layers, that range from the stories that circulate there to the architecture and furniture that shapes it.

Choosing the features that are remembered can attain several meanings, both in the narrative and in the creation of physical spaces or commemorative artifacts. One is forged memory. This is what interests the one who narrates or promote celebration acts, in which memory is a fundamental constituent element. This is what we observe in the São Cristóvão Fair, which forges a memory of the Brazilian Northeast clearly marked by an idea of a fixed identity, one that is temporally delimited, even though it is lost in the hybridisms generated because it is located in a space that allows several exchanges and transformations. This discussion emerges from theoretical thoughts that we developed from fieldwork at the fair. Comprehending cordel poetry as a cultural manifestation strongly associated with the image of the Brazilian Northeast, we perceive, in the fair and in what it mobilizes, the need to discuss memories in the field of tradition, in a search for understanding the ambience in which cordel poetry happens (Carvalho 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2005).

Cordel is not limited to the leaflets, but to the set of traditions and performances that encompass bodies, voices, scenarios and temporalities – for which the fair’s environment is essential. In this sense, we take cordel as a poetry that circulates in printed leaflets, usually aesthetically associated with xylography covers that synthesize the stories’ main plot, but also as declamations of poems that have been around for a long time or that are created in improvisation and according to the circumstances of the moment. Cordel poetry can also be associated with musical rhythms like *repente*, as well as being put to music by the poets themselves or by other singers not necessarily related to the poets responsible for the meter and other features that compose cordel.

Our proposition here is not to compare São Cristóvão Fair to any other “original” fair in the Northeast, but to perceive the elements that appear in its narrative, which is part of a broad set of symbolic constructions about the Brazilian Northeast. We do not seek, therefore, to affirm what the São Cristóvão Fair should be in order to “faithfully” reproduce the Northeast, but to understand how the fair figures what Northeast would be, based on its own objectives of being a reference spot for people coming from that region, as well as for people coming from Brazil’s other regions and from around the world. On the other hand, being one of the authors born in the Northeast, the article uses this condition to indicate, according to the theoretical perspectives adopted here, the recurrent idiosyncrasies found in the pretensions of offering representations of a region so diverse and dynamic that never ceases to produce new social, cultural and economic arrangements.

Methodologically, we chose to make an account of the fair’s ambience before entering the theoretical discussions, considering that this path will allow us to better understand concepts such as forged memory, memory spaces and tradition, for this article is an exercise in interpreting narratives that emerge from the São Cristóvão Fair.

São Cristóvão Fair

Our first contact with the São Cristóvão Fair in Rio de Janeiro happened in a more “uncompromised” way. As a methodological choice, we decided not to present ourselves as scientists conducting an academic research at first, so we could only observe the dynamics of the fair, without taking sharp notes through writings or recordings. We only took occasional photographs for recording specific images that could get lost. We also defined that, at this point of the research, we would keep anonymous the poets identified with cordel cultural universe, since we are now discussing the space’s emerging contexts.

In a journey that started with the impact of our first contact with the fair to the challenges of new issues that surfaced there, our first *flânerie* generated much more questions than answers.

Methodologically, we recognize that this is essential to relocate us from the accommodation of prior knowledge. Moreover, at a moment's notice, the concept of tradition appears as the one that demands urgent reflection, as it is even included in the name of the Fair, supposedly of Northeastern Traditions. For example, the cordel poetry, which is what interests us here as one of the most "typically Northeastern" cultural manifestations, has little expressiveness in the fair.

The perspective of tradition came to us when we came across the fair's ambiance. Including its name, the Luiz Gonzaga Municipal Center for Northeastern Traditions (official name of the São Cristóvão Fair) looks more like a large area of festas juninas². There is an image of Luiz Gonzaga at the fair's entrance and a highly visible panel with an accordion identifying the place.

In the outdoor area, before the ticket office (there is an entrance fee from Friday to Sunday because of the musical shows), there is a playground for children with a carousel and a target shooting stand, both of which refer to activities that are common in Catholic churches' festivities and during vacation seasons in Brazilian Northeast small towns, as well as in the suburban neighborhoods of the largest cities.

The Center's inner decoration is filled with colorful flags – like the ones found in festas juninas, even though we were in October – in earthy tones, wooden benches, pau a pique walls and thatched roofs. These references recall two kinds of stereotypes: the celebrations (festas juninas, specifically) and the poverty caused by the drought in the region.

The fair's space is composed of stores that sell various products – hammocks, blankets, leather products, imported goods, Rio de Janeiro souvenirs, toys, food (both Northeastern and from other regions), perfumes. We also find bars and restaurants, with different determined areas for each one. The bars are in the vicinity of the fair, they play forró and brega music in a very high volume, the front signs pointing out to the drinks' cheap prices. They do not have a clean aspect, be in the front street or in its interior³. The restaurants are found in the Center's interior. Although they have messy lighting, they appear to be more pompous. The menus are described as characteristic of the Northeast region and have higher prices, and the decorations are more sophisticated, showing cultural elements that make a greater visual impact, like Northeast typical chintz and xylography. It is worth remembering that xylography constitute cordéis' illustration patterns, especially the covers. There are also open areas in which festivities take place, where stages are set up for forró shows and repente performances.

The place reserved to cordel poetry and repente is the Catolé do Rocha Square (a reference to a city in Paraíba state), which is just in the center of the pavilion, at the intersection of its main streets. A stage is set there with two chairs for the repentistas, there is a television equipped with sound and DVD systems, and there are stands at the corners where they display albums, books, sculptures, T-shirts and cordéis. There are cordel leaflets being sold in two other spaces: the Brazilian Association of Cordelistas' store, which is related to the Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation, and a stand in a secondary entrance. There was also an exhibition of cordel leaflets, that were not for sale, in a memorial that honors Padre Cícero and transmits excerpts from *Velho Chico*, a telenovela that was airing at TV Globo at the time. Its main location was a fictional village located on the banks of São Francisco River, in Bahia state⁴.

The images of the Brazilian Northeast that the fair offers us transmit an idea of regression in this region. In a way, they are images that retain a memory from its plastering, indicated in the website's official presentation, reinforcing the arrival of the Northeast migrant to Rio de Janeiro in search of work, mainly

² Typical June celebrations that take place during midwinter in most of the country. Many of the largest and most famous festas juninas in Brazil are held in the Northeast region.

³ The imagery we find in the bars' area (although it cannot be taken formally, since we do not perform a precise search for coincident symbolic elements, but that comes from an affective experience) brings us similitudes with bars located in Recife, in the surroundings of bus terminals bordering the Beberibe and Capibaribe rivers.

⁴ The exhibitions occurred in October 2016, when we visited the fair.

in the construction industry. However, we can notice, in both its internal and external areas, the absence of furniture or any other item that refers to the migrants arriving in trucks to Campo de São Cristóvão. Thus, there is a process of information selectiveness so that the Northeast migrants in Rio do not suffer the loss of images that could tell about the times when they lived in the region where they originally came from. That is interestingly tensioned with the new habits that these people acquire when they move to a new place and find themselves in the need to reconfigure how they live, considering that life far from the Northeast cannot be reproduced, even in a space that pretends to offer such a possibility. Therefore, even though there is an attempt to imprison what could be considered typical of Brazilian Northeast culture and reality, many of the original aspects escape from the practices performed there. An example is when a guitar player (*violeiro*) sits on the stage of Catolé do Rocha Square announcing “cantoria de viola⁵” and sings contemporary Sertanejo music, including artists of national fame in Brazil such as Vitor & Léo, or the electronic and industrialized *forró* of Wesley Safadão⁶.

We notice that these contradictions and possible confusions come precisely from the lack of malleability for the understanding and cultural accompaniment of what one intends to reproduce or transplant. In some aspects, the changes that have occurred recently in the Brazilian Northeast are not updated in the fair, but it is also important to emphasize the impossibility of transposing cultural practices, as if one place could be cut out of its context and inserted in another without influences and adjustments. What we point out here is that, despite the attempt to summon contemporary cultural manifestations as an idea of continuity, of transformations, the performed framing excludes many other identification modes of Northeastern audiences, for example, the absence of *manguebeat*⁷ and other musical manifestations. There are no books of other poetic and literary manifestations produced in the Northeast beyond *cordel*, whose presence is also not frequent or in the spotlight. There is also little attention to plastic arts. What they call “novelty” are products made in China, sold as souvenirs, and a dialogue between Brazilian Northeast imagery and the practices that take place in the region where the fair is located.

Our second attempt of *flânerie*, performed one year later, was methodologically distinguished from the first one because we wandered through the fair identifying ourselves as researchers. The general impressions of the first wandering experience remained the same, with the addition of perceptions from people with whom we spoke at the fair. For them, the fair is ambiguous in the case of Northeast migrants, oscillating between being able to make them feel at home and not recognizing the characteristics of their places of origin. These perceptions vary according to how long the person has lived in Rio de Janeiro, as well as if he or she has returned to the Northeast after the migration or not. There are people who have been living in Rio de Janeiro for more than three decades and that have not returned to the Northeast once, so the fair gives them an opportunity to feel a little closer to their homeland.

To reflect on the São Cristóvão Fair, we must consider the conditions of the city that houses it. Rio de Janeiro is a diverse and controversial city. It received a large number of Northeast migrants, but never completely welcomed them. It is a city exposed to diversity: because of its touristic profile, people from different cultures and from all over the world are constantly seen in the city’s streets and beaches. There is also the diversity that inhabits Rio. Whether downtown or in the favelas, the city is home for people of different origins, social classes, religions and cultural habits.

There is a pseudotolerant coexistence. Prejudice is present and crosses all social sectors that prejudice each other for many different reasons. The diversity we find in Rio de Janeiro does not necessarily

⁵ A popular way to name the performances of Brazilian traditional folk songs.

⁶ We do not understand that these musical references as non-identities of the Brazilian Northeast, but we notice that there is a confusion between what is announced and what is performed, which derives precisely from the hybrid experiences and the cultural transformations that are followed by an outside look.

⁷ Cultural movement that emerged in Recife in the 1990’s, mainly identified for its expressions in music, known for combining *maracatu*, hip hop and rock.

mean peaceful and respectful coexistence. There is also significant physical and symbolic violence, rejection and power relations that become very explicit when one arrives at the city. Urban, social and cultural issues are in constant conflict⁸. The eyes can see diversity, but it is not lived harmoniously.

This is perceptible, for example, when we observe Rio de Janeiro's socioeconomic disparities, like when they build favelas near the city's richer neighborhoods, as it is the case of Morro do Vidigal, located next to Leblon. The favelas became a landmark for the city and are sold as tourist attractions to people who pass through them as if in a safari, observing the bizarre, the strange. Or they become places of privileged sightseeing, where entrepreneurs open bars that are inaccessible to the people who live in the favelas, due to high prices.

The experiences of the Northeasterners in Rio de Janeiro are also not harmonious. Often called pejoratively as "paraíbas", these people are diminished because of their geographic origin and are victims of prejudices that portrait them as intellectually incapable to develop complex activities, lazy, inadequate to social and cultural standards of beauty and finesse, and naturally comic, an image propagated by Northeastern comedian characters that became nationally famous in Brazil. These people are generally accepted to work as janitors, door attendants, and waiters. When they are seen out of these jobs, an oddity seems to emerge.

Pau-de-arara, baiano, paraíba... are denominations of derogatory, discriminatory nature that the migrants originating from the Northeast receive in the Central and Southern regions of Brazil, especially when they come from popular or subaltern classes. It is this Northeastern, who usually comes from rural villages or small cities in the region, that attends the São Cristóvão Fair as an artist, seller or consumer (Pandolfo, 1987, p. 133).

So, the place to meet these peculiar people is the equally peculiar environment of the São Cristóvão Fair – which was born with this reference of territory and identity boundaries, and so it remains until the present day. It is as if the fair were a relocated fragment of these people's land, where they can be free to maintain their unusual habits of eating jerked beef, manioc flour and tapioca, dancing forró like spinning tops or listening to repente, buying handicrafts. They can dress in colorful and extravagant clothes, they can wear leather sandals, buy hammocks and, above all, cure a supposed homesickness by finding what would be their identity features there, in that environment and among other people who share the same feelings as them. Within the fair's limits, it is allowed to live Northeastern experiences.

The Northeast presented at the São Cristóvão Fair is not the contemporary everyday Northeast. The Fair does not "offers the visitor everything the region has to offer", as it suggests in the website's description. What we can see at the fair is a set of stereotypes that implies transformations precisely because it tries to remain static and plastered.

We notice the transformations in how the cordel image is not as strong at the fair as it is in some places in the Northeast. We also noted the absence, for example, of the coastal Northeast, that is a great wine producer, that has other literary productions that are not restricted to popular poetry, that has other rhythms and songs besides electronic forró and brega. While the transformations that we have perceived at the fair do not necessarily have a referential connection to the Northeast, as in the case of the singer who, in order to perform a "cantoria de viola", includes in his repertoire songs from the Brazilian Southeast sertanejo. The cultural transformations that take place in the Northeast are not the same ones that are being staged at the São Cristóvão Fair. This happens because the Fair attempts to represent another temporality, is located in another ambience, traverses other dialogues and, therefore, creates other narratives that are palatable for tourists, amplifying the visitors span.

⁸ As a Northeastern woman and being responsible for conducting the fieldwork for the research, the annoyances with prejudice and stereotypes were inevitable.

Forged memories and memory spaces

Memory and tradition are elements of the narrative that trigger the relations of time, traversing the three modes of mimetic experience, in accordance to Ricoeur (2010a, 2010b). The three modes are formed by the prefigured world (mimesis 1), which precedes and “guides” culturally, ethically and morally the links between time and emplotment; the moment of narrative configuration (mimesis 2), an act of organizing and adjusting events, characters and other discordant elements that allow the “synthesis of heterogeneous”, transformed into a coherent story; and the refiguration (mimesis 3), an act that is renewed whenever a narrative is read and, by the interpretation of the one who reads it, refigured.

Here, we understand the configuration of narratives not only in their written, historiographical or literary forms, but also in the form of plastic arts, architecture, etc. This process of configuration activates the collective memory (Ricoeur, 1999, 2007; Le Goff, 2013). The concept of collective memory is broad and contains many controversies, which fall outside the scope of this article, and that is why we refer to the authors in the bibliography for further details. Here, we understand it as “those shared memories that outline the ethnic, cultural, or religious identity of a given collectivity” (Ricoeur, 1999, p.17). This is because, according to Ricoeur, memories are not completely individual, for they rely on the memories of others, and our memories are embedded in collective narratives, according to how history progresses in our social groups. Therefore, these and the other forms of memory are susceptible to manipulation, falsification and to the remembering and forgetting dialectic.

On a level that Ricoeur (2007) classifies as practical (or pragmatic), memory abuses result from a manipulation between remembering and forgetting by those who hold the power to do so, and are linked to distortions that depend on the phenomenal level of the ideologies. There is a dialectic plan instituted in this process of memory manipulation, making its abuses also abuses of forgetting. “The same events can mean glory for some and humiliation for others. Celebration for a side can correspond to the other’s execration. That is how real and symbolic wounds are stored in the archives of collective memory” (p. 96). Memory at this level has to do with the exercise of a power that determines what shall be remembered and what shall be forgotten. From this authority system derives the dialectical questions that constitute a dispute of meanings.

The development of nationalist ideals in fascist states is based on this exact idea of creating a collective memory from the dialectic between remembering and forgetting. They forge narratives in which they select what should be remembered, what should be in books, in stories, what are the cultural activities that shall receive investments to be maintained, so that they can become tradition. They are the narratives that seek to maintain supposedly original forms and structures and they contribute to reverberate the narratives that interest the official authority. These general characteristics allow us to think of these memory abuses beyond the authoritarian states’ strategies, and can even help us understand memory processes found in monuments, in religious or civic celebrations, in museums and in places that, as we saw in São Cristóvão Fair, develop strategies of cultural identification in articulation with memory.

Memory, in its ideological dimension, is “an elusive form of forgetting that originates from dispossessing social actors of their original power to narrate themselves” (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 455). What will be remembered is defined along the choice of what should be erased. It is a permanent negotiation about what should be remembered, which is outlined by what will be forgotten. Forgetting is not the opposite of memory, but what defines it. In this perspective, to deal with the remembering and forgetting dialectic is not something restricted to an act of making history, but it is about the possibilities of narratives failing to account for all perspectives of a determined event. The narrative entails, according to Ricoeur (2007), a selective dimension that configures it.

The strategies for forgetting graft directly into this configuration work: one can always narrate differently, by suppressing, displacing the emphases, reconfiguring in a distinct way the protagonists of the action as well as its outlines. (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 455)

The collective memories that we could apprehend in the São Cristóvão Fair are sets of individual memories that we perceive when we talk to the actors who traverse the spaces. An example is when the cordel seller talks about the fair's recent changes, that it is becoming less profitable, so the poets are no longer interested in going there on Sunday to work. Or when a gentleman sits down to talk about how he likes the place, revealing that he attends it weekly, even though he was not born or raised in the Brazilian Northeast. Ricoeur (1999) points to individual memories as qualities of the experiences lived by the individuals. Moreover, it is through the narratives that these memories are transferred among actors, enabling the creation of new narratives.

According to Ricoeur (1999), memory is the presence of something that is absent, in agreement with Saint Augustine's (memory as the present of the past) and Husserl's meditations (the past retained in the present). It is the possibility of appealing to the past to recover and recreate narratives. Individual memory offers continuity in the present to the events of the past. Thus the remembered past depends on representation, not on presence.

This is an essential topic to meditate upon the representations that the São Cristóvão Fair carries within itself, what representations come from the memories evoked in its arrangements, and how this process corroborates the idea of a memory that is forged for standing as a reference to a fabricated identity. The Northeast references that the fair explores are taken as sufficient for creating a memory, and these elements are understood as tradition.

The São Cristóvão Fair carries a representation imagery of cultural manifestations that are dislocated from their original space and that are delimited by the walls of the Center for Northeastern Traditions, accessible only to those who pay the entrance fee. In this place, a particular representation dictates what will be remembered, creating a particular narrative. It is a representation based on the complementary notions of tradition/traditions/traditionality, or on a memory based on an attempt to create an identity.

Ricoeur (2010b) proposes that traditionality is a dialectic between innovation and sedimentation, which indicates a living history, whose references are created in the narratives by the memories that it articulates. Following this conception, Ricoeur (2010b, p. 387) differentiates three concepts: traditionality, traditions and tradition.

1) Traditionality is the chain of continuity that implies our "to-be-affected-by-the-past" in the dialectic between interpreted past and interpretive present that originate from a "meaning-generating transmission" (p. 377);

2) Traditions are contents that involve meanings that are transmitted, they are "things said in the past that reached us through a chain of interpretations and reinterpretations" (p. 379);

3) Tradition is related to the presumption of truth of a past through propositions of meanings, which cannot be stabilized, however, as the ideas of traditionality and traditions indicate.

It is memory that tradition seeks to secure. This is what happens, for example, when we have a series of elements that refer to the Brazilian Northeast in an attempt to make the visitors identify with the fair, such as decoration in earthy tones, São João flags, the choice of forró as background music and the use of images of Northeastern characters. These are forged references and they contribute to the maintenance of an image of the Northeast that, for being a selected part, does not contemplate the diversity of identities and references that are possible when it comes to people. There are dialogues, including territorial and cultural ones, that act in the construction of memories, in the making of these selected parts, and that are critical for the negotiation of what is elected to be remembered.

The Brazilian Northeast narrative that is fabricated at São Cristóvão Fair is one that aims to enable memory elements of Northeastern people in Rio de Janeiro, but at the same time pretends to offer the city residents and the tourists coming from different parts of the country and the world a "small-scale representation" of that location. To accomplish this, the narrative uses stereotyped elements for

establishing a fixed image of the region. This is the image that must be maintained and propagated. This is one of the fair's main problems, regarding the recognition of Northeastern people: the ones who came from a Northeast that is different from the one staged at the Center do not necessarily share the required identification. Moreover, obviously, the inevitable transformations do not follow the cultural flow of what is truly happening in the Northeast. Instead, they create a hybrid with the other space where the practices are staged repeatedly. It is intended to maintain a fixed collective memory, but being a memory, arising from past experiences, it cannot remain still and is constantly incorporating new elements and dialogues.

Collective memory consists only of the set of footprints left by events that have affected the course of the history of the involved groups, who have the ability to present these common memories as a reason for festivities, rituals and public celebrations. (...) Written history constitutes a foundation that supports the phenomenological existence of these groups. (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 19)

In this sense, in our first visit to the fair, we watched a presentation that was identified as “cantoria de violeiros”, in the Cordel square. What they sang was the sertanejo music from the Southeast. The memory, which formed a narrative that the Center wants to retain fixed, does not follow the transformations that change the meanings and configure what constitutes a Northeastern tradition. From other experiences, new memories are formed and the idea of memory maintenance fails. Because in the end, for all the transformations undertaken, we will have other individual memories, something that departs from the idea of collective memory as an average of memories, because this average is the glue that tries to fix the narrative of memory, from which, by individual experiences and the passage of time, tradition runs away. And, by doing so, tradition constantly reformulates itself.

What we have in the narratives of the São Cristóvão Fair is the mark of absence. Brazilian Northeast is not present in its entirety – nor could it be at all – in a fair in Rio de Janeiro. What we find are some elements that reference the Northeast, mainly the music and the food, which nowadays are easily found in any major supermarket. What we found there is an image that hardly corresponds with the contemporary experiences lived in the Brazilian Northeast. Thus, there is absence in the São Cristóvão Fair, especially of the movements that led to changes in the Northeast region, such as those we have already mentioned regarding musical genres. There is also an absence of landscapes. Unlike the 1950s, when the fair was established and the main image references were almost exclusively from the drought, the Northeast landscapes went through transformations that incorporate agricultural crops by irrigation methods, to remain in just one example.

As a collective memory in the absence of the Northeast region's new configurations, the São Cristóvão Fair explores, in its decoration for example, almost exclusively what refers to the drought and *forró*. In this case, memory summons a presence of the Northeast in a place that is not located in that region. Therefore, for the reference to be made, it needs to use elements such as music, food, presentations, products and the people that carry with them elements of a Northeastern memory, and that, in the territorial absence of the region, create a presence in the relations that emerge at the fair. In this case, we are facing the absence due to a geographical issue, since the products, works and people identified with the Brazilian Northeast can transit in a space that allegedly reproduces its “dear land”, as signaled in the Fair's official website. However, the references we have sought relate to the nostalgia of the people who left the Northeast to live in Rio de Janeiro and stage in São Cristóvão Fair the place where they no longer live. In this way, as if the land could be transposed, the practices developed there, which aim to create a presence in the absence, display the flaws of this movement that requires other dialogues and that shows the edges that are left overs from the attempts of reproduction. Therefore, we are also facing the problems raised by the perspective of memory spaces.

Pierre Nora (1993, p.21) problematizes the memory spaces pointing to some unavoidable tension spots: “simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, immediately offered to the most sensitive experience

and, at the same time, excelling from the most abstract formulation". Traces, vestiges, documents, testimonies, as well as museums, memory centers, historical buildings and other forms of monuments and registers constitute memory spaces, which are essential to the historian's craft, allowing, for example, the comprehension of events and their dynamics (Dosse, 2013). Although the human brain itself can be a memory space, just like the many different data storage technologies, our concern here is focused on physical territories as memory spaces, such as the São Cristóvão Fair, as we have already presented in what poses as questions for our reflections.

To put into perspective the notions of forged memory, according to the remembering/forgetting dialectics, and memory spaces allow us to better understand what is at stake in the São Cristóvão Fair, with its peculiar strategies of presenting the Brazilian Northeast to the non-northeastern inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro and to tourists from all over the world, simultaneously offering the migrant from that region what could be taken as an authentic piece of his or hers "dear land". Regarding the memory spaces specifically, Nora's propositions are illuminating:

Unlike all objects in history, memory spaces have no referents in reality. Or rather, they are their own referent, signs that return to themselves, signs in their pure state. Not that they have no content, physical presence or history; on the contrary. But what makes them memory spaces is exactly what makes them escape from history. (Nora, 1993, p.27)

In the memory spaces, there is some sort of insurmountable contradiction, since they pretend to be faithful to what has constituted the history of a society, a place, an event of great repercussion or a physical space, but, in order to fulfill this objective, they need to suppress exactly the pretense of reproduction, in the very same way, of the object they are referring to. Naturally, the problem gains intricacy when we consider the possibility of scrutinizing places such as the São Cristóvão Fair according to the logic of memory spaces, since we are faced with a series of physical and symbolic artifacts that allegedly reproduce their referent, whose existence is contemporary to them, and therefore can be analyzed in the fidelity of its representation of something that is not definitively lost in the mists of a remote past. The Brazilian Northeast that presents itself in the São Cristóvão Fair can only acquire meaning through suppressions that attempt to synthesize the cultural, geographical, ethnic composition and other variables that form the multiplicity of a Northeast's real existence, whose extensive territoriality is only one of the challenges to physical and symbolic synthesis.

Nora explains that memory spaces are, consequently, spaces of excess: of images, symbols, selected parts. Those excesses bring us closer to the view proposed by Umberto Eco, in a different analytic perspective, of semiotic and non-historiographical influences, when he makes feral meditations, overflowing fine irony and sarcasm, about how the United States designs monuments, museums and even entire cities in which hyper-reality is the stamp that confuses the authentic and the original. The strategy of reproducing European palaces, which may even include importing piece by piece from the original palaces, but when this is not possible, the search for similar materials (like marble) in the locations from where they were originally extracted to build the European buildings, all this does not eliminate warnings about what is authentic and what is an authentic copy of the authentic, reproduced in its minimal details. Therefore, we can comprehend the São Cristóvão Fair, following Umberto Eco's thoughts on creations centered on the hyper-reality perspective, as a project in which the true and the false are deliberately disordered.

To speak of things that are meant to be true, these things must seem true. The "all true" identifies itself with the "all false". Absolute unreality offers itself as a real presence. In the reconstructed office [Eco refers to the reconstitution of the White House office, in the United States], the ambition is to provide a "sign" that does not seem like one at all; the sign aspires to be the thing, and to abolish the difference of

remitting, the mechanics of substitution. Not the image of the thing but its decal, or rather, its double. (Eco, 1984, p.13)

Due to the small proportions of the São Cristóvão Fair compared to its geographical reference, the Brazilian Northeast, it is clear that the relationship between sign and referent is more complex since the starting point. But the hardships of creating connections between thing and decal, due to Brazilian Northeast cultural diversity, despite selecting what would supposedly be its more universal characteristics, such as the leather hat, gibão⁹, jerked beef and other typical dishes, forró or religious references like Padre Cícero. In this sense, the cordel poetry that motivated us to wander through the São Cristóvão Fair in search of the Brazilian Northeast symbols symptomatically rests there more as an absence rather than a presence, or we could say an absent presence. Always remembered because it composes the place and its scenarios, even when it is not found beyond the forms fixed by the books.

Conclusions

Every narrative is a selection of parts; it is framing, and choice. They are elements that enter the plotment to the detriment of others who are left out, because no narrative accounts for the wholeness of the events. Fairs, as narratives, with symbolic formulations on cultural elements or on the cities that indicate how they want to be identified and recognized, tell us about power relations, dialogues and memories. Thus, reflecting on these articulations is crucial to understand the performances that emerge in these locations, which have these elements as part of their composition.

This is the idea of the absent presence that appears as constitutive of the idea of forged memory. Individuals in co-presence refer to objects, phenomena and events that are absent at the moment of the performance. However, they are brought into presence in the form of narrative. Ricoeur (1999) arrives at this conclusion through Koselleck's concepts of "horizon of expectation" and "space of experience", which are defined as "the ensemble of legacies of the past whose sedimented footprints constitute, in a certain way, the soil on which rest the desires, fears, predictions, projects and, in short, all anticipations that project us into the future" (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 22). In this research, it refers to the set of feelings, affects and references that identify the Brazilian Northeast in a fair located in the Southeast region.

This direct us to the reflections around the idea of a contextuality of the performance (Zumthor, 2010, 2014), considering that the context is not a background, but a part of the process of narrative plotment of the world, that presents itself as a constitutive element of the limits and possibilities of what is and how it is performed. The São Cristóvão Fair is a fruit that, ripped from the tree where it grows, no longer receives its supplies and no longer is presented with the tree's vitality. Like this ripped fruit, the fair's maturation is rushed and its lifespan seems to diminish, at least in a metaphorical perspective, if we understand life as a constant renovation that comes from new cultural elements that are incorporated into the dynamic and multifaceted life of the Brazilian Northeast, including the cordel poetry, which incorporates new themes and new propagation arrangements to its narrative strategies, for example, sharing the texts online.

Considering that, we encountered a fair that simultaneously presents signs of a stagnant past and proposes transformations that, at first sight, are no longer related to the past of the geographical and cultural referent that it intends to preserve. This occurs because the Fair cannot deny the mutable character of the cultural practices or ignore elements of the context that composes it. Although barriers have been lifted in order to establish limits and prevent the interchanges of cultural practices, the people who enter the fair take and bring their experiences. All together, they are put to tension and what we see emerging is the clash between what changes and what remains to maintain recognition for that place. At this point, we

⁹ A leather jacket used by vaqueiros (cowboys) in the region.

identify the conditions that lead to the possible unraveling of strategies to forge memories of the Brazilian Northeast for audiences that originate from that region, but they do not leave aside inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro and the ethnic, geographic and cultural diversity of thousands of tourists that pass by the São Cristóvão Fair, a memory space that pretends to safeguard the traditions of the “dear land”.

Acknowledgements

The researches that made the writing of this article possible were financed by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes), Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) and Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais (Fapemig).

References

- Carvalho, G. de. (2002a). Cordel, cordão, coração. **Revista do GELNE** (UFC), v. 4, p. 285-292.
- Carvalho, G. de. (1999). **Madeira matriz**: cultura e memória. São Paulo: Annablume.
- Carvalho, G. de. (2002b). **Patativa**: poeta pássaro do Assaré. Fortaleza: Omni Editora Associados Ltda.
- Carvalho, G. de. (2005). **Tramas da Cultura**: comunicação e tradição. Fortaleza: Museu do Ceará.
- Dosse, F. (2013). **Renascimento do acontecimento**: um desafio para o historiador: entre Esfinge e Fênix. São Paulo: Editora Unesp.
- Eco, U.. (1984). **Viagem na irrealidade cotidiana**. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.
- Hartog, F.. (2013). **Evidência da história**: o que os historiadores veem. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora.
- Havelock, E. A. (1996). O oral e o escrito: uma reconsideração. *In*: Havelock, E. A. **A revolução da escrita na Grécia**. São Paulo: Unesp; Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T.. (2012). **A invenção das tradições**. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.
- Le Goff, J.. (2013). **História e memória**. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.
- Lemaire, R.. (2008). Entre Oralidade e Escrita: as verdades da verdade. *In*: **Actas do congresso Literaturas marginais**, Porto, Ed. da Universidade do Porto, Portugal.
- Lemaire, R.. (2007). Rer ler os textos: resgatar as vozes. *In*: FUNK, G. **Estudos sobre Patrimônio oral**. Câmara Municipal de Ponta Delgada. Açores.
- Lemaire, R. (2010). Tradições que se refazem. **Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea**, n. 35, p. 17-30.
- Nora, P.. (1984). O acontecimento e o historiador do presente. *In*: NORA, Pierre e outros. **A nova história**. Lisboa: Edições 70, p. 45-56.
- Nora, P.. (1993). **Entre memória e história**: a problemática dos lugares. Projeto História, (10), pp. 7-28. Retrieved December 20th, 2017, from: <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/revph/article/viewFile/12101/8763>.
- Ong, W.. (1990). **Orality and Literacy**: The technologizing of the word. London: Routledge.
- Pandolfo, M. L. M.. (1987). **Feira de São Cristóvão**: a reconstrução do nordestino num mundo de paraibás e nortistas. São Paulo: FGV. Tese de Doutorado.

Ricoeur, P. (2007). **A memória, a história, o esquecimento**. Campinas: Unicamp.

Ricoeur, P. (1999). **La lectura del tiempo pasado**: memoria y olvido. Madrid: Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Arrecife.

Ricoeur, P. (2010a). **Tempo e Narrativa**. Tomo I. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Ricoeur, P. (2010b). **Tempo e Narrativa**: o tempo narrado. Tomo III. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Zumthor, P. (2010). **Introdução à poesia oral**. Belo Horizonte: UFMG.

Zumthor, P. (2014). **Performance, Recepção, Leitura**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.