

Mirrors of the present in stories of the past and prophecies of things to come: Contemporary commentaries by younger female pilgrims to Juazeiro do Norte

Espelhos do presente em histórias do passado e profecias do futuro: comentários contemporâneos de jovens peregrinos a Juazeiro do Norte

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Abstract: This article analyzes stories told by younger female participants in the ongoing pilgrimage that honors the priest Padre Cícero Romão Batista in the Northeastern backlands city of Juazeiro do Norte. It devotes special attention to various sorts of stories and commentaries, concluding with a look at some present-day versions of prophecies that the speakers attribute to the priest during his lifetime (1844-1934). These prophecies tend to represent Padre Cícero as a sympathetic presence in a society that still looks with suspicion upon women who seek to better their lives through the pursuit of additional formal education and/or satisfying work outside the home. The space that they afford largely poor individuals to comment on the present and an imagined future makes them particularly revealing testimony to rapid changes and continuing challenges in today's Brazil. The narratives as a whole are of interest to educators in their capacity to involve younger along with older persons in the transmission of the past. As a result, the conclusion of my analysis offers a number of suggestions as to how these stories could and should be used in and beyond schools. These suggestions allow readers to imagine ways that the stories described in the body of the text may find new uses and meanings in an educational environment.

Keywords: Padre Cícero, women, pilgrimage.

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Resumo: Este artigo analisa as histórias contadas por mulheres jovens participantes da peregrinação que homenageia o Padre Cícero Romão Batista no sertão nordestino de Juazeiro do Norte. Dedicar atenção especial a vários tipos de histórias e comentários, concluindo com uma análise de algumas versões atuais das profecias que os oradores atribuem ao sacerdote durante sua vida (1844-1934). Essas profecias tendem a representar o Padre Cícero como uma presença solidária em uma sociedade que ainda olha com desconfiança para as mulheres que buscam melhorar suas vidas por meio de mais educação formal e/ou do trabalho satisfatório fora de casa. O espaço que eles oferecem aos indivíduos, em grande parte pobres, para comentar sobre o presente e um futuro imaginado faz deles um testemunho particularmente revelador de mudanças rápidas e desafios contínuos no Brasil atual. Essas narrativas em geral são de interesse para educadores no desenvolvimento da capacidade de pessoas jovens, assim como as mais velhas, de transmitir o passado. Na conclusão desta análise ofereço sugestões de como estas histórias podem e devem ser usadas além da sala de aula. Através dessas sugestões os leitores poderão imaginar novos usos e significados que as histórias descritas no corpo do texto poderão tomar no ambiente educacional.

Palavras-chave: Padre Cícero, mulheres, peregrinação.

Today's pilgrimage to the city of Juazeiro do Norte – one of the largest such journeys in the world's biggest Roman Catholic country – prompts several million people to travel to this location in the Northeast Brazilian interior each year². This at once highly traditional and yet decidedly unusual journey in honor of Padre Cícero Romão Batista (1844-1934) – a folk saint whom the Roman Catholic Church appears unlikely to canonize any time soon – attracts men, women and whole families from different corners of the Northeast and beyond³. I am interested here in the ways that today's pilgrimage to Juazeiro – today an urban center of some 300,000 people – continues to respond to stresses and moments of profound change in pilgrims' lives⁴. Although visitors of all sorts may engage in verbal exchanges

² Exact numbers for the pilgrimage are notably vague. While some of this vagueness in terms of participants has to do with factors such as whether it is an election year in which politicians open their wallets to pay for pilgrims to travel to Juazeiro, some is simply a result of scant recordkeeping on the part of the municipality. Classic academic works on the history of Juazeiro include Della Cava (1970) and Barros (1988). See too the helpful articles and primary sources in *Padre Cícero Romão Baptista e os fatos do Joazeiro* (Casimiro vol.1 2012; Barros vol.2 2012).

³ The visitors from other places – such as Rio, São Paulo, and Brasília – are almost all Northeastern migrants or their descendants.

⁴ Today, the once clear limits between Juazeiro and the smaller cities of Barbalha and Crato, tend to run into each other, creating a single urban area of close to half a million people that some call "Crajobar".

including highly traditional narratives and debates and my broader research concerns pilgrims of all ages, I concentrate here on young women in their teens and early twenties.

My focus on these younger women reflects my skepticism regarding statements by older residents of Juazeiro and a mix of observers concerning young people's supposed lack of connection to Padre Cícero and the past. There is no doubt that many of these young pilgrims' visions of the world and Juazeiro in particular is very different from that of their elders, or that a number of young visitors know little about the history of the priest or the city. However, I show here how many of these pilgrims actively utilize pieces of traditional stories and prophecies in accord with their own decidedly contemporary ends. Although it is possible to see this piecemeal approach as a sign of decline in older, formerly more detailed stories about Padre Cícero's lifetime, I understand these transformations as a process through which individuals find ways to make the pilgrimage and the Northeastern past more relevant to their own lives in a time of rapid change. The prophecies in particular offer a tantalizing mixture of highly traditional elements with a telegraphic form that assures their place in the age of Twitter⁵.

A brief note on the history of Juazeiro and women's place within it

I begin with the suggestion that Juazeiro – today one of the two biggest urban hubs in the Northeastern backlands or *sertão* – has long held a special importance for women of all ages. This importance dates back to the Cariri Indians – one of a relatively small number of matrilineal groups in Northeast Brazil – who gave their name to a sub-region that, while not immune to drought, remains far richer in water than most other parts of the arid Northeastern interior. From its pre-history onward, this area's natural wealth made it a magnet for indigenous migration. As a result, the Cariri Valley of southern Ceará became a sought-after destination for European newcomers eager to claim its fertile land for themselves. As proof of this importance, in the second part of the nineteenth century, the Cariri Valley accounted for four of the twenty-two Charity Houses or Casas de Caridade founded by the charismatic lawyer-turned-priest known as “Mestre Padre Ibiapina”⁶. Although these Houses had multiple purposes, one of the most important was to house a number of lay nuns or *beatas*⁷.

⁵ My previous research on the Juazeiro pilgrimage during nine months in the early 1980s allows me to contrast this earlier era with a later period stretching from 2004-2017 (Slater, 1986).

⁶ For an initial description of the Charity Houses see Della Cava (1970, p. 19-22). Ibiapina founded not one, but four such Houses in the Cariri Valley – one in Crato, one in Barbalha, one in Milagres, and one in Missão Velha.

⁷ Della Cava also provides a brief, but helpful introduction to the *beatas* or primarily lower-class members of the backlands “sisterhoods of charity” who resided in the “Charity Houses”. For research on these women, including Maria de Araújo, see a subject which has triggered more recent research including work by researchers including Forti (1999), Nobre (2014) and Paz (1998).

Ibiapina greatly influenced the future Padre Cícero, whose father is said to have died in the older man's arms during a cholera outbreak. This experience confirmed the young man's long standing desire to join the priesthood – a desire made easier by the construction at that moment of a new seminary in the state capital of Fortaleza. Once ordained there, the newly-minted priest returned to the Cariri where he assumed the religious leadership of Juazeiro. Although the latter was at that time a sleepy hamlet, no place was immune from the immense political, economic, and social tensions within Brazil that came to a head in the late 1880s. These anxieties sprang in part from the abolition of slavery in 1888, followed by the country's transition from an Empire to a Republic a year later. The impact of these events became yet greater within the backlands when an impending drought led Padre Cícero to stage an all-night vigil⁸. When the prayers ended, the priest offered Communion to all those in attendance, including a *beata* by the name of Maria de Araújo. After the wafer that he placed upon this young woman's tongue turned crimson with what those present believed to be the blood of Jesus Christ, news of the apparent miracle quickly spread throughout the region.

The first pilgrims who flocked to Juazeiro sought to venerate the Precious Blood of Christ that they believed had stained the cloths used to staunch its flow. A number of these initial visitors also made a point of paying homage to Maria de Araújo, whose status as a poor mulatta likely to have descended from the African slaves who labored on the Cariri's sugar cane plantations made the miracle a yet more surprising event. After, however, an official commission of inquiry went on to discredit the so-called "events of Juazeiro", the Bishop of Fortaleza prohibited Padre Cícero from mentioning either the miracle or the *beata*. Nonetheless, even as Maria de Araújo faded from view and Juazeiro came to revolve about the figure of the priest, the growing city remained a place where women continued to enjoy a special role.

Because Padre Cícero's long-standing friendships with local landowners made the latter willing to employ his job-hungry followers, numerous pilgrims of both sexes came in search of a new life on the land or in the growing city. As a result, while Juazeiro was above all a destination for men accompanied by families it was also a rare haven for single women eager to escape a difficult husband or father⁹. Although much of the Catholic hierarchy continued to look askance at the pilgrimage, a good number of these female arrivals viewed Padre Cícero as a male protector whose priestly identity could shield their reputations¹⁰. The pilgrims' custom of wearing a rosary whose medal pictured the Virgin on one side and the priest on the other suggests the ongoing presence of both masculine and feminine elements within the pilgrimage.

⁸ While the Cariri was less drought-prone than most of its neighbors, particularly prolonged periods without rain had severe consequences, as much because of human-caused and drought-related events (Davis, 2000).

⁹ For an excellent account of women's attempts to achieve a degree of independence in the second half of the nineteenth century within the Northeastern interior, see Santos (2012).

¹⁰ Francisco Renato Sousa Dantas, personal communication regarding family histories, Juazeiro do Norte, 7 June 2017.

The idea of Padre Cícero as the head of a patriarchal family not limited to blood relations but open instead to all newcomers willing to accept an authority grounded in spiritual precepts grew stronger with the priest's election as the first mayor of Juazeiro in 1912. The city's astonishing victory two years later over government soldiers sent to crush its newly proclaimed independence struck the priest's followers as clear confirmation of his super-human powers. As a result, despite the Church's continuing hostility to Juazeiro, Padre Cícero's death in 1934 did not put an end to the pilgrimage. On the contrary, people kept on pouring into Juazeiro, above all on the anniversary of his death and for the yearly celebration in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows, the patron saint of Juazeiro.

Contemporary stories, commentaries, and debates

These travelers to Juazeiro also continued to tell stories about Padre Cícero and the pilgrimage. This narrative tradition has stretched on into the present where these primarily oral exchanges often find reinforcement in printed or, above all, digital sources¹¹. The remainder of this paper concentrates on various facets of contemporary oral narratives, including prophecies that I heard from female pilgrims in their teens and early twenties during a dozen research trips spanning 2004-2017.

Many of the conversations cited below took place in rustic lodgings called *ranchos* or *pousadas* located near the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows. Other exchanges occurred on the Horto hilltop crowned by the enormous concrete statue of the priest or else amidst the rocks of the more isolated Santo Sepulcro or Holy Sepulchre located around an hour's walk away from the main part of the hill. Still other conversations took place in or around the church of Our Lady of Sorrows and the much smaller Socorro chapel, or in one of the two very different Salesian museums known as the Living Museum (*Museu ao Vivo*) and the House or *Casa* of Padre Cícero. Although I spoke with people of different social classes (a growing number of visitors stay in more upscale hotels or entire houses that their owners rent out during major pilgrimages), the great majority of the young women with whom I spoke had little money. Moreover, while these younger pilgrims were far more likely than members of previous generations to have some degree of formal education as well as routine contact with a larger world via the Internet, a number still lived in remote rural communities or else upon the margins of big cities whose centers they might barely know.

The young women with whom I spoke were definitely not all devoted followers of Padre Cícero. Like their male counterparts, many had come to Juazeiro with families whose older members (often a

¹¹ The printed sources were above all the rustic booklets formerly known as folhetos (now, as literatura de cordel), which came in part from the oral tradition and that were often re-incorporated in new stories based upon the poets' narratives in verse (Slater, 1982).

grandparent) had carefully saved up money all year long in order to pay for the entire family's seats on a weather-beaten chartered bus or a flatbed truck fitted with splintered benches. Some of these female travelers had set off for Juazeiro hoping to encounter young visitors from other places. Many were there to help care for small children or elderly adults. Still others said that they were simply curious about Padre Cícero – a figure about whom they had heard from friends and neighbors or had run across in the pages of schoolbooks about the Northeast. A good number had come in order to visit landmarks about which they had heard since childhood from older relatives. For some, the trip to Juazeiro had as much to do with the reliving of these sorts of family ties as it did with any type of more direct relationship to Padre Cícero – a figure about whom they might know relatively little. For others, the priest was above all an ongoing champion of the poor and, more specifically, of women in a still-hostile world. Even when visitors had no prior devotion to the priest, they might see him as someone on whom people like them could call for help in the face of need. “Se ele quiser fazer um milagre para mim, não vou lhe dizer ‘não’”, says one young woman, voicing a sentiment I would hear from various other pilgrims¹².

Some of the stories that these women told were deeply troubling. One young pilgrim who had been raped on not just one but two occasions as she walked home from her late-night restaurant job described how her father had placed the blame on her even though there was no transport available at the advanced hour that her work often ended. Instead, her one consolation was Padre Cícero, who appeared to her in a series of dreams that had helped her to summon up the courage to denounce the crime to the police. “Só ele”, she says with a sadness laced with defiance, “só ele mesmo não me abandonou e só ele que ficou ao meu lado quando eu não tinha como me defender na vida”¹³. When I asked the speaker if her female friends and relatives had not stepped forward to help the speaker shrugged and said that she had not wanted to share the story with others out of fear that they might pity or look down on her for what had occurred.

A number of young women see Padre Cícero as not just a hard-to-come-by source of unfailing help and acceptance but also as a historical figure who stood up for the oppressed – above all, blacks – in a moment when members of the elite often dismissed them as less than human. Stories from the past about how the priest scolds a family that refuses to allow a daughter to marry a black man of whom Padre Cícero respects for his honesty and hard work have often become are often part of larger conversations involving race today. While the speaker here notes that this story involves her own family she is less interested in its more personal aspects than she is in its ability to suggest larger, more systemic problems from the past that have lingered on into the present. “Porque, veja bem”, she says with

¹² Alice, age 14, interior de Alagoas. High school student, helps mother decorate cakes. Rolls eyes when asked if she has a boyfriend. 12 September 2012.

¹³ Eliane, age 20, Palmeira dos Índios, 3 pilgrimages to Juazeiro. Restaurant work (but has switched her place of employment). Hopes that Padre Cícero will work the miracle of finding her a good man. 24 August 2011.

something between sadness and anger, “estas coisas ainda existem. Você vê que mesmo hoje quando tem leis para proteger os direitos de todo mundo ainda tem grande preconceito contra o negro – não só aqui, mas também no Sul”¹⁴.

The notion of Padre Cícero as a powerful ally in confronting contemporary injustices is relatively common in these latter-day stories. Even when the narrators do not appear to have a strong personal relationship with the priest, they may insist that he stood up for women whom men attempted to disparage or ignore. Some may extend the conversation to include people’s right to express their sexual orientation. “Olhe”, says one young woman in a bright green T-shirt stamped with a picture of Padre Cícero labelled “Patriarca do Nordeste” (Patriarch of the Northeast), “naquele passado as pessoas tinham vergonha de tudo – não se sentiam capazes de falar destas coisas que quase todo mundo fala hoje”¹⁵.

Many of these stories are ultimately less the sort of traditional narrative with a beginning, middle, and end to which today’s pilgrims may still respectfully listen without comment than they are a series of heated debates in which two or more people exchange competing ideas about the past relationships to a very different present. One speaker who had been hunched over a cell phone looks up as her friend talks and says with a laugh that “o Padre Cícero era um padre católico desses muito sérios – acho que não teria gostado dessa coisa de homem com homem e mulher com mulher”¹⁶. The friend then makes a face and replies that “as pessoas têm direito de viver”. “E olhe”, she continues, “não vai pensar que os padres são uns inocentes. O meu Padrinho Cícero pode ter sido santo, mas os outros, não”¹⁷.

Still other young women see Padre Cícero as an emblem of a past that is rapidly receding from view with the disappearance of an older generation. While some of these pilgrims describe the Juazeiro that existed in the priest’s time as less frenzied, others reject this more peaceable vision as hopelessly romantic. “Tem gente que acha que o passado era melhor”, says one woman in a pink straw hat with a green ribbon designed to keep it on her head as she pushed her way through the city’s crowded streets.

Mas, veja bem, o passado tinha muito sofrimento, muita fome, muita ignorância. Dou valor a tudo que os nossos pais lutaram para conseguir. Mas, acho que o presente, mesmo com tudo que ele tem de ruim, ainda é melhor. Agora, o Padrinho Cícero

¹⁴ Janaína, age 18, Campina Grande, first pilgrimage to Juazeiro (“though I was here in my mother’s belly”). Works as an aide in a grade school. Unmarried with small child whom she has brought to Juazeiro. 12 September 2013.

¹⁵ Maria das Dores (“Dorinha”), age 19. Recife. Studies and works in a cell phone emporium. Born Patos, lives in João Pessoa. Unmarried but has a longtime boyfriend whom she plans to marry. 20 July 2012.

¹⁶ Maria da Fátima (“Fatinha”), age 20, interior of Piauí. Manicurist, works odd jobs; dropped out of school. Married but separated from husband, has a two-year-old boy.

¹⁷ Célia, age 22, Propriá. Works part-time jobs and helps her husband who makes artisanal sandals. 14 February 2009.

*tentava ajudar o povo, era o Patriarca do Nordeste e não só do Cariri. Por isso, as pessoas ficam visitando Juazeiro até hoje*¹⁸.

In a number of these evaluations, Padre Cícero serves as an emblem of an older Northeast that remains preserved in an updated but still familiar urban space that the tellers may know from television programs if not personal experience. They may argue that Juazeiro is one of the few places in the world today that remains a family home since even as the city continues to reveal rapid growth it retains numerous landmarks that recall another time. These landmarks leave no doubt in pilgrims' minds that Padre Cícero remains the *dono* or owner of a Juazeiro whose ongoing success gives hope to their own lives. "Porque nós somos como ele", declares one young woman. "Ele acreditava no pobre e o pobre ainda vai atrás dele com aquela fé que o futuro pode ser melhor. Assim que aqui no Juazeiro, a gente sente-se em casa, em vez de ficar com vergonha do que não tem porque é pobre, fica com aquele desejo de trabalhar"¹⁹.

For some of the many speakers who have experimented personally with Evangelical Protestantism before returning to Catholicism, Padre Cícero is someone with whom one can have the sort of personal relationship that Evangelicals may have with a particularly charismatic pastor. Some young pilgrims may go so far as to describe the priest as a kind of super-pastor – with, of course, the drawback that he is no longer here on Earth to offer them face-to-face assistance in their moments of need. Moreover, although the pilgrimage experience often deepens individuals' sense of community, this heady feeling of belonging to a family commanded by a saint may swiftly dissipate once the group arrives back home.

Despite this sense of Padre Cícero's less immediate presence, he remains a unifying figure in the daily lives of some young pilgrims from the countryside who view him as a particularly powerful intercessor with God and Our Lady of Sorrows. City dwellers may likewise view him as a daily companion in settings racked by a degree of violence that leaves many recent migrants feeling alone and afraid. In a moment in which divorce and the growing presence of drugs and gangs routinely splinters families and whole communities, this unifying quality is especially important to women intent on holding their families together. "Não é que eu sou um desses fanáticos do meu Padim Cícero", one young woman who comes to Juazeiro every year says. "É mais que vejo ele como uma presença duradoura na minha vida. Ele fica querendo que a gente vá para a frente; neste momento tão difícil para o Brasil quer que a gente fique lutando por um mundo melhor"²⁰.

¹⁸ Suely, age 20, Propriá. Works in "anything that comes my way and I know how to sew too". Separated from husband "but I wasn't really married anyway and it's found with me if he never shows up in my life again". 14 February 2009.

¹⁹ Jerusa, age 15, Maceió.. Goes to night school, works in a grocery store and helps her father sell vegetables on the weekend. Not interested in men "porque eles só dão trabalho para a gente". 12 January 2012.

²⁰ Lindalva, age 16, born in Timbaúba, has just returned from a year in São Paulo with her aunt. Student, hopes to become a nurse "se Deus quiser".

This same woman goes on to talk about the priest as part of a Northeast that remains important to young people and that has something to offer the world beyond its borders. She says:

Veja bem, eu tenho orgulho de ser nordestina mesmo porque com todos os problemas que a gente tem, somos ainda de uma terra com um passado. Agora, aquele pessoal de São Paulo nunca terá isso que a gente tem. Lá só pensam na grana, ficam naquele corre-corre para todo canto e assim nem têm tempo para eles pensarem quem são ou quem queriam ser.

Prophecies as attempts to use the past to influence the present and the future

Prophecies attributed to Padre Cícero are above all predictions for a future that the priest foresaw during his lifetime. These predictions may also function as telegraphic narratives that find their way into larger stories or less structured conversations. I single out a small number of these for attention here because of their role as pieces of the past whose uses include both present-day reflections on the priest and attempts to shape the future. Because a number of these prophecies sound like throwbacks to an earlier era, I was initially perplexed by their popularity among young women who did not seem particularly tradition-oriented. However, the more I thought about these generally brief pronouncements the more easily they seemed to fit into a world marked by the sort of brief and rapid communication characterized by a digital age. Moreover, the prophecies' aura of authority along with their ability to link the present to a foreign-seeming past gives them a sense of urgency that is often useful to the speakers' narrative objectives. In addition, the enigmatic nature of virtually all of the best-known prophecies invite individuals to furnish their own interpretations of sayings often credited to Padre Cícero.

Versions of some of the prophecies that young women tend to favor still appear in the traditional booklets or stories known as *folhetos* or *literatura de cordel*. A number of the most common of these prophecies are enigmatic promises of a future in which Padre Cícero promises that there will be "few hats and many heads" ("poucos chapéus, muitas cabeças"). Another common prophecy revolves around Padre Cícero's supposed declaration that the large stones once extremely common atop the Horto hilltop would one day turn into bread. The puzzle-like quality of these and other prophetic snippets have a particular appeal to present-day pilgrims who enjoy musing over their riddle-like quality. People, for instance, often suggest that the priest was envisioning a future in which the straw once used to make pilgrims' hats would become hard to find in a Juazeiro increasingly crowded with synthetic imports from China. They may likewise explain that the ancient stones which had previously littered the Horto would increasingly serve to pave new roads leading up the hill.

Prophecies such as the two just cited clearly date back to the time of Padre Cícero. (Whether the priest was their originator and, if so, what he meant to suggest through their riddle-like language is another matter). Other predictions attributed to the priest, however, are almost certainly recent inventions that correspond more to the hopes and needs of present-day speakers than to anything directly concerning the historical Padre Cícero. In addition, many of these more contemporary-sounding prophecies are above all strategic descriptions of that different, more prosperous future that the priest is said to have envisioned.

These prophecies do not necessarily run counter to documented actions on the part of Padre Cícero. We have already seen for instance, a story from the past that underscores the priest's insistence on not judging people by the color of their skin. This earlier narrative, however, makes no claim that the priest envisioned a future in which racism would disappear. In contrast, allusions to prophecies in which Padre Cícero assures his followers that the day will come when Blacks and Whites freely mingle would appear to have more to do with hopes and desires connected to the present than with concrete actions in the past.

Similarly, young female pilgrims' growing insistence that Padre Cícero championed a woman's right to secure a degree of education--something that would have been more easily available to men--is not without some factual basis. The priest's support for education for both sexes, for example, finds expression in the foundation of the Escola Normal Rural (Normal School or Teachers' College) within Juazeiro shortly before his death. This generalized support also appears in references by older people who can remember Padre Cícero's admiration for Protestant missionaries' ability to read and write. The priest was undoubtedly in favor of education in general and recognized a number of women's needs as well as their abilities. Present-day prophecies' accounts of his insistence on specifically female educational issues is probably less a reflection of past deeds than it is of present-day desires.

Moreover, there is plenty of concrete evidence for Padre Cícero's attempts to help women as well as men find work that would allow them to support their families. Present-day descriptions of him as an advocate for female self-fulfillment through a job outside the home may say considerably more about contemporary women's aspirations than they do about the priest. It is true that the great majority of female pilgrims found their way to Juazeiro with or without husbands or male relatives. These persons had no choice but to work from dawn to dusk as domestic servants, agricultural laborers, or dispensers of childcare and various other household services in other, richer people's homes.

This sort of labor, however, tends to be very different from that which appears in contemporary prophecies that see Padre Cícero as a proponent of radical changes in women's traditional roles. Frequent claims that "meu Padrinho Cícero falava de um mundo em que a mulher teria as mesmas oportunidades do que os homens" conjure up a world of possibilities for individual self-realization largely foreign to the past. Here, I am not suggesting that Padre Cícero did not support opportunities for

women or that he would oppose their desire for personal fulfillment. Rather, my point is that the possibilities available to people of both sexes in his time were considerably more limited than they are today. While life remains extremely difficult for many present-day pilgrims of both sexes, a sizable percentage of both men and women are apt to harbor ideas of personal fulfillment along with economic advancement.

Younger female pilgrims have good reason to see Padre Cícero as a sympathetic presence. Likewise, the prophecies that they attribute to him often have some grounding in historical fact. Indeed, these sorts of present-day prophecies underscore the degree to which the priest still plays a significant role in the lives of younger pilgrims who may have little idea of, or much concrete interest in, the workings of an older Juazeiro. These pilgrims' continuing interest in Padre Cícero as both model and protector in a present-day age rife with questions concerning race, gender and competition among religions suggests a more vital presence of the priest among young travelers to Juazeiro than might initially appear.

In other words, even while Padre Cícero remains firmly linked to an earlier era, this era—like our own—is not necessarily static. The adaptive twists characteristic of present-day stories in general and contemporary prophecies in particular make the priest a continuing source of identity in a globalizing world that young people may simultaneously reject and embrace in order to create their own identities. As a result, even when young people roll their eyes at the pilgrimage's more traditional aspects, they may still be quick to assert that Padre Cícero is “uma parte do Nordeste que fica com a gente e não morre”. Continuing discrimination towards Northeasterners by persons from other parts of Brazil who look down on them as poor and backward finds a retort in pilgrims' claims that they, at least, possess a history and an enduring home that just so happens to be the timeless center of the world. In this sense, Padre Cícero remains one of the rare individuals who will not betray them; a lingering presence that remains a legacy upon which they can draw even while they reshape it to their own ends. This legacy is particularly important to today's young women who seek to use it as a bridge into a better future.

A look back over the stories and the prophecies

This better future has become harder to imagine, let alone achieve, in the face of the economic and political setbacks following the fall from power of the progressive Workers Party that governed Brazil between 2003 and 2016. In the present-day context of ongoing setbacks, stories and more telegraphic prophecies about Padre Cícero often serve to express larger visions of the increasingly fraught relationship between an uneasy present and a future that many Brazilians feel has lost its way. As a result, it is not surprising to find that the same young women who shrug their shoulders at many aspects of the pilgrimage to Juazeiro may also use it to invoke aspects of the past – real or imagined – that they

wish to conserve. The result is often a *mélange* that includes elements of a traditional past complete with better material conditions, physical security, respect for themselves as women, access to education and the right to dream. Not only are the prophecies which express these mixed desires generally easier to remember than are the longer stories that their listeners may have inherited from older relatives, but they may also help their young narrators to maintain the hope that things in a tenuous present will somehow turn out for the best.

Older female pilgrims whose youth was often far harder than that of their daughters and granddaughters, sometimes express impatience with what they see as these younger women's misplaced sense of entitlement and their perceived indifference to a more traditional Catholicism. They may also react negatively to larger changes in gender roles and accompanying behaviors. A few scoff at the idea that Padre Cícero would have championed work outside the home as a woman's right ("O mundo tem enlouquecido", more than one declared). However, even those individuals who affirm that Padre Cícero never said the things routinely cited by some young women may nod their heads at a number of the sentiments that these members of a different, less docile generation express. When asked if the priest actually made these claims they may shrug and say that he *could* have done so. "Ele não tinha mãe, irmãs, todas aquelas mulheres da casa dele que lhe ajudavam a receber todo aquele horror de romeiros?" some ask. Então, se o meu Padrinho não era do lado das mulheres quem os homens ainda maltratam e até matam nesse Nordeste nosso, então quem será o nosso protetor?" others demand.

In short, younger female pilgrims are likely to see Padre Cícero differently than do their older counterparts. They are more apt to acknowledge the inequities visited upon the poor which neither the Church nor the State has proven able and willing to resolve. At the same time, they may use the figure of Padre Cícero to insist on a Juazeiro open to increasingly heterogeneous practices and points of view even while it remains a family home. An expression of individual hopes, the prophecies in particular voice new, collective desires through well-worn and often cherished collective forms. In so doing, they suggest a present more nuanced and heterogeneous than that which many of their elders would describe. In so doing, they do not necessarily jettison Padre Cícero along with a pack of older gender expectations but instead create an ongoing space for him within a world that keeps on changing.

Reflections on the potential pedagogical uses of contemporary stories about Padre Cícero

A look over these narratives as a whole allows us to reflect on the relevance and potential uses of these varied, upon passionate, stories and prophecies by young female pilgrims within schools. The first point that I make here in terms of the stories' worth to schools and a larger educational process is that

Padre Cícero is far more than a religious figure from the past whom most Brazilians have seen on national news reports about the massive pilgrimage to Juazeiro. Rather, this figure in an old-style robe and hat is not simply a historical figure but, also and above all, an embodiment of the Northeast whom different individuals and groups can and do see in varied ways. As a result, it is possible to encourage students in and outside of Juazeiro to look beyond narrowly religious judgments to better understand and value not just the narratives of older generations but the young storytellers' own history. They can learn to take pride in a regional heritage that many other parts of the world and their own country have lost or never had.

In purely linguistic terms, the narratives are a precious legacy. Quite apart from questions of who Padre Cícero was or wasn't, they are culturally rich. Many of these accounts are deeply imaginative. As such, they are an invitation for listeners as well as readers to see the wealth that even the poorest person may possess and also to think about other cultural riches that set Brazil apart.

Within schools, these stories can help students to see the differences—and the links between—literal and symbolic truths. It is possible to work with these individuals so that they can understand the larger experiences and feelings that lie within accounts that may not appear literally true but are nonetheless deeply important.

In addition, the literary tools that these stories consciously or unconsciously employ can serve to spark discussions about the differences between oral and written accounts. Because so many of these stories appear in the *literatura de cordel*—whose authors drew on oral sources that then passed back into these same traditions—they provide a way of tracking the mixture of speech and writing in folk and popular communication.

The stories invite conversations both at school and in the home. They hold out an opportunity for young people to reconnect with older relatives who are all too easily dismissed as part of an antiquated past because of their frequent discomfort with new technologies. While these narratives may serve as the focus of oral exchanges, they may also lead into other sorts of stories about an older time in terms of customs and values.

The dynamics of these conversations are another opportunity for study. While students may initially think that it is easy to ask questions, they will soon discover that getting people to talk about a particular subject is often a challenge. How does the potential interviewer put someone at ease? How does he or she move from one topic to another so that the conversation keeps on flowing? What does and doesn't foster a real interchange of ideas and experiences? How can one tactfully change the subject? Here, the stories may invite a new look at interviews on television and discussions of the particular strategies that the interviewer is using to a particular end.

In regard to the particular stories we have seen here—and especially the prophecies, teachers can encourage students to think about their own desires for the present and the future in light of what the

pilgrims say. The point here is not so much whether what the priest says in these prophecies seems true or false, but what it has to do with young people's hopes and dreams for what is yet to be. Students can use the discussion to write their own prophecies, both in terms of what they think will actually happen or else in terms of what they would like to see. What do they think is actually possible and how could these sorts of positive outcomes become more likely to happen in terms of actions they themselves could take? Although I have dwelt on the stories of young women in my analysis, there is no reason that the commentaries and actions described in this summary should not be adaptable to a much wider range of individuals.

In short, the narratives that we have seen hold out a range of possibilities not limited to Padre Cicero or Juazeiro. While they offer material for thought, they also lay out possibilities for action. In addition, they invite the incorporation of older persons into larger reflections on the past and how this does or does not find its way into the present. In so doing, these particular stories emphasize the ways in which older literary forms adapt to contemporary concerns—in this case social and environmental changes of concern not just to young female pilgrims, but also to a public that extends far beyond them.

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