

# Four fishermen, Orson Welles, and the making of the Brazilian northeast

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# Four Fishermen, Orson Welles, and the Making of the Brazilian Northeast<sup>1</sup>

Courtney J. Campbell

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In December 1941, Orson Welles read an article in *Time* magazine entitled ‘Four Men on a Raft’, about four Brazilian fishermen who had protested their labor conditions by traveling nearly 2,500 kilometers for sixty-one days from the city of Fortaleza to Rio de Janeiro on a rustic sail-raft called a *jangada*.<sup>2</sup> Their voyage pressured Brazil’s so-called New State (*Estado Novo*) to recognize the fishermen’s trade as an official profession within the state’s expanding social programs and centralized labor laws. The fishermen – Jerônimo André de Souza (Mestre Jerônimo), Manuel Olimpio Meira (Jacaré), Manuel Pereira da Silva (Manuel Preto), and Raimundo Correia Lima (Tatá) – were successful in their protest, in part due to extraordinary national media support. The half-page article in *Time* would bring Welles to Fortaleza to film an episode for his movie *It’s All True*. While the movie was left unfinished, the fishermen’s voyage and Orson Welles’ attempt to recreate it projected debates about the meaning of the region from which they set sail onto a assumed international screen.

The fishermen had set out from the Brazilian Northeast – the region within Brazil often described as poor, backward, and a block in the road to Brazilian progress, yet also as the very

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Four Men on a Raft’, *Time*, 8 Dec. 1941.

root of authentic Brazilian culture, untouched and isolated from the world around it.<sup>3</sup> The term ‘Northeast’ came into use within governmental documents around 1919 as a way to refer to the drought region.<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1919, there was no ‘Northeast’, but only ‘North’ and ‘South’. In the 1920s, a group of intellectuals (the most prominent, Gilberto Freyre) organized a collection of essays and a conference in Recife to define the region in terms of its history and culture.<sup>5</sup> The 1940 census was the first to break the country into regions, placing within the Northeast the states of Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, and Alagoas.<sup>6</sup> The 1950 census would add the archipelago Fernando de Noronha, while the states of Bahia and Sergipe would not officially join the Northeast until the 1970 census.<sup>7</sup> While structurally, the fishermen’s protest pulled the most rustic element of this newly defined region into the modern legal apparatus of a centralized state, symbolically, the fishermen’s journey generated an archetypal figure that provided a way to talk about the Northeast in terms of culture and ethnicity, developing both racialized and folkloric characteristics of its people and uniting the semi-arid backlands and the tropical coast.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See esp. Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, *Nos destinos de fronteira: história, espaços e identidade regional* (Recife, 2008); Maria Carolina Morais, ‘Fases da intolerância na contemporaneidade’, *Leitura Flutuante*, iv (2012). For more on the Brazilian Northeast, see: Courtney J. Campbell, ‘History of the Brazilian Northeast’, in Ben Vinson (ed.), *Oxford Bibliographies in Latin American Studies* (Oxford, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do nordeste e outras artes*, 4th edn (São Paulo, 2009), 81.

<sup>5</sup> Gilberto Freyre (ed.), *Livro do Nordeste (Comemorativo do 1.º centenário do Diário de Pernambuco)*, 2nd edn (Recife, 1979). The first edition was published in 1926.

<sup>6</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. *Sinopse do censo demográfico: Dados Gerais* (Rio de Janeiro, 1946).

<sup>7</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Estatísticas históricas do Brasil: séries econômicas, demográficas e sociais de 1550 a 1988*, 2nd edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Other regional archetypes are the bandit and the religious fanatic, described in *Past & Present* or by its contributors in: Linda Lewin, ‘The Oligarchical Limitations of Social Banditry in Brazil: The Case of the “Good” Thief’, *Past & Present*, lxxxii (Feb. 1979); Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, *Os cangaceiros: les bandits d’honneur brésiliens* (Paris, 1968); Eric J. Hobsbawm,

The study of regions has a deep historiography. Geographers initially studied regions to avoid dogmatism when formulating general statements about the world, and later, as part of a ‘new human geography’, focused on the study of the interaction between people, place, and space.<sup>9</sup> Historians have also studied the formation of regions, regionalism, and regional identity, usually as subjacent to the formation of nationalism in their particular nation of study.<sup>10</sup> Historians usually place their work within the parameters of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger’s studies of nation and nationalism, arguing that regions and their identities are socio-historical constructs, just like the nations and national identities within which they fit.<sup>11</sup> Studies of region, regional identity, and regionalism in Brazil have followed a similar pattern, examining regionalism as an effect of the centralization of the national government or emphasizing that the formation of regional identities are an invention of

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*Bandits* (Delacorte, 1969); Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, ‘Messiahs in Brazil’, *Past & Present*, xxxi (July 1965).

<sup>9</sup> See, Courtney J. Campbell, ‘Space, Place, and Scale: Human Geography and Spatial History in *Past & Present*,’ *Past & Present*, forthcoming in 2016. See also, Hans Holmén, ‘What’s New and What’s Regional in the “New Regional Geography”?’’, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography*, lxxvii, i (1995); Anssi Paasi, ‘Place and Region: Regional Worlds and Words’, *Progress in Human Geography*, xxvi, vi (2002); Anssi Paasi, ‘Regions Are Social Constructs, but Who or What “Constructs” Them? Agency in Question’, *Environment and Planning A*, xlii (2010).

<sup>10</sup> See Celia Applegate, ‘A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times’, *The American Historical Review*, civ, iv (Oct. 1999); Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley, 1992); Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Mexico* (Minneapolis, 2001); Kolleen M. Guy, *When Champagne Became French* (Baltimore, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, 2006); Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (New York, 1983); Eric J. Hobsbawm, ‘Nationalism and Nationality in Latin America’, in Bouda Etemad, Jean Batou, and Thomas David (eds.), *Pour une histoire économique et sociale internationale: mélanges offerts à Paul Bairoch* (Geneva, 1990); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990).

intellectuals, artists, professionals, and bureaucrats.<sup>12</sup> Recent work – notably that of Stanley Blake, Scott Ickes, and Barbara Weinstein – has emphasized regional identity formation in Brazil as a historically constructed racial category.<sup>13</sup> Other recent works have stepped away from the category of nation to study the formation of regions that transcend national boundaries.<sup>14</sup>

Through an analysis of the fishermen, their voyage, Orson Welles' visit, and Brazil's Northeast, this article examines the role of the region in both imagining and moving beyond the nation in the twentieth century. It presents press accounts, intellectual essays, music, images, film, and the *Diário dos jangadeiros* – a scrapbook of sorts in which supporters from all social classes left messages for the fishermen at each port. While intellectuals interpreted the fishermen and artists romanticized them, the press claimed to transcribe the fishermen's words in articles and by printing the 'Diário do bordo' – a ship's log of sorts that Jacaré penned along the journey. In the *Diário dos jangadeiros* people of all ranks of society – including fishermen – shared their views and descriptions of the fishermen, offering us a unique source that is both bottom-up and top-down. While some signers wrote only their names, others wrote a page or more to the fishermen, describing their significance and encouraging them on their journey. Building on the work of Berenice Abreu who published a detailed account of the fishermen through the

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Weinstein, 'Brazilian Regionalism', *Latin American Research Review*, xvii, ii (1982); Ruben George Oliven, 'O nacional e o regional na construção da identidade brasileira', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, ii, vii (1986); Ruben George Oliven, *A parte e o todo: a diversidade cultural no Brasil-nação* (Petrópolis, 1992); Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do nordeste*; Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, *The Invention of the Brazilian Northeast*, trans. Jerry Dennis Metz (Durham, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Blake, *The Vigorous Core of Our Nationality: Race and Regional Identity in Northeastern Brazil* (Pittsburgh 2011); Scott Ickes, *New World Diasporas: African-Brazilian Culture and Regional Identity in Bahia, Brazil* (Gainesville, 2013); Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Durham and London, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the extensive work of Daniel Bach or Frederik Söderbaum on regionalism in Africa or of Prasenjit Duara on regionalism in Asia. See also: Tirthankar Roy, 'Where is Bengal? Situating an Indian Region in the Early Modern World Economy', *Past & Present*, ccxiii (2011).

perspective of expanding labor law under the New State and Catherine Benamou who examined Orson Welles as a figure within pan-Americanism, this article analyzes how the fishermen of the Northeast were transformed from brave labor organizers into non-threatening folkloric figures through a process of memory, narration, and forgetting.<sup>15</sup>

Examining the fishermen's story as a regionally-defining moment that transcended national boundaries provides a significant case study of how, by the mid-twentieth century, the nation came to be understood as a series of interrelated regions, with one region serving as both national scapegoat and root of authentic culture. This understanding of a nation of interrelated yet unequal regions developed through interactions that pushed beyond national borders. As the example of the fishermen of the Brazilian Northeast demonstrates, discussions on regional identity formation included the voices of elite intellectuals, state actors, workers (like the fishermen), journalists, popular artists, and international cultural intermediaries, who incorporated the fishermen's struggle into the national and international spheres. Once the film crews were gone and the protest long over, anthropologists, folklorists, and artists moved in, leaving a fisherman that served as a nameless, nostalgic symbol of the backward yet brave Northeast and a way not only to discuss the region's characteristics, but to visualize them. This figure, then, is not simply the invention of intellectuals nor is it only the reflection of an authentic working class or a burgeoning New State. Instead, the fisherman as an archetypal figure is the product of a cross-class discussion about the meaning of regional, working-class, folkloric, and anthropological figures and spaces within the modern nation and the world. The

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<sup>15</sup> Berenice Abreu, *Jangadeiros: uma corajosa jornada em busca de direitos no Estado Novo* (Rio de Janeiro, 2012); Catherine Benamou, *It's All True: Orson Welles's Pan-American Odyssey* (Berkeley, 2007).

tenor of this discussion changed as did the assumed geographic scale of the region's reach from local and regional, to national and international.

Understanding the relationship between region, nation, and world is important not only for interpreting the Northeast or Brazil, but for understanding the development of the modern nation. Oaxaca in Mexico, the Scottish Highlands in the United Kingdom, the Deep South in the United States, and the South of Italy are examples of one region – often the poorest or most agricultural – serving as counterpoint to the more dynamic capital cities of the nation as the area considered ‘backwards’, yet culturally ‘authentic’. These supposedly ‘isolated’ regions and their cultural identities solidified through their engagement with the world around them at a moment of intense international change and an expanding international consumer culture. As fears of accelerated technological change and cultural homogeneity mounted, so did attempts to preserve local culture, define authentic folklore, and catalogue regional archetypes, seen as rooted in the past. At the same time, ideals of progress and development accelerated, accompanied by attempts to identify the backwards regions and diagnose their nostalgic illnesses. Examining the fishermen's story within the context of the making of the Brazilian Northeast provides us with a cross-section view of how region-based nationalism developed in the twentieth century.

### **Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

Jangadas and their fishermen have served important roles in the history of Brazil. Deriving from the Malayalam word *changadam*, the word ‘jangada’ finds its origins in the Southern Indian province of Kerala, which, like the area where fishermen used the jangada in Brazil, was dominated by Portuguese merchant ports in the sixteenth century and caught between

Dutch and Portuguese disputes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>16</sup> The Portuguese drew upon a colonial imagination and vocabulary informed by their presence in southern India to describe the Brazilian vessel.<sup>17</sup>

The jangada – often the first thing that European travelers saw upon arriving by ship at the coast of Brazil – became a motif in nineteenth-century travel literature by authors who repeatedly described this mode of transportation with fascination.<sup>18</sup> These writers referred to the jangada as an object of wonder and distinction, while connecting it to a limited geographic space along the Brazilian coast – the area that in the twentieth century would become the Brazilian Northeast. In the 1941 translation of Henry Koster’s *Travels in Brazil*, the Brazilian anthropologist and folklorist Luis da Câmara Cascudo even uses the anachronistic designation of ‘Nordeste’ (Northeast) in the title.<sup>19</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, the fisherman Francisco José do Nascimento (1839-1914), popularly known as the ‘Sea Dragon’ (‘Dragão do Mar’), and his colleagues of the *Clube dos Jangadeiros* gained national and international renown.<sup>20</sup> In 1850, Brazil banned the international

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<sup>16</sup> Francisco da Silveira Bueno, ‘Jangada’, *Grande dicionário etimológico-prosódico da língua portuguesa* (São Paulo, 1963), 2022–3; Antenor Nascentes, ‘Jangada’, *Dicionário etimológico resumido* (Rio de Janeiro, 1966), 426; Ferreira, Aurelio Buarque de Hollanda, ‘Jangada’, *Novo dicionário da língua portuguesa* (Rio de Janeiro, 1975), 796; J. Almeida de Costa and A. Sampaio e Melo, ‘Jangada’, *Dicionário da língua portuguesa* (Porto, 1994), 1060.

<sup>17</sup> Luis da Câmara Cascudo, *Jangada: um estudo etnográfica* (São Paulo, 2002), 60. See, for example, Pero de Magalhães Gândavo, *Historia da prouincia Sãcta Cruz a que vulgarmete chamamos Brasil* (Lisbon, 1576), 76 [Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal].

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, M. Ferdinand Denis, *Brésil* (Paris, 1837), 256 (image 379 in Google Books pdf); Maria Graham, *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil and Residence There during Part of the Years 1821, 1822, 1823* (London, 1824), 99 [Bibliothèque Nationale de France, hereafter BNF]; James Henderson, *A History of the Brazil* (London, 1821), 357–8 (image 404–5) [Making of the Modern World]; Henry Koster, *Travels in Brazil* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois, 1966), 3; Maximilian Alexander Philipp Wied-Neuwied, *Voyage au Brésil dans les années 1815, 1816 et 1817*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1821), ii, 331 [BNF].

<sup>19</sup> Henry Koster, *Viagens ao nordeste do Brasil*, trans. Luis da Câmara Cascudo (Recife, 1942).

<sup>20</sup> Luiz Geraldo Silva, *Os pescadores na história do Brasil* (Recife, 1988), i, 184.



slave trade, but not slavery. As the coffee market expanded in the southern states, an internal slave trade flourished.<sup>21</sup> *Jangadeiros* – the term used to designate those who go to sea on jangadas – carried slaves to ships offshore, which would then transport the slaves for sale to southern markets. In 1881, jangadeiros in the state of Ceará joined the Ceará Freedom Society, refusing to load slaves onto ships and closing down the port.<sup>22</sup> These fishermen also policed the seas and provided safe transport for refugees who fled to Ceará – the first Brazilian state to abolish slavery.<sup>23</sup> News of their role in abolitionism spread quickly, inspiring abolitionist movements around the empire and making the fishermen internationally recognized symbols of abolitionism.<sup>24</sup> The Sea Dragon captured the national imaginary, becoming a well-known figure in the press and traveling to meet abolitionists around the Empire. The jangada and the fishermen already carried a connotation of wonder, singularity, social engagement, and geographic specificity before the turn of the twentieth century and before the creation of a region called ‘Northeast’.

The fishermen who set sail for Rio de Janeiro in 1941 relied on this usable past and also on a history of ‘raids’ in the region. The Portuguese term ‘raid’ (sometimes spelled ‘reid’, ‘reide’, or ‘raide’) is a mutated Anglicism. By the 1920s, a ‘raid’ in Portuguese meant a long-

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<sup>21</sup> Oswaldo de Oliveira Riedel, *Perspectiva antropológica do escravo no Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1988), 25; Osvaldo Evandro Carneiro Martins, *Sobre o proletariado de Fortaleza* (Fortaleza, 1993), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Lusirene Celestino França Ferreira, ‘Nas asas da imprensa: a repercussão da abolição da escravatura na província do Ceará nos periódicos do Rio de Janeiro (1884-1885)’ (Univ. Federal de São João del-Rei Master’s thesis, 2010), 31; Silva, *Os pescadores*, 180.

<sup>23</sup> See ‘João Cordeiro to João Ramos’, 22 Aug. 1883, 2, Bundle 3, Box 218, Correspondência João Ramos (1884-1896), Instituto Arqueológico Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano, Recife; Silva, *Os pescadores*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *Congrès international antiesclavagiste, tenu à Paris les 6, 7, 8 août 1900* (Paris, 1900), 91–92 [BNF]; Silva, *Os pescadores*, 181–2; Celso Castilho, ‘Abolitionism Matters: The Politics of Antislavery in Pernambuco, Brazil, 1869-1888’ (Univ. of California, Berkley Ph.D. thesis, 2008), 74–5; Ferreira, ‘Nas asas da imprensa’, 32.

distance feat that at times demonstrated endurance, at others speed or technological advance, including both long-distance airplane and jangada trips. For example, Mestre Filó, a jangadeiro from Natal, led three jangadas on a twenty-three-day Natal-Rio de Janeiro ‘raid’ in 1922, inspiring an epic poem (‘Almirante’ by Catulo da Paixão Cearense) and a popular song (‘A Praia’ by Otoniel Meneses and Eduardo Medeiros) to register the feat.<sup>25</sup> In 1928 another group of fishermen sailed from Prainha, Ceará to Belém do Pará, later stating that they were a reincarnation of the Sea Dragon.<sup>26</sup> The fishermen who set out in 1941 on the Fortaleza-Rio ‘raid’ drew from the history of their locality the wonder of the jangada, the association of social justice and fisherman, and the pride of ‘raids’ to and from the Northeast.

### **The Fishermen and their Rafts**

Folklorists and anthropologists have described the jangada in terms of resistance to modernity. According to Câmara Cascudo, by the time Henry Koster described it in 1809, the jangada had already reached the peak of its technological advance.<sup>27</sup> In the words of anthropologist Severriano Aguiar, studying fishermen in the state of Pernambuco in the 1960s, ‘The same jangada, made of logs, used in the sixteenth century by Indians [caboclos] that lived along the Northeastern coastline at the moment of discovery, are used at the height of the twentieth century (while man prepares to go to the moon)’.<sup>28</sup> Up to 1950, the jangada usually consisted of six carved logs of up to eight meters either lashed or pegged together, a triangular sail, a center keel, a bench for seating, and baskets and jugs for storage.<sup>29</sup> In the 1940s, these vessels had a value of about \$102 in 1940 currency (\$1,628.68 in 2015) and lasted about

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<sup>25</sup> Cascudo, *Jangada*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Ainda vivem os jangadeiros de 1928’, *O Povo*, 7 Nov. 1941, Setor Microfilmagem (hereafter SM), Biblioteca Pública Governador Menezes Pimentel (hereafter BPGMP), Fortaleza.

<sup>27</sup> Cascudo, *Jangada*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Severriano Aguiar, *Mudanças em um grupo de jangadeiros de Pernambuco* (Recife, 1965), 83.

<sup>29</sup> Cascudo, *Jangada*, 80; Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 44.

eighteen months of daily use.<sup>30</sup> Four fishermen, serving clearly defined roles, accompanied each jangada out to sea.<sup>31</sup> Knowing one's role was a safety mechanism in a very dangerous profession.<sup>32</sup> The fishermen of the state of Ceará took their jangadas either on day trips or for longer stays of up to six days on the high seas, subsisting on fish roasted over small burners with manioc flour mixed with drippings (*pirão*), while their wives and children usually dedicated their time to weaving hammocks and lace (*renda*) on shore.<sup>33</sup>

The fishermen tended to fish over rocky bottoms where large fish sought easy prey of mollusks and schools of smaller fish. Nets were generally too expensive, so they used hook and line, gathering around thirty or forty fish per day on average, but as few as seven or eight and as many as 200 in high season. The fishermen did not usually own their own jangada. Instead, the jangada's owner allowed them to use it in exchange for half of their harvest. The fish, once brought to shore, were sold to middlemen (*atravessadores*), who sold the fish on the streets and in markets. The fishermen were dependent on this system which kept their earnings at basic subsistence because they had no way to conserve the fish.<sup>34</sup>

When Mestre Jerônimo, Jacaré, Manuel Preto, and Tatá, like many *cearenses* (residents of the state of Ceará), moved to Fortaleza in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Northeast was gaining attention as a drought zone, but had not yet received its name. Tatá, the

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<sup>30</sup> 'O trabalho dos pescadores', *A Manhã*, 22 Nov. 1941, 6. The value in Brazilian currency was 1:700\$000 (one conto, 700 mil réis). I calculated an exchange rate of \$1 = 16\$666 based on the chart published in T.H. Holloway, *Imigrantes Para O Café* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984), 268. Chart available online at 'Dólar Americano', accessed 23 March 2013, <http://www.ocaixa.com.br/bancodedados/dolaranualmedio.htm>. I used the Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator to translate 1941 dollars to 2015 here: <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.

<sup>31</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 46; Cascudo, *Jangada*, 15 & 18.

<sup>32</sup> Cascudo, *Jangada*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> 'O trabalho dos pescadores'.

oldest of the four (aged 52 in 1941), moved to Fortaleza in 1906, while the others arrived in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>35</sup> Due to migration from the drought-stricken backlands to the coast, Fortaleza by 1940 had a population just under 150,000 inhabitants – almost double its population in 1920.<sup>36</sup> The fishermen initially settled along the coast, but when the wealthier classes began to move into the beach communities of Fortaleza in the 1920s and 1930s, most fishermen gave in to economic pressures and moved to the hills beyond. Tatá and Jerônimo continued to live near the beach, while Manuel Preto and Jacaré lived in the hills alongside other working class cearenses.<sup>37</sup> Like 70 percent of cearenses in 1940, all but Jacaré were illiterate.<sup>38</sup> Their main diversion was the yearly festival honoring Saint Peter (São Pedro), and though Jacaré abstained, most fishermen relied on the Brazilian cane liquor, cachaça, for relaxation.<sup>39</sup> The four fishermen were incredibly witty, caught quipping quick jokes or making fun of each other in the regional and local press. While Jacaré is frequently quoted in the press and referred to as the group's leader, Mestre Jerônimo and Tatá appear only occasionally, and Manuel Preto is nearly silent.

The fishermen belonged to communities referred to as 'fishing colonies' organized under the Federation of Fishermen. Most belonged to the oldest colony formed in Fortaleza in 1922 – the Z-1, of which Jacaré was President.<sup>40</sup> While these fishing colonies served similar purposes as unions, under federal law, the jangadeiros did not belong to an officially recognized profession.

### **Along the Coast, Through the Press, and into the National State**

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<sup>35</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> Waldery Uchôa, *Fortaleza na sua expressão histórica, geográfica e estatística* (Fortaleza, 1946), 35.

<sup>37</sup> Abreu. *Jangadeiros*, 39 & 43. See also Eustógio Wanderley Correia Dantas, *Mar à vista: estudo da maritimidade em Fortaleza* (Fortaleza, 2002), 47–102.

<sup>38</sup> IBGE, *Alfabetização da população de 18 anos e mais*, Census, Estatísticas do Século (Rio de Janeiro, 2003). CD-ROM.

<sup>39</sup> 'O trabalho dos pescadores'.

<sup>40</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 40.

The fishermen's journey was inspired by changes in national politics. In what is referred to as the 'Revolution of 1930', Getúlio Dornelles Vargas became chief of the Provisional Government. The Vargas era spanned from 1930 to 1954 and included the provisional revolutionary government from 1930 to 1937; the New State from 1937 to 1945 when Vargas ruled as dictator; his term in Congress from 1945 to 1950 as an elected representative; and finally, his return to the executive office as president through election from 1950 until his suicide in 1954. During his time in power, Vargas performed an exceptional balancing act negotiating between elite and laborer, urban and rural, and strategically pursued Brazilian interests abroad.<sup>41</sup> Vargas created a vast network of governmental institutions, pulling the country together under a centralized national government while actively pursuing a unified cultural identity. The fishermen's voyage, according to Abreu, became possible as the fishermen's moral, cultural, and social expectations merged with the projects of the State.<sup>42</sup> Although not the fishermen's objective, the trip also initiated a conversation on the inclusion of the most rustic symbols of the Northeastern region into a modern, centralized state.

On September 15, 1941, Mestre Jerônimo, Tatá, Jacaré, and Manuel Preto set out on a journey from Ceará to Rio de Janeiro. They sought to pressure Vargas to include jangadeiros in the state's expanding centralized labor laws. In November 1930, Vargas had created the Ministry of Education and Public Health and the Ministry of Labor, Industry and Commerce (MTIC).<sup>43</sup> The MTIC dismantled independent labor unions, replacing them with MTIC controlled unions

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<sup>41</sup> See Robert Levine, *Father of the Poor?: Vargas and His Era* (Cambridge, 1998); Leslie Bethell, 'Politics in Brazil under Vargas, 1930-1945', in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 11 vols. (Cambridge, 2008), ix; Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* (Durham, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> See Abreu, *Jangadeiros* for discussion of fishermen's journey and New State.

<sup>43</sup> Bethell, 'Politics in Brazil', 23; Otaíza de Oliveira Romanelli, *História da educação no Brasil (1930/1973)*, 29th edn (Petrópolis, 2005), 131; Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil*, 53.

with state-appointed leaders.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the MTIC pushed through legislation on minimum wage, working conditions, pensions, unemployment compensation, and maximum working hours.<sup>45</sup> In 1933, all governmental oversight of fishing was transferred from the Fishing and Coastal Sanitation Board (created in 1923) under the Ministry of the Navy, to the Ministry of Agriculture, under which fishing colonies were civil associations (akin to clubs) with no authority.<sup>46</sup> Vargas placed priority on industrial labor, emphasizing modernization through industrialization. As such, the new work laws initially applied only to formal, urban, industrialized labor, and not to agricultural labor, much less to the fishermen.<sup>47</sup> This focus on industry left agricultural and piscatorial workers out of the modern state, and, in doing so, also left agricultural and piscatorial regions – notably the Northeast – on the margins.<sup>48</sup>

The fishermen had organized and prepared for their trip to Rio de Janeiro in an effort to claim their stake in the New State's expanding labor apparatus. In 1939, the fishermen heard of the creation of a school for fishermen, the Darcy Vargas Fishing School, on the island of Marambaia near Rio de Janeiro. The school was founded by a Catholic organization, but had as matron the first lady, Darcy Vargas. This was the first school of its kind; until 1939, the fishermen had learned their skills on the beach from their fathers or other experienced fishermen. The school proposed to teach the children of *jangadeiros* modern techniques alongside moral and

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<sup>44</sup> Bethell, 'Politics in Brazil', 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*; Marshall C. Eakin, *Brazil: The Once and Future Country* (New York, 1997), 45.

<sup>46</sup> Aguiar, *Mudanças*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Bethell, 'Politics in Brazil', 23; Eakin, *Brazil*, 44; Romanelli, *História da educação*, 166.

<sup>48</sup> For more on industrial labor organization, see Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920-1964* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Barbara Weinstein, 'The Industrialists, the State, and the Issues of Worker Training and Social Services in Brazil, 1930-1950', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, lxx, iii (1990): 379 & 381; John D. French, *The Brazilian Workers' ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill, 1992); Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men: São Paulo and the Rise of Brazil's Industrial Working Class, 1900-1955* (Durham and London, 1993).

civic values.<sup>49</sup> News of the school coupled with Darcy Vargas' declaration that she would like a jangada of her own provided the initial inspiration for the trip to Rio de Janeiro. Over time, the fishermen became increasingly convinced that President Vargas would listen to their concerns and respond. Through their trip, they spoke with fishermen along the coast who added to their list of grievances and helped them systematize their request.

On 8 September 1941, a local priest blessed the jangada and Brigida Pimentel (the wife of the federally-appointed state governor, or *Interventor Federal*) became the 'godmother' of their voyage on paper, though Mariinha [sic] Hollanda, the Director of the Associação de São Pedro da Praia de Iracema, is often referred to as the godmother as well.<sup>50</sup> The people of Fortaleza donated the jangada, the *São Pedro* (Saint Peter), along with food and supplies, and Fernando de Alencar Pinto (president of the Jangada Club and, later, friend to Orson Welles) and Ms. Hollanda promised to care for their families in their absence.<sup>51</sup> It was Ms. Hollanda who prepared the *Diário dos jangadeiros*, which the fishermen presented to supporters who awaited their arrival at each port. Once they received the all clear for their voyage, the local fishing colonies sent word to the Fishing Federations of each state through which the fishermen would travel, requesting that fishing colonies provide housing and support in every port. In this way, the fishermen, while responding to grievances particular to their profession, also drew together and

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<sup>49</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Berenice Abreu de Castro Neves, 'O Livro do Raid', in *Diário dos Jangadeiros: Fortaleza - Rio de Janeiro 1941* (Fortaleza, 2004), 20; Miguel Ângelo de Azevedo, *Cronologia ilustrada de Fortaleza: roteiro para um turismo histórico e cultural* (Fortaleza, 2001); 'Diário dos jangadeiros', in *Diário dos jangadeiros, Fortaleza-Rio-1941* (Fortaleza, 2004), MS p. 4, book p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> 'O fatalismo dos homens do mar', *A Tarde*, 14 Nov. 1941, *Jornais e revistas raras* (hereafter JRR), Biblioteca Pública Estadual da Bahia (hereafter BPEB), Salvador; 'O "Diário de bordo" da jangada S. Pedro', *O Povo*, 13 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

represented a community. While representing fishermen in a particular community, they also tied together a network of disenfranchised fishing communities along the northeastern coastline.

The institutions of the press – newspapers, magazines, and radio – provided a step-by-step account of the voyage. Brazil’s Associate Press (*Diários Associados*) was founded in 1924 by Assis Chateaubriand with the objective of uniting Brazil’s disparate regions.<sup>52</sup> The journalist João Calmon, at that time working in Fortaleza for the newspaper *Correio de Ceará*, sent a national plea through the Associate Press for media support.<sup>53</sup> This plea emphasized that the fishermen had already gained the necessary local support, but that the port authority would not permit their trip without authorization from the merchant marine. The *Diário de Pernambuco*, in Recife, with the widest circulation in the region, published the initial request of support, and followed the fishermen throughout the raid.<sup>54</sup> Other newspapers around the region and the country soon picked up the story.

In each main city port on their trip, the fishermen met with fishing colonies and local authorities, giving each state’s governor a miniature of the jangada *São Pedro*. By the time the fishermen arrived in Natal in the state of Rio Grande do Norte on 27 September – not even two weeks into their trip – their fame had spread.<sup>55</sup> The city reportedly received them with such festivity that mestre Jerônimo – frequently cited in the press for his witty, humorous comments – quipped that the Northeast had not seen such enthusiasm since the 1930 ‘Revolution’ that had

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<sup>52</sup> See, Fernando Morais, *Chatô, o rei do Brasil* (São Paulo, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> “‘Jacare’ deu conta do recado’, *Diario de Pernambuco*, 22 Nov. 1941, SM, Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (hereafter FUNDAJ), Recife.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Em jangada de Fortaleza ao Rio’, *Diario de Pernambuco*, 10 Sept. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ; Austregesilo de Athayde, ‘Deixem vir os jangadeiros’, *Diario de Pernambuco*, 17 Sept. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Diário dos jangadeiros’,” MS pp. 14–25, book pp. 51–63.



initially put Vargas in power.<sup>56</sup> In Salvador, a holiday was petitioned for their arrival on 17 October.<sup>57</sup> Even smaller fishing villages greeted and received them with celebration.

In every major port, migrant cearenses greeted the fishermen. Migration out of Ceará and its neighboring states had begun decades before the raid, inspired by a series of devastating droughts (from 1877 to 1880 and in 1888, 1900, 1915, and 1919). This migration from poverty- and drought-stricken rural areas of the Northeast – first to the Amazon and later to the metropolitan areas of the South and Southeast – has made the boundaries between Northeastern and national appear both strikingly visible and geographically blurred. In 1940, nearly ten per cent of living Brazilians born in Ceará had migrated out of the state. However, only fifteen per cent of those migrants lived in the Southeastern region, which held the populous cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In 1940, half the migrants out of Ceará had moved to neighboring Northeastern states, participating in the process of rapid urbanization in twentieth-century Latin America.<sup>58</sup>

Further, migrants from Ceará were not only the drought-stricken. Northeastern migrants were also workers who went to the Amazon to work in the rubber boom or to São Paulo to work in factories.<sup>59</sup> Others were students, businessmen, or bureaucrats. In Cabedelo in the state of

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<sup>56</sup> ‘O “Diário de bordo” da jangada S. Pedro’.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Aguardados na Bahia os jangadeiros cearenses’, *O Povo*, 16 Oct. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>58</sup> IBGE, *Estatísticas históricas do Brasil: séries econômicas, demográficas e sociais de 1550 a 1988*, 2nd edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1990), 39–46.

<sup>59</sup> For more on migration, see: Jack A Draper III, ‘Forró’s Wars of Maneuver and Position: Popular Northeastern Music, Critical Regionalism, and a Culture of Migration’, *Latin American Research Review*, xlv, i (2011); Eakin, *Brazil*, 74; Paulo Fontes, *Um Nordeste em São Paulo: trabalhadores migrantes em São Miguel Paulista (1945-66)* (Rio de Janeiro, 2008); Paulo Fontes, “‘With a Cardboard Suitcase in My Hand and a Pannier on My Back’: Workers and Northeastern Migrations in the 1950s in São Paulo, Brazil”, *Social History*, xxxvi, i (2011).

Paraíba, a bank manager and governmental figures – all from Ceará – greeted the fishermen.<sup>60</sup> In Recife, the fishermen sent special thanks to the cearenses who met with them and took them to lunch.<sup>61</sup> In Bahia, the ‘República Potiguar’, self-described as a ‘Traditional cearense student boarding house in Bahia’, signed their book expressing pride for their fellow cearenses.<sup>62</sup> On their way to Cabo Frio in the state of Rio de Janeiro, they were approached by reporters from Rio who later published excerpts from their ship’s log. Among them was Edmar Morel, the cearense reporter who later served as intermediary between the fishermen and Orson Welles. When relating this encounter to journalists, Jacaré said ‘They’re right in saying that everywhere in the world you will find a cearense’.<sup>63</sup> The four poor, dark-skinned, and mostly illiterate fishermen became unofficial ambassadors of cearense migrants – rich or poor, educated or otherwise – throughout the region and around the nation.

The fishermen timed their arrival to coincide with the Brazilian national holiday commemorating the Proclamation of the Republic on 15 November. This timing reinforced the symbolic nature of the trip and allowed for thousands of people to greet them at the port and follow them down Rio Branco Avenue in Rio de Janeiro. According to press accounts, two bands and thousands of people were waiting on shore and so many people went to the top of Sugar Loaf to watch the procession from above that they had to close the lift.<sup>64</sup> Upon arriving, hundreds of boats escorted the fishermen to shore, the *São Pedro* was loaded onto the back of a

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Chegam a Cabedêlo os jangadeiros cearenses’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, 7 Oct. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Partem, hoje para o Rio os jangadeiros cearenses’, *Diario de Pernambuco*, 11 Oct. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Diário dos jangadeiros’, MS p. 35, book p. 83.

<sup>63</sup> ‘A chegada dos jangadeiros ao Rio’, *O Povo*, 17 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* ‘Apoeótica recepção no Rio!’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, 16 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP; ‘Chegaram ao Rio os jangadeiros cearenses’, *Diario de Pernambuco*, 18 Nov. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ.

truck, and the fishermen walked directly to the Palácio Guanabara (the presidential palace) to speak face-to-face with the president of Brazil, followed by a procession of hundreds of cars.<sup>65</sup>

It was Jacaré, known for being the most eloquent public speaker of the group, who delivered the jangadeiros' message to President Vargas. According to press accounts, he referred to the president as their 'father', described their living conditions, and assured him that their problems pertained to 'an entire class [of fishermen]'. After about an hour of discussion, surrounded by masses of people on the streets, Vargas closed the conversation, assuring the fishermen that the government would bring them 'justice'.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, the jangada – considered a present to first lady Darcy Vargas – was set up in the Praça Floriano, where it would remain on display during a week of festivities.<sup>67</sup>

On the day they arrived in Rio, newspapers in Fortaleza already reported one success – the Darcy Vargas Fishing School would receive the children of eight more fishermen (two had already arrived) from Ceará.<sup>68</sup> By the end of their third day in Rio, the fishermen made the front page of newspapers again when Vargas issued a law incorporating the jangadeiros into the national labor system of social welfare. The new law included fishermen who worked for businesses as well as those who were 'legally qualified' to carry out this profession through self-employment. The fishermen would benefit from the services of the Institute of Retirement and Pensions of Maritime Workers, ensuring that they must earn at least a local minimum wage. The Institute would 'within its possibilities' establish stations in fishing colonies to assist the

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<sup>65</sup> 'A chegada dos jangadeiros ao Rio'; Artur Eduardo Benevides, 'Os heróis vão regressar', *O Nordeste*, 19 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>66</sup> 'Chegaram ao Rio os jangadeiros cearenses'. News footage of this scene is included (starting around 00:05:19) in Rogério Sganzerla, *Nem tudo é verdade* (Embrafilme, 1986).

<sup>67</sup> 'Os jangadeiros serão homenageados durante oito dias', *O Povo*, 13 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>68</sup> '8 filhos de pescadores cearenses para a Escola de Pesca Darcy Vargas, no Rio', *O Povo*, 15 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

fishermen and provide first-aid, while mandating that public hospitals care for those who needed more invasive treatment. It also ushered the fishing industry into the modern nation, stating that businesses and individual fishermen must now register everything from profits to sales of fishing boats.<sup>69</sup> The Executive Commission on Fishing was created in 1942, establishing Regional Divisions that provided assistance to fishing colonies. Each colony received a cooperative (or ‘dependency’) and elected its own president and representatives. The Executive Commission controlled distribution of fish to urban centers, docking its operating expenses from the price paid by the consumer. In one fishing community in Pernambuco, for example, the cooperative established under the Regional Division in Recife provided two nurses, a pharmacist, a doctor, a dentist, medicine, a school, and a court.<sup>70</sup> The fishermen asked to be incorporated into the nation, and their request was granted.

On 30 November 1941, the fishermen returned to Fortaleza. The Brazilian airline Navegação Aérea Brasileira, founded in 1940, donated trips in a Beechcraft plane back to Ceará.<sup>71</sup> The flight allowed newspapers to highlight the drastic difference in efficiency between the rustic jangada and the new Brazilian airline.<sup>72</sup> The federally appointed governor, Menezes Pimentel, gave them medals and a special mass was celebrated by the Archbishop in front of the

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<sup>69</sup> Getúlio Vargas, *Decreto-Lei n. 3.832 de 18 de novembro de 1941*, 1941, <http://www010.dataprev.gov.br/sislex/paginas/24/1941/3832.htm>. Sections of the law were published in newspapers. See, for example, ‘Amparo aos pescadores brasileiros’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, 19 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP; ‘Resultados imediatos da façanha heroica dos jangadeiros cearenses’, *O Nordeste*, 19 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>70</sup> Aguiar, *Mudanças*, 99.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Chegaram ao Recife os jangadeiros cearenses’, *Diário de Pernambuco*, 10 Oct. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ; ‘“Jacaré” joga bilhar com o presidente da navegação aérea brasileira’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, 23 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>72</sup> ‘O regresso triunfal dos jangadeiros cearenses’, *O Nordeste*, 1 Dec. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

Jangada Club.<sup>73</sup> One writer emphasized that the fishermen represented more than just Ceará; the whole Northeast was eager to embrace them.<sup>74</sup>

### **Becoming Northeastern**

In press accounts and within the fishermen's signing book, the scale of representation of the fishermen began with Ceará, but quickly came to encompass the entire Northeast. Journalists called upon notions of the cearense as a resistant sufferer to emphasize the stoic nature of the fishermen. The suffering was caused by the frequent and severe droughts that shaped the cearenses' character, making them noble figures by nature.

Describing cearenses in terms of suffering was a historically-rooted theme. In his classic plea for intervention and description of the horrific 1915 drought in Ceará, Rodolfo Teófilo stated: 'Nature gave the cearenses astonishing organic resistance so that they could brave the droughts'.<sup>75</sup> Another famed historian of Ceará, Gustavo Barroso, in his 'Prayer for Ceará' explained that the cearenses' 'martyrdom' gave them 'glory' and should be a cause of pride. This suffering caused the 'sharpness of their intelligence, the courageous resolution of their temperament, of their audacity and of their tenacious patience. Drought molds and shapes a strong race'.<sup>76</sup>

This insistence on the strength of the drought-worn cearense is reminiscent of Euclides da Cunha's admiration of the *sertanejo* (resident of the backlands). Da Cunha had witnessed the destruction of the millenarian and monarchist community of Belo Monte (also known as Canudos) by the newly formed Republican government's army in 1897. It took four military

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<sup>73</sup> 'Chegarão, às 14 horas, os bravos jangadeiros', *Gazeta de Notícias*, 30 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>74</sup> 'O regresso triunfal dos jangadeiros cearenses'.

<sup>75</sup> Rodolpho Teófilo, *A seca de 1915* (Rio de Janeiro, 1922), 31.

<sup>76</sup> Gustavo Barroso, 'Oração ao Ceará', *O Nordeste*, 14 Feb. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

campaigns to put an end to Belo Monte, which da Cunha's book declared a massacre. Da Cunha's *Rebellion in the Backlands* serves as one of the foundational texts of the Brazilian nation, documents the military campaigns, and provides a description of the climate and geography of the backlands and a eugenic examination of its residents. In *Rebellion in the Backlands*, da Cunha describes the sertanejo as 'above all else, a strong individual'.<sup>77</sup>

This excerpt became problematic to the elite classes during the fishermen's raid. In the *Diário dos jangadeiros* the federally appointed governor of the state of Rio Grande do Norte referred to the fishermen as 'legitimate representatives of the strong, proud, and brave race that inhabits the Northeast', as 'eugenic and audacious men' creating a 'Northeastern civilization' – all terms reminiscent of da Cunha.<sup>78</sup> The head of the regional sub-section of the Ministry of Labor, Industry and Commerce in the state of Alagoas quoted Euclides da Cunha as describing the North as 'the living bedrock of our nationality'.<sup>79</sup> They, like many others, who signed the *Diário dos jangadeiros*, chose to focus on da Cunha's portrayal of the strong resident of the backlands.

Da Cunha, however, had juxtaposed the resident of the backlands with that of the coast, and found the latter lacking, as the man of the backlands, 'does not exhibit the debilitating rachitic tendencies of the neurasthenic mestizos of the seaboard'.<sup>80</sup> During the fishermen's raid, the well-known regionalist writer José Lins do Rêgo took issue with this excerpt of *Rebellion in the Backlands*. Rêgo recounted the story of Seu João, a fisherman in the state of Paraíba, who went out to sea, came back with fish, sold them, took care of his family, and then set out to sea again at 3:00 a.m. the next day. Rêgo rejected the portrayal of Seu João and his colleagues as

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<sup>77</sup> Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, trans. Samuel Putnam (Chicago, 2010), 89.

<sup>78</sup> 'Diário dos jangadeiros', MS p. 14, book p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, MS pp. 30–1, book pp. 74–5.

<sup>80</sup> Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, 89.

‘neurasthenic mestizos of the seaboard’.<sup>81</sup> By combining the longstanding belief in the stoic resistance and strength of the drought-wrought sertanejo with a revised vision of the man of the coast, the journalists and regional authors facilitated a new representative character, broad enough to encompass not only the resident of the backlands or the cearense, but also the fishermen throughout the Northeast. They united what Gilberto Freyre referred to as the ‘two Northeasters’ – the agrarian and the pastoral, the coastal and the backlands – into one.<sup>82</sup>

The press related how the fishermen had faced a hostile and dangerous environment, and instead of taking careful measures, threw themselves headlong on ‘fragile’ jangadas into a two-month commitment to it.<sup>83</sup> They faced dangers, such as killer whales, sharks, storms, and unexpected reefs.<sup>84</sup> For days the press did not know where they were at all, creating mystery, suspense, and relief at their arrival in Salvador.<sup>85</sup> As a result, journalists and people who signed their book presented the fishermen as ‘brave’, ‘intrepid’, ‘audacious’, and ‘heroic’.<sup>86</sup> The fishermen, then, were molded by their environment, but were also brave agents of change. While

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<sup>81</sup> José Lins do Rego, ‘Os jangadeiros cearenses’, *O Povo*, 6 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>82</sup> Gilberto Freyre, ‘Prefácio á 1.a edição’, in *Nordeste: aspectos da influência da cana sobre a vida e a paisagem do Nordeste do Brasil*, 3rd edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1961), XI.

<sup>83</sup> On fragility of rafts: Athayde, ‘Deixem vir os jangadeiros’; Assis Memoria, ‘Jangadeiros’, *O Povo*, 30 Sept. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Do Ceara’ ao Rio numa jangada’, *A Tarde*, 17 Oct. 1941, JRR-BPEB.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Aguardados na Bahia’; ‘Chegam a’ Bahia os jangadeiros cearenses’, *A Tarde*, 16 Oct. 1941, JRR-BPEB.

<sup>86</sup> For brave (bravos, corajosos) and bravery (bravura, coragem): Faustino Nascimento, ‘Os jangadeiros’, *O Nordeste*, 8 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP; ‘Chegam a Cabedêlo os jangadeiros cearenses’; ‘Chegarão sabado, ao Rio, os jangadeiros cearenses’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 13 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP; ‘O fatalismo dos homens do mar’; Memoria, ‘Jangadeiros’. For intrepid (intrépidos, denodados): ‘Aguardados na Bahia’; ‘De Fortaleza ao Rio em fragil jangada’, *A Tarde*, 16 Oct. 1941, JRR-BPEB; Athayde, ‘Deixem vir os jangadeiros’. For audacious: Nascimento, ‘Os jangadeiros’. For heroic: Filgueiras Lima, ‘Mensagem de esperança’, *O Povo*, 20 Sept. 1941, SM-BPGMP; Nascimento, ‘Os jangadeiros’. There are too many references to bravery in the *Diário de jangadeiros* to cite.

emphasizing the perils of their journey surely attracted a larger reading audience, it also unintentionally de-politicized these labor organizers.

Journalists repeatedly associated the fishermen with other historical heroes. The most frequent association was with the Sea Dragon.<sup>87</sup> Another common choice was Homer's Odysseus.<sup>88</sup> Other creative comparisons were drawn with Noah and the chivalrous knight Roland.<sup>89</sup> The fishermen, in turn, only expressed a connection with the Sea Dragon, who they referred to as their 'symbol'.<sup>90</sup>

After so many references to the Sea Dragon – a mulato abolitionist fisherman – it might seem surprising that newspapers and signers of the fishermen's book repeatedly accentuated that the fishermen and their culture were *caboclo* (meaning either Indian or a mixture of Indian and European), but not African, Afro-Brazilian, mulato, or even *cafuzo* (of mixed indigenous and African ancestry). The fishermen were described as 'rugged caboclos' who were 'burned by the sun and ignorant of their individual worth'.<sup>91</sup> The courage this 'group of caboclos' exhibited was even 'very particular to the Northeastern caboclo'.<sup>92</sup> In the *Diário dos jangadeiros* the president of the Z4 fishing colony of Natal emphasized the 'courage of the Caboclo of the North' and another signer from Maceió referred to them as the '4 northeastern caboclos'.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> 'O raid dos jangadeiros cearenses', *O Povo*, 15 Sept. 1941, SM-BPGMP; Jorge Freire, 'Jangadas audazes', *O Jaguaribe*, 19 Oct. 1941, Hemeroteca, Portal da História do Ceará; Memoria, 'Jangadeiros'; 'O Presidente e uma vida nova para os pescadores', *Diário de Pernambuco*, 21 Nov. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ.

<sup>88</sup> Memoria, 'Jangadeiros'. For other Homeric comparisons see Filgueiras Lima, 'Ode aos jangadeiros cearenses', *O Povo*, 18 Oct. 1941, SM-BPGMP; Eustorgio Wanderley, 'Jangadeiros', *Gazeta de Notícias*, 22 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>89</sup> Jacques, 'Operários do mar'; Berilo Neves, 'Os jangadeiros', *O Povo*, 13 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>90</sup> 'O "Diário de bordo" da jangada S. Pedro'.

<sup>91</sup> Neves, 'Os jangadeiros'.

<sup>92</sup> Edigar de Alencar, 'Os jangadeiros cearenses', *O Povo*, 11 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>93</sup> 'Diário dos jangadeiros', MS pp. 21 & 29, respectively or, book pp. 59 & 72, respectively.



In the 1940 census, out of the more than two million inhabitants of the state of Ceará, a quarter were recorded as black and another quarter as of mixed racial background. While far from the majority (which was white, at over a million people), the black population of Ceará was hardly insignificant.<sup>94</sup> In 1864, 88.3% of the fishing population was reported as free black, and only 2.2% indigenous.<sup>95</sup> This was not the enslaved population, but free individuals working in a trade that is often passed down from one generation to the next. While Afro-Brazilians were not written out of Ceará's history entirely, the national and local press did not accept them as physically or culturally representative of the region. The fisherman Manuel Preto earned his nickname due to his Afro-Brazilian characteristics ('preto' in Portuguese means 'black'), but as a regional ambassador, he was caboclo.

This is, at least partially, due to associations between the fishermen and the famous novel by cearense writer José de Alencar, *Iracema*. The novel, first published in 1865, is a foundational text of the state of Ceará, narrating the impossible love between the indigenous Iracema (an anagram of America) and the white Martim Soares Moreno.<sup>96</sup> Their child becomes the first Brazilian (and the first caboclo), a manifestation of miscegenation, the fruit of the Old World and the New. The fishermen not only set out from the author's home state of Ceará, but from Iracema Beach, so named after the novel.<sup>97</sup>

Ceará's sub-regional ethnic identity stands in contrast to that of another Brazilian state that would later become Northeastern: Bahia. According to Anadelia A. Romo, in the early

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<sup>94</sup> *Sinopse do censo demográfico: Dados Gerais* (Rio de Janeiro, 1946), 14–15.

<sup>95</sup> Silva, *Os pescadores*. This information is in a table on an unnumbered page in the Appendix.

<sup>96</sup> On 'foundational fictions', see: Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). For other cultural incarnations of Iracema, see: Courtney J. Campbell, 'The Brazilian Northeast, Inside Out: Region, Nation, and Globalization (1926-1968)' (Vanderbilt Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2014), particularly chs. 3 & 6.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, 'Diário dos jangadeiros', MS pp. 32, 33, & 42, book pp. 77, 79, & 97.

twentieth century, Bahia's Afro-Brazilian population and culture came to represent the preservation of 'all that was valuable of Brazil's past'.<sup>98</sup> Getúlio Vargas' promotion of racial democracy as a Brazilian ideal facilitated this shift, as did the Afro-Brazilian Congress organized by Gilberto Freyre in Recife in 1934. In an attempt to root Afro-Brazilian culture in Salvador instead of Recife, the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress was held in Bahia in 1937, organized by Afro-Brazilian intellectuals. Working class Bahians also took part in this transformation in Bahian cultural identity, through ritualized performances in public spaces and insistence on recognition in Salvador's cultural scene.<sup>99</sup>

These separate ethnic identities stand out when we limit our focus to the region and its sub-regions. Yet, when we zoom out to the national level, sub-regional ethnic distinctions become less apparent. Instead, the region as a whole serves as a dark backdrop against which to contrast the white, Europeanized idea of immigration, modernity, industrialization, and progress of Brazil's South and Southeast, particularly that of São Paulo. In this way, referring to the cearenses as, exclusively, indigenous supports notions of the Northeast as more rustic and premodern, while also creating a more indigenous (and hence more primordial) sub-region within the Northeast represented by the state of Ceará.

The press presented the fishermen as cearenses, but beyond cearenses they were representatives of the North, and within the North, the Northeast. When describing the fishermen, Assis Memoria referred to memories of fishermen in the state of Maranhão and José Lins do Rêgo to the state of Paraíba, allowing the jangadeiros from Ceará to represent the figure throughout the region.<sup>100</sup> They were simple, 'like all fishermen of the North'.<sup>101</sup> They were not

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<sup>98</sup> Anadelia A. Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum: Race, Reform, and Tradition in Bahia*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Ickes, *New World Diasporas*.

<sup>100</sup> Memoria, 'Jangadeiros'; Rêgo, 'Os jangadeiros cearenses'.

just brave, but brave and Northeastern, and represented the needs of all ‘Northeastern fishermen’.<sup>102</sup> Journalists even considered their confidence and sails Northeastern.<sup>103</sup> According to signers of the *Diário dos jangadeiros*, they were ‘fearless Northeasterners’ and ‘incomparable jangadeiros of the Northeast!’<sup>104</sup>

Journalists and the fishermen’s supporters, like the nineteenth-century travelers, associated the jangadeiros with a geographic location, but this region had earned a name. Journalists and spectators inscribed upon the region, through the fishermen, characteristics of the Northeasterner: rusticity, a stoic nature, bravery, primordial ethnicity, vagrancy, instability, and strength. These characteristics separated the Northeast from the center of power in Rio de Janeiro as if Brazil were two different countries. As one journalist in Rio de Janeiro stated, ‘Those men who are coming ... they did not just overcome almost two thousand dangerous miles of winds and diluvian rains: they overcame the distance that separates one world from another, and one Brazil from the other Brazil ...’<sup>105</sup> The fishermen’s trip gave journalists a way to talk about the Northeast and its particular traits, but it also served as a way to unite the Northeast with the South, bringing the country together. This regional rhetoric placed the fishermen and the Northeast firmly within the growing imagined community of a nation of interrelated regions. The fishermen were not only regional heroes, but national heroes, demonstrating that even the most rustic elements of the nation could, through integration into Vargas’ labor apparatuses, become modern. These Northeastern representatives were offered as examples that the whole nation should follow.

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<sup>101</sup> ‘Do Ceara’ ao Rio numa jangada’.

<sup>102</sup> ‘O fatalismo dos homens do mar’; Freire, ‘Jangadas audazes’.

<sup>103</sup> Jacques, ‘Operários do mar’, 3; Neves, ‘Os jangadeiros’.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Diário dos jangadeiros’, MS pp. 12, 21, & 38, book pp. 49, 59, & 90.

<sup>105</sup> Neves, ‘Os jangadeiros’.

## **In Music and Toward the Silver Screen**

Newspaper reports on the fishermen's voyage provoked a desire to understand the jangadeiro as a folkloric, anthropological figure. Articles on their protest often came accompanied by discussions of typical clothing and language of the fishermen.<sup>106</sup> Interest in the fishermen as a character also inspired music and a short film, directed by Ruy Santos and produced by the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) of the Brazilian government. While the movie's script was written by journalist and playwright Henrique Pongetti, the well-known Bahian musician Dorival Caymmi, already in Fortaleza to inaugurate Ceará's only radio station (the P.R.E.-9), composed and sang the music for the film and acted in the principal role as a fisherman going out to sea.<sup>107</sup>

Regional and local newspapers published excited articles about the famous singer's visit to Fortaleza. Caymmi had already gained fame as the author of *O que é que a bahiana tem?* – the first song that Carmen Miranda sang on U.S. radio.<sup>108</sup> 'His music', one *Gazeta de Notícias* (Fortaleza) article stated, 'is folklore', defined as 'that which Brazil has that is most its own, it is tradition, belief, the innocent soul ...'<sup>109</sup> Caymmi described his music to another reporter as 'one hundred percent popular' explaining that he saw most of his songs as folklore. He too defined his terms: 'that is if we understand folklore as the presentation of poetry, music, as an interpretation

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<sup>106</sup> On clothing: 'Do Ceara' ao Rio numa jangada'. On language: Dom Antônio de Almeida Lustosa, 'Linguagem de pescador', *O Nordeste*, 8 Nov. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

<sup>107</sup> "A jangada voltou só", *Diario de Pernambuco*, 14 Nov. 1941, SM-FUNDAJ; Stella Caymmi, *Dorival Caymmi: o mar e o tempo* (São Paulo, 2001), 195 & 197. The P.R.E.-9 would continue without competition until 1948. Mario Ferraz Sampaio, *História do rádio e da televisão no Brasil e no mundo (memórias de um pioneiro)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984), 101.

<sup>108</sup> Antônio Pedro Tota, *O imperialismo sedutor: a americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* (São Paulo, 2000).

<sup>109</sup> 'Dorival Caymmi vem ao Ceará', *Gazeta de Notícias*, 8 Oct. 1941, Hemeroteca, BPGMP.

of the simple soul of the people'.<sup>110</sup> This discussion demonstrates that before the fishermen even arrived in Rio de Janeiro, their protest, way of life, and media image had come to represent 'simple' folklore.

Cearense newspapers emphasized Caymmi's regional qualifications. Caymmi was from Bahia, but had moved to Rio. His music was not just any popular music, it had 'the worthy renown of a strong regional accent'.<sup>111</sup> Caymmi himself stated that he was a 'nortista', or Northerner, and that he could not turn down the opportunity to come back to the 'North'.<sup>112</sup> The forging of Caymmi into a northeastern singer is significant, as Bahia's regional status was still undecided in the 1940s, and would remain so through the 1960s. According to Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, Caymmi and the novelist Jorge Amado were responsible for incorporating this 'other' more Afro-Brazilian Northeast into regional 'image, text, and sound'.<sup>113</sup>

The movie was intended 'to make ... the adventurous and heroic fishermen's lifestyle more known'.<sup>114</sup> The movie was based on the eponymous Caymmi song, *The Jangada Returned Alone* (*A jangada voltou só*), based, in turn, on Jorge Amado's novel *Sea of Death* (first published in 1936), which told the story of the 'life of suffering and poetry of the fishermen of Bahia'.<sup>115</sup> The song and the movie tell the sad tale of a fisherman who goes on an overnight trip for the first time. The next day, his jangada appears on the beach, unaccompanied. While not apparent in the song, in the movie, the fisherman leaves his girlfriend, a lace weaver, on shore

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<sup>110</sup> 'Dorival Caymmi fala aos cearenses, por intermédio do O Povo', *O Povo*, 9 Oct. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>111</sup> 'Dorival Caymmi vem ao Ceará'.

<sup>112</sup> 'Dorival Caymmi fala aos cearenses'.

<sup>113</sup> Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do nordeste*, 246.

<sup>114</sup> "'A jangada voltou só'".

<sup>115</sup> 'Dorival Caymmi no Ceará', *O Povo*, 8 Oct. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

waiting for him. The movie shifts the storyline away from the social conditions of the fishermen toward love, suspense, and loss.<sup>116</sup>

Along with announcing Caymmi's visit, local newspapers in Fortaleza also printed the lyrics to his songs. On 11 November, *O Povo* printed the lyrics to *A jangada voltou só*, next to an article extolling the courage of the jangadeiros en route to Rio.<sup>117</sup> On 15 November – the day the fishermen arrived in Rio de Janeiro – *O Povo* printed the lyrics to the Caymmi song *It is Sweet to Die at Sea (É doce morrer no mar)*.<sup>118</sup> These songs about the mysterious death of a fisherman, printed alongside the story of the fishermen's raid, emphasized the dangers of their journey and their profession, while also creating a morbidly romantic and, again, de-politicized, figure.

Caymmi's visit and the fisherman's raid also allowed the P.R.E.-9 to showcase its technological expansion in 1941. On 9 October, *O Povo* printed a copy of a postcard sent to the P.R.E.-9's owner from New York, confirming that the writer could hear test signals from the new short-wave facilities all the way in New York City with 'absolute clarity'.<sup>119</sup> This long reach of the P.R.E.-9, according to another article, made it possible for cearenses away from home, to quell their homesickness and 'soften their regionalist sentiments'.<sup>120</sup> The P.R.E.-9 reported on the fisherman's arrival in Rio de Janeiro, reaching cearenses around the country – and possibly as far as New York – with the story.<sup>121</sup>

The story of the fishermen's voyage did, in fact, reach as far as New York, if not by air, then in print. On 8 December 1941 *Time* magazine printed a short article under the title 'Four

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<sup>116</sup> “‘A jangada voltou só’”.

<sup>117</sup> Dorival Caymmi, ‘A jangada voltou só’, *O Povo*, 11 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP; Alencar, ‘Os jangadeiros cearenses’.

<sup>118</sup> Dorival Caymmi, ‘E' doce morrer no mar’, *O Povo*, 15 Nov. 1941, SM-BPGMP.

<sup>119</sup> ‘O P.R.E. 9 ouvido em New-York’, *O Povo*, 9 Oct. 1941, SM-BPGMP..

<sup>120</sup> Jorge Freire, ‘P.R.E. 9’, *O Jaguaribe*, 25 Oct. 1941, 1–2, Hemeroteca, Portal da História do Ceará.

<sup>121</sup> ‘A chegada dos jangadeiros ao Rio’.

Men on a Raft’, describing the ‘Homeric voyage that wrought a political miracle in Brazil’.<sup>122</sup> Orson Welles, who was already contemplating a movie containing several episodes from the United States and Latin America, read the article, and, intrigued, set out to include ‘Four Men on a Raft’ as a sketch in his upcoming movie, *It’s All True*. Shortly after the release of *Citizen Kane*, Welles was under contract to RKO radio studio, but had recently come to agreement with the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) to create a film on Brazilian Carnival, which would also form part of *It’s All True*.<sup>123</sup> This movie would be Welles’ first attempt at a cross-cultural film, including, in addition to the Brazilian episodes, an episode in Mexico and a final chapter either on jazz or on the capture and slaying of Inka Atawallpa in Peru.<sup>124</sup> The title of the movie was a play on the porous boundary between reality and representation.<sup>125</sup>

Welles had originally intended to shoot both the jangadeiro and Carnival scenes in Technicolor. As the film crew was already in Rio, he wanted to film the reenactment of the fishermen’s arrival in the Guanabara Bay first.<sup>126</sup> He planned to revise their historical arrival, having the fishermen arrive in Rio during Carnival, instead of on the Day of the Proclamation of the Republic, with their jangada becoming a Carnival float, depoliticizing their arrival date for the sake of narration. After shooting in Rio, Welles planned to film scenes on fishing techniques, women’s tasks, Jacaré’s organizing efforts, and, finally, the expedition itself through the ports of Recife and Salvador. Welles met with Edmar Morel, the cearense journalist with the Associate Press who knew the fishermen and had published and disseminated their ship’s log. Morel wrote

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<sup>122</sup> ‘Four Men on a Raft’; Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 237; Benamou, *It’s All True*, 39.

<sup>123</sup> Benamou, *It’s All True*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–57.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

a short historical context for the episode, compiling social, ethnographic, and historical data, and the log served as a source for the script of the voyage.<sup>127</sup> Morel, originally from Ceará, was already an important journalist in Rio de Janeiro. Through this incident, his role expanded from regional-to-national intermediary to regional-to-international intermediary.

Welles traveled to Fortaleza on 9 March 1942. Newspaper readers in Fortaleza might have recognized the title *Citizen Kane*, and those in Ceará who traveled to Rio de Janeiro or abroad might have even seen the successful movie, but no cinema in Fortaleza had shown it.<sup>128</sup> In a newspaper article for the *Correio do Ceará*, local journalist Octacílio Colares insinuated that none of the journalists had seen the film, but knew of its fame. According to the same author, Welles should be accepted in Ceará based solely on his noble intention of recording the fishermen and showing Ceará to the world.<sup>129</sup> When Welles arrived, he was greeted by journalists, a representative of the state government, Fernando Pinto, and a group of fishermen. The crowd ‘applauded deliriously’ according to local newspapers.<sup>130</sup> Welles and Morel even participated in a jangada race on a jangada navigated by Mestre Jerônimo during their stay in Ceará.<sup>131</sup>

Despite Welles’ good intentions and the enthusiasm of Fortaleza’s press and inhabitants, Welles’ movie project would face unsurmountable challenges. After scouting for locations in Fortaleza, Welles had the *São Pedro* put back to sea in Rio and brought the fishermen from Fortaleza.<sup>132</sup> After filming had already begun, the president of RKO denied Welles’ request for

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>128</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 233; Holanda, *Orson Welles no Ceará*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 242–3.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 243–4.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>132</sup> Benamou, *It’s All True*, 50 & 1.



Technicolor.<sup>133</sup> According to Benamou, RKO manager Lynn Shores sent negative reports to both RKO headquarters in Hollywood and to the Brazilian DIP, in charge of censorship, ‘concerning Welles’ choice of shooting locations, schedules, [and] casting of nonprofessional Afro-cariocas (black residents of Rio)’.<sup>134</sup> Meanwhile, in Brazil, anxieties over Welles’ methods also grew, with Rio de Janeiro’s elite expressing concerns that they would be associated with a ‘negative’ side of Brazilian life as dark-skinned and underdeveloped.<sup>135</sup>

Nonetheless, Welles and the fishermen were able to spend two months working on the Rio scenes before tragedy hit.<sup>136</sup> On 19 May 1942, near Tijuca beach, a motor launch towing the *São Pedro* with the fishermen-turned-actors on board passed the shooting location and overcorrected, breaking the towline.<sup>137</sup> The four fishermen fell into the water and all resurfaced, but while Jerônimo, Tatá, and Manuel Preto were rescued, Jacaré inexplicably disappeared into the sea.<sup>138</sup> Like so many fishermen before him and like the characters of songs, poetry, and movies created around the fishermen’s raid, Jacaré died at sea, leaving his wife with the care of their nine children, and leaving a legacy of dedicated labor activism behind.

Welles, on shore, sobbed openly.<sup>139</sup> He resolved to finish the project as a tribute to Jacaré. By the moment of post-production, however, RKO had hit a major administrative crisis and revoked Welles’ contract.<sup>140</sup> ‘Four Men on a Raft’ was left without a musical or vocal

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>136</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 246–7.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>138</sup> Benamou, *It’s All True*, 52.

<sup>139</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 248.

<sup>140</sup> Benamou, *It’s All True*, 54.

soundtrack. The reel itself was thought lost until Fred Chandler accidentally found 150,000 meters of film in the Paramount Pictures Vault in 1985.<sup>141</sup>

Notably, like *A jangada voltou só*, Welles had rewritten the fishermen's raid as a love story. José André de Souza, or 'Sobrinho', (Jerônimo's cousin) was to play the role of a young fisherman who died at sea right after marrying a young and beautiful wife, played by thirteen-year old Francisca Moreira da Silva. In the movie, the death of the young fisherman would prompt his colleagues into launching the voyage to protest their working conditions.<sup>142</sup> While casting the fishermen's voyage as inspired by love and loss would surely draw a greater audience, it also de-emphasized the power of the voyage as a popular labor movement.

While the immediate press reaction to Jacaré's death was of shock, some journalists criticized the fishermen for stepping out of their regionally, racially, and socially defined positions. There was, as historian Berenice Abreu demonstrated, 'implicitly or explicitly – a moral and social condemnation that Jacaré had stepped out of "his place" as a poor fisherman who struggled justly for his rights and had entered ... the place of Hollywood stars'.<sup>143</sup> The journalist Murilo Mota listed Jacaré's accomplishments and summarized that 'all of this is excessive in the life of an illiterate caboclo from the Volta da Jurema [a beach in Fortaleza]'.<sup>144</sup> Berilo Neves wrote that 'The idea to falsely reproduce what he only knew to do in truth was unfortunate ... The Northeastern caboclo's jangada does not fit in the narrow environment of a cinema lens'.<sup>145</sup> They were not just fishermen, and therefore out of their league; they were caboclos, and even more Northeastern caboclos. Jacaré's demise, according to these accounts,

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<sup>141</sup> Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, 107.

<sup>142</sup> Benamou, *It's All True*, 54.

<sup>143</sup> Abreu, *Jangadeiros*, 250.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in *ibid* from *Correio de Ceará*, 25 May 1942.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in *ibid* from *Diário da Noite* (Rio de Janeiro), 20 May 1942.

was due to the distance between regionally and racially defined expectations for him and the international space within which he acted.<sup>146</sup>

In August, before it became apparent that Welles would not be able to finish the film in post-production, the remaining fishermen showed up at the newspaper office with Francisca Moreira da Silva (13) and Sobrinho (17) to introduce them to the press. The resulting article outlined Welles' interest in the fishermen, Jacaré's death, and even some of the administrative problems that Welles was facing with RKO, but the centerpiece was the young, unsuspecting, actors. Francisca, whose father was a fisherman, was described as a 'moreninha' – a reference to her dark skin tone – both within the body of the article and in large, bold print in the headline. The reporter stated: 'When we saw her, it was hard to believe that, at first sight, Orson Welles chose her to be the bride'. Her dress was 'very poor', she wore sandals, had a 'timid air', and did not have the 'mark of Hollywood'. The only attractive point about her, according to the newspaper, was that when she smiled she exhibited a 'strange beauty on her mestizo face' and demonstrated a set of teeth 'that would give a millionaire envy'. The journalist emphasized that this girl would, surprisingly, 'shine on every screen in the [democratic] world'. Sobrinho, on the other hand, could not be made to smile. He was 'a vigorous example of the Northeastern caboclo'. Yet he had dressed up to meet the journalists and was 'visibly uncomfortable in his white suit. Accustomed to fishermen's clothing and bare feet, he found the collar, cheap tie, and heavy shoes strange'. These were no longer the esteemed fishermen of 1941 – just a year before. An article about fishermen and their families did not need an accompanying explanation of their clothing, language, or way of life. They were not martyrs or stoic sufferers. They were, instead, poor, dark-skinned, Northeasterners who dared to step into clothing above their class (but clearly

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 247.

still below that of the reporter). And though they had only seen one movie between them, they thought themselves Hollywood stars.<sup>147</sup> The jangadeiros had become folklore and were expected to act within the national sphere and remain in the past.

This article, and others like it, were not just about Francisca and Sobrinho, nor did these two young people represent, merely, one fishing community in Ceará. Instead, discussions about the fishermen and fishing colonies in the local, regional, and national press provided a way to imagine the place of the Northeastern region in a projected modern, industrialized nation. On the local and regional levels, the fishermen's voyage presented the opportunity to participate in national politics and nation building. On the national level, the fishermen were acceptable representatives of national folklore, reminders of the nation's unique cultural past. It was when the fishermen's story trespassed national boundaries that the press leveled accusations of cultural inauthenticity, highlighting the limits of Northeastern representation in terms of race and ethnicity. It was not just what the fishermen represented that defined the Northeast, but also what they could not or were not allowed to represent: the nation.

### **Folklore Forgets its Past**

In Miguel Ângelo de Azevedo's archive in Fortaleza (known as the Arquivo Nirez), there is music spanning from 1923 to 1960 on the subject of jangadeiros. Only one song, *Jangada*, made direct mention of the 1941 protest, emphasizing the bravery of the fishermen.<sup>148</sup> While most of the songs about fishermen did not mention the raid, they also affirmed the bravery and stoicism of the jangadeiro figure or emphasized the difficulties of the fishermen's life.<sup>149</sup> In

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<sup>147</sup> 'Uma "estrela" morena do Pirambu vai brilhar nas telas de milhares de cinemas'.

<sup>148</sup> Vicente Leporace and Jimmy Lester, *Jangada* (Continental, 1952), 16.612-a, AN; Esterzinha de Sousa, *Jangada* (Copacabana, 1953), 5.141-a, AN.

<sup>149</sup> On bravery, see Airton Amorim and Zé & Zilda, *Jangadeiro* (Star, 1950), 191-b, AN; Getúlio Alves, *Jangadeiro valente* (Polydor, 1958), 259-b, AN. On difficulties of Northeastern life, see

several genres of music, produced around the country the fishermen recurred as brave ‘cearenses’ or ‘Northeasterners’.<sup>150</sup>

Further, the jangada and the jangadeiro formed an essential ingredient in the visual culture of the Northeast. For example, a small jangada on a *cachaça* (Brazilian cane liquor) label was a visual clue that this *cachaça* was from the Northeast. In some cases, the jangada was a central image on the label, but frequently, it was a small stick figure in the distance or a small detail running down the river alongside a sugar mill. Regional artists and photographers frequently chose jangadas and jangadeiros as subjects in art depicting the region.<sup>151</sup> Postcards, perhaps the quintessential visual medium for expressing local imagery to a national and international audience, also frequently displayed the jangada.<sup>152</sup> One regional postcard editor, Albuquerque, even used the sail of a jangada to form the ‘A’ in their name on their logo.

Anthropological, folkloric, and ethnographic studies further demonstrate the quick adoption of the jangadeiro figure as Northeastern folklore. Assis Chateaubriand commissioned Câmara Cascudo to write an ethnographic study of jangadas and jangadeiros in 1954, resulting in

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Tonico & Tinoco, *Jangadeiro* (Continental, 1953), 16.697-b, AN; Tião Carreiro & Carreirinho, *Jangadeiro cearense* (RCA Victor, 1959), 80-2072-a, AN.

<sup>150</sup> See, for example, Armando Castro and Vagalumes do Luar, *Jangadeiro cearense* (Todamérica, 1952), TA-5.133-b, AN; *Vai jangada* (Todamérica, 1960), TA-5.923-b, NA, and this song from Minas Gerais: Sidney Más, *Ai, Jangadeiro*, Mp3 (Odeon, 1951), 13.117-a, AN.

<sup>151</sup> See, for example, “‘Jangadeiros’ um quadro de sucesso do prof. Martim Lima’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, 20 May 1942, Hemeroteca, BPGMP; Jean Manzon, *Flagrantes do Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1940); Nearco Barroso Guedes de Araújo, *Jangadas* (Fortaleza, 1985); Raimundo Cela, *Jangadeiro arrastando a poita*, n.d., Coleção Raimundo Cela, Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Dragão do Mar, Fortaleza.

<sup>152</sup> See, for example, postcards in the following collections within Tulane University’s Latin America Library: ‘Rio de Janeiro, Ouro Preto, Bahia, São Paulo, etc. postcards and snapshots’, Brazil 1956, maço 2, Carol Edward Mace Photograph Collection; Box 2, Ronald Hilton Collection of Photographs of Latin America, 1950s; Boxes 1 and 2, Ronald Hilton Collection of Postcards of Latin America, 1952-1956.

a detailed and highly cited study.<sup>153</sup> A. da Silva Mello also included a description of the fishermen of Fortaleza in his travel accounts, while Gustavo Barroso, in his study of Ceará, stated: ‘The jangada, a small stage by dimension but immense in the greatness of its heroes, especially the anonymous Northeastern fishermen, is an object of distinction in our folklore, in our poetry, in our fiction and in our history’.<sup>154</sup> Florival Seraine, in his work on the folklore of Ceará, described the song and dance of the fishermen and considered them one of three types of cearense: the jangadeiro, the cowboy or farmer, and the cane worker.<sup>155</sup> Ernani Silva Bruno felt compelled to include a page on jangadeiros in a pocketbook collection on Brazil.<sup>156</sup> The fishermen became an archetype of Northeastern folklore, considered necessary to the anthropological study of the region.

Meanwhile, new fishing technologies began to reach the Northeastern coast, again provoking a desire to record the traditional fisherman’s language and lifestyle. In 1962, an article in the Pernambucan newspaper *Jornal do Commercio* expressed concern that ‘the traditional jangadas will leave the landscape of the Northeastern coast, replaced by modern motorized boats’. Further, this newspaper warned, the fishermen themselves would have to deal with these changes, including learning to use new advanced technologies, like supersonic radar.<sup>157</sup>

The Regional Center of Educational Research (of which Gilberto Freyre was director) commissioned a study, published in 1965, to understand how prepared the fishermen of the state

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<sup>153</sup> Cascudo, *Jangada*.

<sup>154</sup> A. da Silva Mello, *Nordeste brasileiro: Estudos e impressões de viagem* (Coleção Documentos Brasileiros 73, Rio de Janeiro, 1953), 335; Gustavo Barroso, *A margem da história do Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1962), 21.

<sup>155</sup> Florival Seraine, *Folclore Brasileiro: Ceará* (Rio de Janeiro, 1978), 8 & 27.

<sup>156</sup> Ernani Silva Bruno, ‘Jangada’, n.d., ESB(2)2, Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, Univ. de São Paulo, São Paulo.

<sup>157</sup> Levy Cruz, ‘Prefácio’, in Aguiar, *Mudanças*, 17. Cruz refers to an article from *Jornal do Commercio*, 28 Apr. 1962.

of Pernambuco were for change. The study was concerned with changes the fishing community Pontas de Pedra was facing with the arrival of new types of boats and technologies to the region as it approached ‘an industrialized phase’.<sup>158</sup> According to this study, the most rudimentary changes were introduced by wealthy Brazilian vacationers, but it was Japanese shipping vessels, involved in mass fishing off the coast of Brazil, that the author, Aguiar, saw as potentially forcing dramatic change on the fishing communities.<sup>159</sup> Reminiscent of the newspapers that followed the 1941 fishermen down the coastline, Aguiar’s study ends with a glossary of vocabulary and phrases used by the *jangadeiros* of the Brazilian Northeast. The terms were not used in Aguiar’s study and so are unnecessary for understanding the content. Instead, this glossary hints at a sense of urgency to study the language, culture, and way of life of the fishermen before modernity sweeps them away. The outside world – through cosmopolitanism, globalization, or technological advance – constantly threatened the Northeast.

A master’s thesis from the Music Department of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro studying popular samba music cited a song by Dito Felix that ended with the repeating line, ‘Our samba is a tribute to the missed Jacaré’. ‘Jacaré’ is understood, in this study, as a general name representing the anonymous fishermen.<sup>160</sup> Written into a song about fishermen, this is undoubtedly a reference to our Jacaré, Manuel Olimpio Meira, who led the 1941 raid and died during the production of *It’s All True*. This cultural amnesia takes on more meaning when read alongside an article produced days before the fishermen arrived in Rio. On 11 November 1941, Edigar de Alencar wrote of the fishermen of Ceará: ‘I did not memorize their names nor do I remember now their nicknames. But they shouldn’t be called by their names. They do not belong

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<sup>158</sup> Aguiar, *Mudanças*, 21.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 & 100–1.

<sup>160</sup> Sinesio Jefferson Andrade Silva, ‘Memória dos sons e sons da memória: uma etnografia musical da Maré’ (Univ. Federal de Rio de Janeiro Master’s dissertation, 2009).

to them. They have become de-personalized. They are just jangadeiros. Symbols of the heroic, fearless soul of Ceará'.<sup>161</sup> The above songs, folkloric interpretations, images, and anthropological studies suggest that Alencar had sensed in 1941 the beginning of a process that blended the pre-modern rustic jangadeiro figure with the notion of a modern state and the spread of technology, creating a depersonalized, folklorized symbol of the Northeast. The fishermen offered a way for journalists and artists to think about the Northeast, attributing it physical and social characteristics, and combining the discourse of drought and suffering with the rugged, resistant figure of the jangadeiro. Yet, as Ernest Renan and Benedict Anderson pointed out, in order to be remembered and to become representative, certain characteristics also had to be forgotten: their labor organizing; their desire to move beyond a place of rusticity; their racial, social, and political implications; and, eventually, their names and even existence.<sup>162</sup>

This article has used the voyage of four fishermen from Fortaleza to Rio de Janeiro and the movie that Orson Welles attempted to make about it, to show how stereotypes about the Brazilian Northeast developed through a cross-class discussion, unfolding across several, overlapping geographic scales. It outlined ideas about the jangada and fisherman from Brazil's colonial and imperial past and described the local and national context for the fishermen's protest, stressing that the inclusion of the fishermen's profession in the national, centralized state also represented the inclusion of the agricultural Northeastern region into the national project. At the heart of this article is an analysis of representations of the fishermen – both during and after their voyage – offered by journalists, historians, anthropologists, folklorists, politicians, musicians, photographers, and, importantly, fishermen. This analysis shows that descriptions of

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<sup>161</sup> Alencar, 'Os jangadeiros cearenses'.

<sup>162</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, 12th edn (Paris, 1882), 7 & 9; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 11.



the fishermen were bundled together with evolving notions of the region from which they came, with emphasis on their poverty and migratory nature, the rusticity of their profession, their environmental resistance (especially to drought), their reckless bravery, the historical and national depth of their work, their supposed indigeneity, and, ultimately, their ability to represent a particularly regional type of Brazilian folklore, yet inability to represent the nation on an international scale. Finally, this article followed through with the presentation of music, visual culture, and anthropological studies in the decades after the voyage, showing that the 1941 protesting fishermen, eventually, were largely forgotten, replaced by a nameless folkloric and decidedly regional *jangadeiro* figure.

This engaging episode offers many angles through which to examine Brazilian history, and scholars – from film history critics to labor historians – have employed its study to understand Pan-Americanism, labor law, and filming techniques. Studying the fishermen’s 1941 protest and Orson Welles’ visit to Brazil produces such rich results not only because it is entertaining, but due to its timing, positioned neatly within the New State, at the precipice of Pearl Harbor and the United States and Brazil’s subsequent declarations of war, and squarely before the decade that Brazilian intellectual historian Carlos Guilherme Mota describes as one dedicated to consolidating the national ideologies that came before it.<sup>163</sup> Among those national ideologies, is one of its most enduring: that Brazil is a nation composed of interrelated regions, each offering its ethnic and cultural contributions to Brazilian national identity. Yet this ideology lends to Brazilian nationalism something that goes beyond culture: the regional narrative becomes a tool for describing (and therefore justifying) inequalities in Brazilian political and economic development, outlining which regions are successful in terms of the whiteness of its

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<sup>163</sup> Carlos Guilherme Mota, *Ideologia da Cultura Brasileira (1933-1974)* (São Paulo, 1977), 195.

immigrants, the industrialization of its economy, or the newness of its past. These qualities, of course, only have meaning if juxtaposed against a regional foil, that is against the dark-skinned, agricultural, region of Brazilian colonization: the Northeast.

While this article need go no further than a study of the 1941 voyage to outline the seeds of folklorization of the Brazilian Northeast through the story of the fishermen, including an examination of how the narrative around the fishermen changed once the story went international (that is, once both *Time* and Orson Welles noticed it) shows how descriptions of regional identity and regional value change drastically as they move across socially defined geographic scales. While the fishermen and their region were not heralded as economic role models in 1941, they were seen as purveyors of an idealized Brazilian figure on the national stage. It was not until the fishermen chose to act in Orson Welles' film, with the potential of representing not only their state and region, but also the nation, on an international stage, that they fell from favor in the Brazilian press, losing their sense of authenticity as they took their regional representation beyond the nation. As they stepped out of their folkloric spaces, approaching not only modernity but cosmopolitanism, they stepped out of the national narrative, memorialized only in anonymity.

While this story is particular, it is not unique. During the early twentieth century, folklorists around the world recorded the music, legends, recipes, and archetypal figures from regions whose cultures they saw as in danger of being erased through modernization and mass consumption. The famed Northeastern Brazilian intellectual Gilberto Freyre compared his regional work with that of his friends in the U.S. South, in Ireland, in France, and in Finland.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> The best example of this is: Gilberto Freyre, 'Manifesto regionalista de 1926', *Boletim do Instituto Joaquim Nabuco* i, i (1952). For more on Freyre's interactions with regionalists around the world, see Campbell, 'The Brazilian Northeast,' ch. 1.

Antonio Gramsci wrote of the ‘Southern Question’ in Italy, Jean Charles-Brun and André Varagnac wrote of region and culture in France, Francis Butler Simkins wrote of the United States South, and Mariátegui wrote of regionalism in Peru.<sup>165</sup> Still, intellectuals were just one cycle of this process. These regional identities around the world became popular because they were debated widely and mattered in the lives of the region’s inhabitants. They provided a way for different groups of people, on a local level, to mediate the relationship between region, nation, and world and, conversely, also deeply reflected the debates inspired by these interactions. In this way, the story of the four fishermen and Orson Welles is also the story of how different groups around the world situated regional cultures – often described in both economic and racial terms – within the nation and the world in the twentieth century.

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<sup>165</sup> Antonio Gramsci, ‘The Southern Question’, in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. L. Marks (London, 1957); Jean Charles-Brun, *Le régionalisme* (Paris, 1911); André Varagnac, *Civilisation traditionnelle et genres de vie* (Paris, 1948); Francis Butler Simkins, *The South Old and New* (New York, 1947); Francis Butler Simkins, *The Everlasting South* (Baton Rouge, 1963); José Carlos Mariátegui, ‘Regionalismo y Centralismo’, in *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (Caracas, 1995).