

The Brazilian Northeast, counterculture and popular culture: cognitive places and persistent fictions in João do Crato's poetics ¹

DOI

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/1678-9857.ra.2022.198022>

¹ | Research funded by the CNPq in 2013-2014 during a post-doctoral internship at the Núcleo de Experimentação em Etnografia e Imagem (NextImagem) [Centre for Experimentation in Ethnography and Image], at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Partial results were presented at the XI Reunião de Antropologia do Mercosul [Mercosur Anthropology Meeting], in 2016, the 51st Congress of the Latin American Association (LASA), in 2017, and the 18th World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), in 2018.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout his forty-year career as singer and activist, on countless occasions, João do Crato has employed the fact of being out of place. He was a rock singer in the interior of Ceará in the 1970s and 80s. He usually presents an exaggeratedly sinuous gender performativity for peripheral neighbourhoods where he militates and performs his music. He moves freely between diverse groups of popular culture and manifestations that embody the cultures of African matrices, in the region of Cariri, Ceará. This research examines João do Crato's narratives and support from fellow activists to reflect on displacements concerning the reception of social markers expressed by the artist. The continuous action engaged in from the stage distinguishes João's trajectory as an expressive form of lived experiences in the interior of Ceará, while modulating stereotypes concerning the immobility of an authentic popular culture and the immutability of oppositions between male and female in rural and peripheral areas. By treating the rural world and popular culture as scenarios of differences, João enhances the recognition of a place for himself and his audience based on the displacements he provokes.

KEYWORDS

Sexuality, spatialities, ethnobiography, Brazilian Northeast, popular culture

INTRODUCTION

Based on an ethnobiographical approach (Gonçalves, Cardoso and Marques, 2012a), I textualise creative actions that tension spatial imaginaries from continuous performances in varied, yet symbolically connected fields of action.

Thinking of space as a confluence and (re)iteration of experiences (Gupta; Ferguson, 1997), I follow the creative action of the artist and activist João do Crato in the symbolic production of a micro-region far from the capitals, in the interior of the Brazilian Northeast, a textualised spatiality usually based on images of drought, local despotism, popular culture and religiosity (Albuquerque Júnior, 2001). Considering that the construction of the idea of the Northeast as the margin of the nation is reiterated not only by strategies of erasure in the national memory (Pollak, 1989), but also by the crystallisation of its identification signs, I am alert to dynamics that consolidate the production of spatial imaginaries close to diversified agents, in the form of contact zones (Pratt, 1999a; 1999b), appropriations of an omnipresent grammar that imposes itself as a colonial heritage by socially located subjects. Thus, based on João do Crato's personal creative imagination, his actions on stage and beyond the stage, and the consolidation of a narrative about himself, displacements in operation concerning the usual ideas of the Northeast, counterculture and popular culture are perceived.

As Gonçalves, Marques and Cardoso (2012b) teach us regarding ethnobiography:

(...) the sociocultural worlds in which [the intricate relationship between subject, individual and culture operates] are thought of as the production of individuals who form part of these, individuals whose personal imagination is always situated: creating the world, themselves and their perspectives on this world. Sociocultural reality, therefore, is nothing more than the stories told about it, the narratives by which it is represented. (9-10)

My focus here, therefore, prioritises the production of narratives intersecting² markers of origin, spatial location and sexuality and their effectiveness in consolidating a sense of groundedness (Rapport, 2000) for singer João do Crato, his audience, and fellow activists.

Momentarily, I present our collaborator as an artist who has been active since the late 1970s. As developed throughout this article, his trajectory is linked to the generation that produced song festivals in the city of Crato (CE) and to the young people who introduced rock music to Fortaleza in the 1980s. Since his return to the Cariri region, his career as a singer has merged with his participation in various social movements and the expression of a way of life inspired by the 'drop out' philosophy. João do Crato has been able to mobilise expressive forms linked to local memory and notions of the Northeast and popular culture, while simultaneously tensioning and enlarging modes of existence considered common in small and medium-sized towns

² Here I refer to the debate on intersectionality, as undertaken by the feminist anthropology of Piscitelli (2008), McClintock (2010) and Brah (2006).

in the interior. His action as a singer and, indeed, his very existence invites us to think about the narratives concerning the place he inhabits in the light of displacement. To demonstrate my argument, we shall glimpse through some cracks he expresses in the tellabilities of Luiz Gonzaga's Northeast.

CHÁ CUTUBA

It was 1977 when Luiz Gonzaga recorded the *xote* 'Chá Cutuba' [*lit.* Strong/ Brave Tea] on the long-playing album³ of the same name as the composition by Humberto Teixeira⁴.

The lyrics tell the saga of Sandoval, who took a *meizinha*⁵ made of natural herbs and barks to invigorate his sexual appetite. The tea had also cured Tomé Ribeiro, who was 'in a coffin', then suddenly 'reacted' and 'saiu "despinguelado" perseguindo uma "mule"' [ran out "stripped naked" chasing a woman]. To acquire the tea, it cost Sandoval 'a house, two calves and a yard full of chickens'. Sandoval's satisfaction with the product is summed up at the end of the third stanza of the song: 'Valeu o sacrifício, que o diga a Nazaré! / Pra curar minha "lezeira" foi bastante uma "culé"! [The sacrifice was worth it, Nazaré tells us that! / To cure my indolence, a spoonful was quite enough!]

During the 1940s and 1950s, Luiz Gonzaga became a relevant articulator in reiterating the founding signs of the idea of the Brazilian Northeast as a unit (Albuquerque Júnior, 2001; Dreyfus, 1997; Vieira, 2000; Marques, 2008). Published by radios and magazines in circulation throughout Brazil at the time, his work began to efficiently communicate images of an idyllic rural landscape, the migration experience, the precarity experienced in the poorest region of the country, and everyday life, characters and sociability in small towns in the interior⁶. Ultimately, his songs thematised gestures and affection insinuated in the relationship between men and women in a domestic environment of fierce social control⁷.

These messages reached thousands of North-Eastern migrants across the North, Southeast and Central-West regions in the middle of the era of developmentalism (Ortiz, 1987; Durham, 1973; Risério, 1990). Thus, Luiz Gonzaga's music was consolidated as the soundtrack of a country of migrants. The song and rhythm of longing impregnating senses of belonging and the experience of displacement.

As Sulamita Vieira (2000) affirms, between the second half of the 1940s and the second half of the 1950s, Luiz Gonzaga's *baião* came to occupy a prominent place in Brazilian musical production. As an indication of the spatial expansion of the *baião* and its themes, the author considers its acceptance by various segments of society, with Luiz Gonzaga having been hired by the largest recording company in the country at the time and having maintained an exclusive contract with Rádio Nacional⁸.

In the middle of a very irregular decade in his career⁹, he recorded 'Chá Cutuba' in 1977, a year after the good reception of the *forró* 'Capim Novo' [*lit.* New Grass], aired

3 | From the 1940s onwards, music was recorded on long-playing vinyl records prior to the possibility of digital printing on compact discs (CDs) or music streamed from online digital platforms.

4 | Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3TmlxiJtqs>, accessed on Aug 13, 2021.

5 | A colloquial name for any homemade medication, a *meizinha* or *meizinha* is prepared by experts with knowledge of natural herbs.

6 | As discussed by Vieira (2000) and Marques (2008), this list does not fully express the variety of themes dealt with, nor the complexity of Luiz Gonzaga's body of work. The reiteration of his most popular works produces a specific memory concerning the artist.

7 | Examples include: "O Cheiro da Carolina" [Carolina's scent] and "Numa sala de reboco" [In a room of plaster].

8 | The main Brazilian broadcaster, which was incorporated into the *Patrimônio da União* [Heritage of the Union] in 1940.

9 | The song "Pra onde tu vai baião" evokes the moment experienced in Luiz Gonzaga's career between the 1960s and 1970s, when he sings: "Pr'onde tu vai, baião? / Eu vou sair por aí / Mas por que baião? / Ninguém me quer mais aqui." [Where are you going, baião? I'll be off wandering around / But why baião? / Nobody wants me here anymore] (Luiz... 2002).

on the soundtrack of the TV Globo soap opera *Saramandaia*. In 'Chá Cutuba', Luiz Gonzaga unites the power of the imagination concerning the Sertão with a model of masculinity without nuances, communicated from fairly simple opposing poles: new vs old; psychological vs physiological; potent vs impotent; man vs woman; new drug vs natural remedy.

This representation of masculinity (Butler, 2019) is particularly evident in the synthesis sung by Luiz Gonzaga in 1950: 'No Ceará não tem disso não!' [In Ceará, there's no such thing!]. The verses of the song organise specialities based on the presence/absence opposition that composes the Northeast as a space of tradition, a rural world, in short, as an 'anti-modern device' (Albuquerque Júnior, 2001) in opposition to the urban, the capital, supposedly marked by the multiplicity of practices and their possibilities of flowage.

Marked polarisations along the trajectory of 'Rei do Baião' were tensioned by the singer João do Crato in his 2012 show *Alvíssaras ao rei Luiz* [Good wishes to King Luiz], a tribute to the 100th anniversary of Luiz Gonzaga's birth.

The saga of Sandoval, the main character of the song 'Chá Cutuba', was then presented on stages in cultural centres in the Northeast, at agricultural fairs and public squares. According to João do Crato, the only place it was not possible to present the show was in Exu (PE), Luiz Gonzaga's birthplace. João do Crato's Luiz Gonzaga was 'too different' for local assimilation of the 'Rei do Baião'¹⁰.

The costume for the 2012 show in honour of Luiz Gonzaga consisted of black silk garments, made up of a long-sleeved smock with coloured sequins and similarly translucent pantaloon pants that allowed the audience to glimpse a black thong underneath.

João do Crato used the same costume in the show *Uranianos*, in which he sings compositions by Geraldo Urano. The Crato-born poet Geraldo Urano is a contemporary of João from the generation that modernised the forms of artistic expression in the city of Crato and in Cariri region, and disseminated ideals of freedom and irreverence, themes and melodic forms related to counterculture and tropicalism (Marques, 2004; Dias, 2014).

This confluence between Luiz Gonzaga, tropicalism and counterculture is not accidental. João's body and singing destabilise forms appropriated by the composer from Pernambuco, presenting him as a 'naked messenger of the orixas', born 'at the beginning of the Age of Aquarius', 'the son of Dom Sebastião's dream'¹¹.

Throughout the show, the costume, on stage narratives, gender performativity, and repertoire compose a calculation of displacements frequently presented during João do Crato's career. In this text, I intend to reflect on how creative acts involving narratives marked by the expression of gender and sexuality inspire the place that João invents, whether on stage or off. A place inhabited by the character he creates for himself.

¹⁰ | The impossibility of staging the show in the town of Exu (PE) was discussed by João do Crato during a presentation that took place at the family farmers market in Crato, in July 2013, where I was in the audience, during the fieldwork for this research.

¹¹ | These are references to Luiz Gonzaga cited by João do Crato during the show *Alvíssaras ao rei Luiz*. The thematisation of entities worshiped by Afro-Brazilian religions, an understanding of the 1960s as a time of awareness in relation to the planetary reality and the principles of humanitarianism and, finally, the return of the character Dom Sebastião, linked to messianisms. After the disappearance of Dom Sebastião in the North of Africa in 1578, the belief spread that Dom Sebastião would return and retake the Portuguese throne. This messianism is widespread in the Northeast of Brazil, and expresses inconformity with the current order and an expectation of salvation by the return of an absent dead person. On messianisms in Brazil, see Queiroz, 2003 [1965]; Negrão, 2001.

CHÁ DE FLOR

João do Crato is a singer from Ceará who has been working for 40 years, recognised among the artists and cultural producers who welcomed counterculture and rock and roll in Ceará during the 1970s and 1980s.

Since the first decades of the twentieth century, in the geographic microregion of Southern Ceará called Cariri, the city of Crato has shown prominence for its commercial, educational and leisure services (Sousa, 2016). In 1914, the political emancipation¹² of the former Crato district, now known as Juazeiro do Norte, established a fierce tension between the two cities. Since then, initiatives by the economic, intellectual and political elites have mobilised personal and institutional resources in an attempt to characterise the city of Crato as a model of urbanity, striving to publicise the quality of its infrastructure in local and state publications, together with the lineages of distinguished individuals born in the city and the occasional pioneering in the offer and variety of services (Pinheiro & Figueiredo Filho, 1955).

Following the economic growth that occurred in the 1950s, the displacement of children from the middle classes to the capitals in search of university education increased, corroborating the adherence to eminently urban behaviour and consumption ideals. Local educational initiatives in the provision of secondary and higher education reinforced this sensitivity, materialised in the printing of news diaries, the presence of guilds and literary societies. Recreational clubs, tree-lined squares, wide streets and imposing buildings specialising in the provision of health and educational services began to mark a new urban layout. The droughts that hit the semi-arid Sertão in the late 1950s precipitated intense migrations from the countryside to the city. The availability of precarious labour and agricultural financing policies for local monocultures triggered the financial peak that occurred in the 1970s, intensifying the fast-growing urbanisation of the city (Sousa, 2016).

In 1970, the municipality of Crato had 71,157 inhabitants; 56% of this population resided in the main urban centre. There was an intense flow of young people from the local middle classes to the cities of Recife, Fortaleza and Salvador, together with the dissemination of the artistic production of the time through a system of loudspeakers and local radios, theatre groups and the circulation of people aligned with the drop out philosophy; LPs and printed materials inspired a generation of young residents, simultaneously seduced by aesthetic and behavioural ideals coming from outside the region and mobilised by the feeling of belonging, popular culture and local tellurism¹³.

In the city of Crato, this generation of artists produced 11 song festivals, 10 fine arts festivals, and countless shows, books, *cordéis*, etc. (Marques, 2004). Young people from the 1970s and 1980s shared the intent of breaking with institutional models conceived by local elites and 'respectable families', such as the *Instituto Cultural do Cariri* (ICC) [Cariri Cultural Institute] and the *Sociedade de Cultura Artística do Crato* (SCAC)

12 | The political emancipation of Juazeiro do Norte is linked to the charismatic leadership of Padre Cícero and the events known as 'o milagre da hóstia' [the miracle of the communion wafer] (Della Cava, Ralph, 1977; Barros, Lutigarde, 1988, and Camurça, Marcelo, 1994). The political context at the time placed the city of Juazeiro do Norte at the centre of the national debate on the tensions between Catholic Church and state during the Old Republic (Della Cava, 1977; Schwarcz, 2012).

13 | Regarding the acceptance of counterculture in different locations in the country, see Leon Kaminski, 2019. Specifically on Cariri in the 1970s and 80s, see Marques, 2004 and Dias, 2014.

[Crato Society of Artistic Culture] art school, together with nostalgia for an idyllic rural world, revisited on walks in Chapada do Araripe. Inspired by the aesthetics and ideals of counterculture, they interweaved a new geography for the city and for themselves, sometimes occupying the benches in the city centre's squares with guitars and recreational drugs, sometimes wandering through the cemetery, or around the waterfalls and trails at the foot of the Chapada.

As I discuss below, this urban setting is intertwined with João do Crato's trajectory. Fifty years after the onset of the song festivals in Crato, the singer continues to perform, with his long blond hair in disarray, his sinuous gestures, tight Lycra pants and sequins, in local auditoriums like the Banco do Nordeste do Brasil Cultural Centre (CCBNB) in Juazeiro do Norte, and those of the Social Service for Commerce in Crato and Juazeiro do Norte, considered one of the most respected artists in the Cariri region. In parallel, João has developed continuous militancy with groups of local popular culture, including the Women of the *Coco da Batateira*, the *reisado* of Mestre Aldenir, the *maneiro pau* of Mestre Cirilo and *Penitentes de Barbalha* [the Penitents of Barbalha]¹⁴.

He also militates among the youth of the periphery and cultivates musical encounters there as a way of raising the awareness and expression of these young people.

To visualise how narratives found individual and society at the same time (Gonçalves, Marques and Cardoso 2012a; Rapport, 1997), I have examined the temporal and spatial collages engaged in by João as an inventive model of himself as a character and the world he inhabits. In Marques (2016), I reflect on João do Crato's discourses concerning his performances on stage, analysing the reiteration of specific speeches, events and presentations as a way of creating a sense of groundedness (Crapanzano, 1982; 1984) and being at home (Rapport, 1992; 2000).

Throughout João's narratives on his stage performances, the intention to displace elements is perceived, whether describing his posture as a '*caboclinho*' or a '*Mateus*'¹⁵ on stage while singing progressive rock, or talking about his characterisation as a 'clay doll made by the ceramist Cícera do Barro Cru' in a song festival. His presentations seem to gamble on the productivity of frictioning references and modes of living usually coupled with an 'ideology of well-being' (Velho, 1977) and the disruptive power of art, provoking a clash between grammars and social locations. In the following example, he refers to his performance in a competitive exhibition of artists held in 1993, held by *Rede Globo Nordeste*:

I spoke to Giovani [Sampaio], who's a friend of mine, a wonderful artist, and he took a [clay] doll from [ceramist] Dona Cícera [de Barro Cru] and trans... transformed me into a doll! My body was painted all over, right? And my outfit was that of a 'warrior'! An 'ambassador of the *reisado*!' There was a papier-mâché crown, a papier-mâché sword, my whole body painted like it was a clay doll, with a cardboard petticoat too, painted all over! And to close it off more I just put a genital guard underneath!

14 | These are local groups of popular culture, and two have specific religious aspects: the Women of the *Coco da Batateira* dance, sing and play a regional musical genre – *coco* – in the Giselia Pinheiro (Batateira) neighbourhood of Crato; *reisado* is an enactment of the birth of Jesus and the three kings – *reis* in Portuguese – in which each Mestre imprints original aspects within their group; *maneiro pau* is a collective dance to the sound of a tambourine, which mimics combat between *caboclos*, with the use of sticks; and the *Penitentes de Barbalha* are famous for maintaining rituals that have fallen into disuse in official Catholic practice and for preserving unique aspects of Catholicism popular in the Cariri region.

15 | Throughout the interviews, João accesses numerous characters linked to popular dances and games in the rural Northeast without distinction, usually linked to the diffuse notion of "popular culture": *Mateus*, *Guerreiro* [Warrior], *Ambassador of the reisado*, among others. Within the limits of this text, it is not possible to define each of these characters and manifestations.

I got up on that stage to be irreverent! They didn't know who Dona Cícera do Barro Cru¹⁶ was, they didn't know what my outfit was about! They thought I was trying to shock! That what I wanted was to show off! And it turned into a comedy! A controversy! The stage shook! I was attacked on stage by the two presenters. (...) They were terrified when they saw me! As was the whole of Rede Globo! They never expected a festival contestant would do that! Because they have to be in control! They want everyone to go with their hair tied back, with gel, and a little patchwork vest! They standardise everyone! And I went there to disrupt that! (Interview granted on April 26, 1999)

Here, I intend to present João do Crato not as an exemplary subject of the spatiality where he lives, typifying him, rather as an agent of Cariri's production, a region continually (re)introduced through acts in the world.

Therefore, I abandoned the idea of a Cariri as merely a political-geographical and institutional grouping to reflect on narratives engendered by subjects who simultaneously displace the narrated subject and the place they occupy in the world. In the words of Nigel Rapport (2000):

Narratives may be understood as stories that people tell about themselves and their worlds. The medium of their narrational telling can vary (from words to images to gestures to routine behaviour), but what is invariant is the characteristic of narratives in propagating a meaningful sequence across time and space. (...) In a world in motion, narratives provide for the world-traveller – whether anthropologist or informant – a place cognitively to reside and make sense, a place to continue to be. (p. 74)

I return to João's account of his performance at the *festival Canta Nordeste* [Sing Northeast festival]. In principle, his performance is narrated as an affirmation of the relevance of the art of Dona Cícera do Barro Cru, an importance not recognised by the festival's organisers, immediately elevated and condensed to the condition of 'them'¹⁷. A few sentences later, João reveals another condition of possibility for his performance: the expression of artists from the 1960s and 1970s in university festivals throughout Brazil.

Because I think that's what it's about. Festival is about disruption, like Caetano [Veloso] caused disruption at a certain time, back in the 70s! Like how Os Mutantes caused disruption! With that speech that Caetano Veloso made!¹⁸ A rant! (...) I didn't go on stage to win the festival! I went there to show that! To protest! Due to the neglect of popular art! Because they had no clue what I was representing there! (Interview granted on April 26, 1999)

Through the act of blurring references, from the *reisado* 'Mateus', to David Bowie, Dona Cícera do Barro Cru, and Os Mutantes, and the spatial and temporal senses, this

16 | Born in Crato, the ceramist Cícera Maria de Araújo (1915-1994), aka Cícera do Barro Cru, lived in Juazeiro do Norte throughout her career. Some of her works are present at the Museu Casa do Pontal, in Rio de Janeiro. In 2015, the Museum of Ceará held the exhibition "Cíça e Maria – o barro e suas maravilhas" [Cíça and Maria – clay and its wonders], in honour of the artist's 100th birthday.

17 | This condensation marks opposite pairs that are fairly characteristic of cultural production between the 1960s and 1970s, including the songs "Eles" and "Panis et circensis" by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil. For a panoramic approach to this production, see among others Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda (1980).

18 | Here the singer refers to the performance of Caetano Veloso and Os Mutantes singing 'É proibido proibir' [Prohibition is forbidden] at the III Festival Internacional da Canção [International Song Festival], promoted by Rede Globo in 1968. Boored by the audience, the Bahian composer went into a loud, angry rant against the audience and the jury who had watched at the theatre of the Catholic University of São Paulo (TUCA). The song was disqualified from the festival, having already been released in the single format in 1968, with a studio version on the A side and a live version recorded at the TUCA on the B side.

composite-body has been acclaimed by social movements in Cariri and by local institutional policies¹⁹ as an 'artist of the region', a region that João do Crato continually reinvents from his presence on stage (Marques, 2016).

João thus creates a place for himself and for Cariri, a place welcomed by those of us who watch him and, due to the artist/performer, (re)cognise the place we inhabit in the world. I would particularly like to highlight how this place textualises and intersects images of local and racial origin and sexuality. To achieve this, it is necessary to consider from which places of self-invention João allows himself to speak of Cariri.

MARGINS AND IMAGES OF HIMSELF IN JOÃO'S CARIRI

Based on Doris Massey and Marc Augé, Rapport and Dawson (1998) teach us that

If population movement, travel, economy and communication make the globe a unified space, then, for Augé, no place is completely itself and separate, and no place is completely other. And in this situation, people are always and yet never 'at home'. (p. 6)

At the same time, although none of us is completely at home, not all of us share the condition of 'unhomeliness' (Bhabha, 2003), unintegrated hybrids in their own city of origin, the blurred boundary between being at home and feeling exiled in their own world. It is with this 'cognitive place' (Rapport, 2000) that João do Crato connects us in some of his narratives on his expressions on stage.

The possibility of displacing senses of masculinity from the work of Luiz Gonzaga or of performing the dance of *caboclinhos* during a show by a progressive rock band or of dressing as a Dona Cícera do Barro Cru 'warrior' using a genital guard are 'strategic positions' assumed in order to incorporate and displace notions of time and space (Rapport & Overing, 2000; Rapport & Dawson, 1998).

It is from this tension between a cognitive place of agency and persistent fictions about times and places revisited in João do Crato's poetics that my ethnographic field is engendered. My contact with the artist began in 1999, in research on a generation of artists and cultural producers moulded by the counterculture in Cariri (Marques, 2004; 2019). The diversity of personal and artistic trajectories experienced by this generation inspired me to think about individuation processes in their creative scope for the composition of worlds (Gonçalves, Marques and Cardoso, 2012a). Thus, from 2012, I adopted audio and video recording of the singer's recent stage performances as a methodological strategy. Mediated by trivial issues related to these footages, I interacted with producers, musicians and professionals from different cultural centres that produced these shows. These methodological incursions made it possible to textualise the narrative and performative production of these places in-between as viewed from the stage, the place from where João looks at himself, his audience and at Cariri.

19 | As developed throughout the text, João do Crato has transited between cultural centres in the Northeast, but also through institutions in Cariri, such as the *Centro Educacional de Jovens e Adultos* (CEJA) [Educational Centre for Youth and Adults] and the *Associação de Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais* (APAE) [Association of Parents and Friends of Disabled Persons] of Crato, in Crato. His action as a militant and supporter in different forms of social engagement is sometimes described as that of a popular educator.

The repetition of narratives for a variety of people in different interviews led to a new methodological strategy, beginning in 2013, when I started to collect and categorise interviews given by João do Crato at different moments in his career.

The comparison of these interviews led me to reflect on possible disjunctions and conjunctions (Brah, 2006) raised by the singer in distinct situations in which he talks about his life and experiences he shared with the generation of artists and cultural producers in Crato and Fortaleza during the 1970s and 1980, and public moments in which he expressed his trajectory to journalists, educators, university students and diverse networks of local and national militancy. Mediated by João and his narratives, I collate post-structuralist inspirations around the invention of ethical and aesthetic communities through processes of 'fabulation' and deterritorialisation of the 'Self' (Arcos-Palma, 2006, p. 284) in order to conjugate and communicate expressive forms triggered through public performances (Butler, 2018). Thus, narratives and performances on stage, through the stage, impose themselves as strategies for inventing worlds textualised by us as we share with João a dense tracery between everyday rhetoric, incorporation, and the production of cognitive places (Rapport, 2000).

Within the limits of this text, the way in which João invents himself as a character from Cariri is prioritised in discourses concerning his trajectory with different interviewers. If I sought to didactically punctuate some *tropes* of creation of João as a character of himself, the revisiting of certain places drew my attention: a) his childhood in the interior of Ceará, in contact with a large family and manifestations of local popular culture; b) their place of residence on the periphery of the city of Crato in the 1970s; c) his relationship with the artists of his generation, resident in the city centre; d) his perception of himself as Black and a resident of the periphery based on the impossibility of their family joining a local summer club; and finally e) moving to Fortaleza and getting closer to other artists identified with rock.

The following are a few of João's discourses on some of these *tropes*:

a) The childhood of a 'different' boy:

I came from a family (...) that had two very macho older brothers. And since I was little (...) it was different because (...) I sang, (...) I wouldn't go hunting with a catapult, I wouldn't play football with others. I actually did play, because (cracks his hands) because I felt that if I didn't it would be much more difficult! So, I played football, I actually did things that boys of my time did, but because I already felt a lot of pressure to (...) because I felt that if I didn't, things would be even worse (...). And in adolescence, that's when things got a bit complicated! So, I totally isolated myself! (Interview granted to the author on April 26, 1999)

Memories concerning childhood as a 'different' child are alternated with narratives about the presence of *mestres* of popular culture at the Crato fair. The symbolic

force of the art of ceramicists, *emboladores* [a type of poet-musician of the Northeast], singers, presentations of *reisado* through the eyes of a 'different' child in Cariri. The music played through amplifiers in inner cities and dramas staged in circuses.

My dad played acoustic guitar and sang, my mum also played acoustic guitar and sang (...). The music at the time was this amplified music that we used to listen to. The programmes for the amplifiers started from noon (...) then it stopped and began again at night and went on until around eight at night, and we were always listening to the music of that period. As a child, I was a very attentive to all of this.

I wasn't a kid who'd play with other kids in the street. I swam in the river, but what I really liked was playing (...) was dramas. (...) Since I have a few more siblings at home, who all like art, thank God!, we made up dramas in the backyard. We'd watch the circuses that passed through the city, the circus caravans, and then we'd reproduce the things that the circus presented. What I found most interesting about the circus, besides the trapezes, and the clowns, were the dramas, which were stories (...) that looked like theatre, a popular theatre, which was a curtain that opened and the actors appeared. The stories were fantastic! Of failed love, such things (...) It was very enriching to see! So, I spent my childhood very attached to these things. (Transcript of a talk by João do Crato during the project *Narrativas em volta do fogo* [Narratives around the fire], organised by the Federal University of Cariri and Banco do Nordeste do Brasil Cultural Centre (CCBNB), on October 25, 2014)

b) João and the generation of artists from Ceará in the 1970s

His late participation with the generation that produced music, visual arts and literature in Cariri during the 1970s and 1980s is justified by the fact that João lives in the peripheral neighbourhood of São Miguel, in Crato.

In reality I was a contemporary [of artists of this generation], but I wasn't that involved with the movement yet because this movement was more centralised here in the municipal park, in the city centre, and I've always lived more on the periphery (...). Maybe [the group] was even a little closed off and I couldn't [fit in] and maybe it wasn't (...). Maybe I was the one who was closed off! Maybe I was a little afraid to join in. (...). They already existed, they were already organised (...) because everyone lived close by, everyone met up and it was a more centralised thing. And since I lived on the periphery, I was just a spectator, even though I already thought it was wonderful, and I was supportive and such. Even the [song] festivals [that took place in the city of Crato], I just watched because I still hadn't assumed this thing of art being inside me.... I had everything inside my head, but it was all still very confused. (Interview granted on April 26, 1999)

Running from the possibility of serving in the army in the city where he grew up, João moved to Fortaleza where he started to live with young people interested in the nascent national rock music of the time. There, rehearsing with rock bands and singers in the backyard of his sister's house, João became 'João do Crato'.

I really only came to discover and consolidate [my identity as an artist] when I left here and went to Fortaleza. And that's when everyone left: Abidoral [Jamacaru] left, Cleivan [Paiva] left, Rosemberg [Cariry]²⁰ left too. So, I also went to Fortaleza. There, in the late 70s, I began getting involved with the rock and roll movement, I started doing backing vocals in some bands. Perfume Azul was perhaps the most expressive in the history of rock and roll in Fortaleza. The crooner was Lúcio Ricardo.

(...) I lived alone with my sister and with her help, I managed to get the wall of my house to do the rehearsals. So, Perfume Azul was rehearsing in my backyard! [The singer] Mona Gadelha rehearsed in the backyard of my house, Sigberto Franklin (...) also rehearsed in the backyard of my house. When I came back for a vacation [in Crato], then I was feeling good about going to Praça da Sé, you know, to really open up! And we were a very op... we made a point of really opening up, there was that too! (Interview granted on April 26, 1999).

In research on the music scene concerning the gang that followed rock in Fortaleza in the second half of the 1970s, Simone Gadelha (2018)²¹ reports on the acceptance of sounds and aesthetics from different elements of rock and roll by local bands Perfume Azul and Chá de Flor. Unable to access studios, professional equipment or consumer goods desired by the 'apprentices of transgression' at the time, young people recently integrated into the network of relationships and urban ways of life in the centre of Fortaleza signalled their adherence to the 'contemporary' aesthetic 'by valuing the art of dressing, with outfits accentuated by shiny fabrics, an excess of colour and (...) androgyny' (Gadelha, 2018, p. 16).

With João and Batista Sena, Heriberto Porto, Ronald Carvalho, 'Cigano' and 'Chupeta', João do Crato set up the band Chá de Flor.

The founders of Chá de Flor, João and Batista Sena, lived together in the Barra do Ceará neighbourhood²², where the group experimented with new compositions with psychedelic names, such as '*O predileto vestido de Dália para esperar polichinelo*' [Dália's favourite dress to wait for jumping jack] (...) the proposal of Chá de Flor anticipated and inserted other references (...) 'such as Yes, Genesis, Jethro Tull, the Brazilian band O Terço, in addition to a very strong connection with the music of Clube da Esquina and tropicalism'. (Gadelha, 2018, p. 64, from an interview with João do Crato)

The house in the Barra do Ceará neighbourhood was frequented by 'all the vanguard of the time', 'the people involved in the arts revolution [theatre, dance and music]

20 | The musicians Abidoral Jamacaru, Cleivan Paiva and the filmmaker and poet Rosemberg Cariry are Crato-born artists from the generation that became famous by organising the song festivals of the 1970s and 1980s discussed throughout this work.

21 | A Master in Communication who researches the rock scene in Fortaleza in the 1970s, Simone Mary Alexandre Gadelha, also known as Mona Gadelha, is a singer and songwriter from Ceará, who has been working and producing since the end of the 1970s.

22 | A neighbourhood located in Western Fortaleza, bordering the municipality of Caucaia. Throughout the interview with Mona Gadelha, João do Crato refers to the neighbourhood in the late 1970s as 'a wonderful place', marked by the proximity of the Ceará River.

in Fortaleza' (João do Crato an interview with Mona Gadelha. Gadelha, 2018, p. 64). It was also a 'place of passage' for artists and backpackers of the late 1970s, enchanted by the beauty of the unspoilt mangrove surrounding the Ceará River.

Amid occasional travels to spend vacations with his family in Crato, João had the opportunity to perform a few times with members of *Chá de Flor*. He also said that the TV Globo affiliate in Ceará used to talk about the band *Chá de Flor*: 'At that time there was only TV Verdes Mares (...), but they were talking about the band *Chá de Flor*. There was talk of João do Crato and that was when people began to see that I existed, right? That I was doing some work there and such' (statement given to the author, April 26, 1999). Disagreements in the band led him to move back to Crato. However, from then on, the strength of the experiences and ideals shared in his self-discovery as an artist in Fortaleza established him as João do Crato, an invention of that time between places.

Like the trajectories of the singer and composer Abidoral Jamacau, the filmmaker Rosemberg Cariry, the musician and composer Cleivan Paiva, João do Crato's performances are marked by a trajectory between places synthesised in the relationship between interior and capital. While the generation of artists linked to the Massafeira movement²³ (Aires, 1994; Sousa, 2010), in Fortaleza, found its expressive force²⁴ in tellurism and romanticising the Sertão, it was the confluence of experiences between peers in the capital of Ceará that enabled the transmission of João's yearnings as an artist. Like the narrative constructed in Jean Rouch's 'Jaguar' (1955), it is necessary to move spatially to fabulate another self. Based on this displacement of the self, the potential possibilities in the city of origin were tuned into and expanded, appropriated as between places by João's narrative and performative actions.

[In Praça da Sé], when we saw that those more traditional conceited ladies were coming, we'd light a joint and make a point of (drag on) puffing on it! So [puffing] to feel... in... We did it and it was kind of aggressive! Even today I wonder if... if it wasn't really a thing... but no! I think the process has to be this, you know? It had to be! To cause a rupture or I don't know why... but we used to do that a lot! (Interview granted on April 26, 1999)

c) The father who was unable to enrol in the Crato Tennis Club, because he was not from Crato and was black.

[It was in my adolescence that] I started to feel in my skin how much Crato was a traditionalist, straight city, the bourgeoisie of Crato, the traditional families. It was when my father, in an attempt to want us to feel fine here in Crato, went to the [recreational club] Crato Tennis Club to try and join, so we would have the opportunity to (...) attend a social club, and alas it was denied! They held an assembly and said, 'No, no you can't. He is not from a family! Who is this man? This black man? This black man that no one knows who he is! No, you can't be a member!' I started to feel in my skin how much this city was straight, bourgeois, and

23 | Led by Ednardo, singer and composer from Ceará, artists linked to music, the visual arts, theatre and cinema performed at José de Alencar Theatre, in Fortaleza, between October 16 and 19, 1979. The show resulted in a double LP released by CBS in 1980. Ednardo was in charge of artistic direction, production direction, and studio direction of the Massafeira album. Augusto Pontes was the co-producer. Rodger Rogério, Petrócio Maia and Stélio Valle were in charge of musical coordination.

24 | As examples, listen to the songs "Como as primeiras chuvas de caju" [Like the first rains of cashews]; "Água grande" [Big Water] or "Fotografia 3 x 4" [3 x 4 (cm) Photography]. See also the film "Cauldron of Santa Cruz do Deserto", by filmmaker Rosemberg Cariry.

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then I retreated a lot. My adolescence was restricted to the peripheries, to the '*lapinha*' dances beyond the woods. I intended to be '*caboclinho*', following the '*lapinha*' dances (Interview granted on April 26, 1999)

It could be suggested that the displacement performances on stage mentioned above are reaffirmed by the creation of a narrative place for himself associated with precarious ways of life: displaced from his generation, due to his sexuality, race, family origin, and place of residence. The conditions that made his performances on stage possible are, therefore, weaved from a very simple opposition between modes of functioning present in the city of Crato: a modern mode in resistance to a traditional mode. In this polarisation, João considers himself an agent of modernity.

He consolidates his narrative from *tropes* capable of establishing opposition between a traditional-local-linear-'straight' morality polarised by attitudes aligned with experimentation-modernity-cosmopolitanism. Effectively, this opposition is constructed from the continuous citation of moments of conflict between these two voices in Crato or in other cities he has passed through.

However, the narrative needs to advance further. My intention here is not to punctuate the existence of different social places in cities in the interior of the Northeast, the sublunar variety is a very obvious assertion. Rather, the issue is to affirm how these displacements create and multiply tellabilities recognised as narratives of a place, bringing together gender performativities and spatial imaginaries.

Therefore, as I have tried to demonstrate thus far, through the narrative and performative construction of himself as a peripheral, 'different' child of black parents, João establishes a mimetic interaction with his audience, which identifies with the place he creates for himself and for them. It is possible that this identification produced by João based on his performances and narratives justifies the place raised by the artist in local cultural centres, by other artists and intellectuals from Cariri, and in his incursions in the city and its surroundings, as I elucidate below. Perhaps this network linked to the local cultural production that makes up his audience identifies with the *status* of 'creator' occupied by João, including the possibility of producing different places to live. Thus, paraphrasing Crapanzano (1982), João's trajectory is at the same time very particular and very much grounded in the place he inhabits. An individuation process at once far from typical and, at the same time, only possible in Cariri.

These *a posteriori* narratives incorporate temporal and spatial displacements, which in the present fabulate a Crato and in the past, a João, creating a character and a place for himself from a sense of the lack of a place to exist – 'unhomeliness' (Bhabha, 2003). This place of self-invention, consolidated from linear narratives and with a very evident sense of 'project' (Velho, 1999), is illuminated by the *status* João occupies in the memory of his generation and that of other young artists, for local cultural centres and for groups of popular culture and non-governmental organisations where he performs his activism: *Grupo de Valorização Negra do Cariri* (GRUNEC) [Cariri Black Empowerment

Group]; *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT) Pastoral Land Commission; *Frente de Mulheres dos Movimentos do Cariri* [Women's Front of Cariri Movements]; *Associação dos Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais* (APAE) [Association of Parents and Friends of Disabled Persons], and in different neighbourhoods and peripheral locations like the village of Carrapato, the community of Melo, Lagoinha, among others.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: WHEN CHÁ DE FLOR MEETS CHÁ CUTUBA

Summarising a trajectory that has remained on the stage for over forty years would be impossible. João do Crato's journey articulates presentations for different audiences, production values and a distinct scope. Allied with the complexity of this intent is the fact that the artist is continually present in the daily life of social movements, in public acts articulated by these movements, and as a supporter or volunteer in other forms of engagement present in the Cariri region.

My contribution here was therefore restricted to an attempt to demonstrate how the notions of the Northeast and popular culture, usually conjugated based on supposed stabilities – the longevity, restriction and crystallisation of elements are shattered by João do Crato. Creations and actions engaged in through the reiteration and strength of his presence on stage.

The perspective on 'popular culture' as mystery and complexity imposes itself as a theme in several artists and professionals identified with production in the late 1970s, including the tropicalists Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil and the architect Lina Bo Bardi (Basualdo, 2007; Bardi, 2007). This displacement, thematised here from the show *Alvíssaras a Luiz Gonzaga*, is constant in other shows by the singer²⁵. The scope of this new device is reinforced when it incurs on national stages or imposes itself on relevant stages in the state of Ceará, like presentations at the *Mostra SESC de Culturas* (SESC Cultures exhibition)²⁶, the commemoration of 'culture day' at the Cineteatro São Luiz, or on the stages of the Maloca Dragão festival in honour of the singer and composer Belchior, from Ceará, organised by the *Instituto Dragão do Mar* [Sea Dragon Institute]²⁷.

When he assumed the richness of contemplating the Northeast through the viewpoint of the 1970s, João do Crato explored persistent fictions concerning the stability of the region and popular culture, producing places based on these to share existence. Allied with the daily life of his interaction with relevant male and female articulators of social movements in Cariri, the possibility of the displacement of crystallised power relations makes the presence of João do Crato among these movements fundamental. For Angelita Maciel, an activist linked to the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), social movements benefit from the knowledge that João do Crato has of the surrounding area of Chapada do Araripe and its characters:

²⁵ | For example, in the show in which he interprets the repertoire of the singer and composer Marinês or in the show *Remoenda*, in which he interprets songs by composers inspired by the power of imagination of the Sertão.

²⁶ | Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nGPeoa1_J4

²⁷ | Available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1330442153658977&ref=watch_permalink

(...) The person who brings us closer to these communities is João, because João knows *bibocas*²⁸ in this Chapada that you can't even imagine! João knows sources you can't imagine! And in these places, he gets to know the characters. He gets closer to the characters, to the elderly. When we wanted something, [he'd say]: 'It's in that corner! There's a man who knows the herb!' So João comes to the movement helping us achieve this proximity, which for us had remained hidden! (Angelita Maciel, interview granted on March 10, 2017)

28 | Synonymous with small villages, and hidden places.

Vicente de Paulo, advisor to Crato's Secretariat of Culture since the early 2000s, told us that having withdrawn from friends with whom he had fun during the weekends, he was gradually introduced by João do Crato to the social movements around Chapada.

João starts asking me to go out with him on weekends, to 'riacho do Meio' to 'Engenho da Serra', saying that it was a 'youth meeting' (laughs). Then, when I arrived at this Engenho da Serra²⁹, I came across a crowd trying to re-establish a spring that was there! Then I started freaking out about this! They were some kids from the youth group [...]. Then I started to get to know this work that already existed, which was linked to leisure, culture, environmental issues and associativism. (Vicente de Paulo, interview granted on October 16, 2015)

29 | Riacho do Meio and Engenho da Serra are rural locations in the vicinity of Chapada do Araripe.

The reiteration of João do Crato's constant presence in diverse groups, spatially distant, but unified by their relations with the surrounding area of Chapada, precipitates interaction with other agents of social movements, making the presence of the singer and activist a very obvious choice when groups like the *Associação Cristã de Base* (ACB) [Christian Base Association], Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), *Rede de Educação Cidadã* (RECID) [Citizen Education Network] and others wish to perform artistic or mystical presentations in encounters with the communities.

People know João, he is not new to these worlds, and I ask, how did João arrive? He arrived [for example] through a lacemaker [in the town of] Aurora, an artist who made crafts who knew João from his activities in Crato, from his music, and her family lived in this community and she called João to have lunch at her house and look at the community, some time ago. In Salitre, João knows someone who's connected to the secretariat of culture... long before this PT administration and so people take João there and he goes into the community. This story of João walking, like a wanderer, that he goes '*no giro da venta*' [similar to: *like a rolling stone*] is something that makes him very ordinary, because as he walks, he meets a lot of people and he talks to them, about anything. He asks the simplest things, with women, old people, so he's very much of this world! (Angelita Maciel, interview granted on March 10, 2017)

This continuous interaction makes João a good match for communities around Chapada do Araripe and for social movements. Belonging marked by complex

appropriations of markers of social origin, gender, sexuality and race. Markers present in him, present in the communities of Chapada and in militants. Thus, if in his performances as a singer, he draws attention to a body far removed from models of masculinity promoted as a stereotype of the Northeast, this body is lifted by João to another place, a more complex and indistinct place: a field of creation and discovery of mini mysteries.

We receive a natural gift that we don't know where it's from. Since I was a child, I've always had this thing for irreverence (...). As a child, I no longer played at catching animals, or using catapults. I preferred to accompany my sisters to clubs, to dance. I learned to dance very young! (...) And when the sexual revolution actually began (...) with all the discontent that the youth was going through, wanting new things, wanting to get away from that straight, boring thing that religions imposed, that the system imposed (...). And Cariri was a very early route for these backpackers. When I was a teenager, I spent so much time with backpackers who passed through Crato, through Juazeiro do Norte, and stayed a few days. Those people had interesting information because it came from all over the world, right? (João do Crato, in an interview with Wallison Araújo, September 11, 2019³⁰)

30 | Interview available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dparut1JLoA>, accessed on August 14, 2021.

Together with bodily performances from popular culture, such references precipitated a body on stage.

I already had a very strong connection with this performance thing, very little clothing, glitter, using the body as a very important thing linked to singing, right? So then, I always liked it! And this thing about sexuality is also pretty crazy. Because people imagine unspeakable things about you! When you expose yourself in this sense, people are curious to know what you do, what's behind that person, and people were always very curious to know what my thing was, who I was dating (...). And that's not the intention! The intention is to cause the revolution as a whole! The issue of sexuality is very particularised. We were the ones who were very repressed, right? (João do Crato, in an interview with Wallison Araújo, September 11, 2019)

Appropriated by generations already shaped by the notions of fundamental human rights, identified by the identity grammar constructed throughout the history of LGBT movements, the acceptance of João do Crato by the youth in communities in the foothills of the Cariri Serra in Ceará assumes new importance.

Today, the youth, particularly in rural areas where the issue of sexuality is more curtailed, (...) more hidden, when João arrives, these people reveal themselves! ... It's as if they see a mirror in João, especially the young. Today I perceive this! When João is in a rural community, when João arrives, when João speaks, this group feels represented. (...) In particular, I have met

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many boys and girls who have the desire to leave there to live their sexuality openly. It's not just that story of going to a better school, getting a better job, no. It's about being respected, being able to express yourself. And this is a characteristic that João brings. João brings this to Salitre, to the community in Araripe, to Porteiras. And it's interesting because João isn't a person who talks about himself. He arrives, is who he is and that's it! (Angelita Maciel, interview granted on March 10, 2017)

If we contemplate Angelita Maciel's discourse through the lens of sexual diversity grammar post-1980s, it is possible to consider that João's presence would impact young people in the communities around Chapada do Araripe through the imposition of new ways of living identified with a specific sexual identity. However, if woven into other elements presented throughout the text, we perceive that this performativity cannot be conjugated if not through a complex grammar between times and spaces, involving narratives of an also-Northeast conjugated on stage and in flashes of sequins arising from the acceptance of the counterculture in the 1970s and 80s.

João's acceptance is, therefore, the result of the reiteration of his presence in these places, together with his charisma in dealing with people in the community throughout his works of militancy. It could be suggested that markers like sexuality, race, gender performance, body shape, in addition to effective and continuous action with these communities are used not only to produce differences, but to negotiate mimetic effects with them.

Finally, I return to the idea that in his action, João do Crato potentiates the recognition of a place for himself and for us from tensions and displacements based on the stage, while bringing such displacements into his daily action with NGOs and other forms of local political agency.

This identification with his action as an agent of creation has produced collective actions identified not with his identity, as gay, as a resident of the periphery, as black, as a man, but with his ability to displace these identities and thereby produce places of groundedness, from which he can establish himself. His identification with the idea of the Sertão, as well as with the ideals of irreverence and freedom characteristic of the generation of young people in the 1960s and 70s, are possibly keys to understanding the complexity of displacement games present in his performances and narratives. Among other things, this enables us to think of counterculture as a phenomenon with numerous temporalities, with multiple spatialities. João teaches us to conjugate counterculture not only in the past, but also in the present and the future. To achieve this, João becomes an inventor of Cariri, to then shatter it, through the expression of a dislocated body and voice.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION: Phil Badiz did the translation for the english version.

FUNDING: The Ceará Foundation for Scientific and Technological Development (FUNCAP) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

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Received April 5, 2021. Accepted July 14, 2021.

