

Jose Sergio Leite Lopes and Rosilene Alvim

The Strength of Working-Class Social Memory in a Northeast-Brazilian Deindustrialised Town

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the making of working-class social memory in the city of Paulista in Northeast-Brazil. When returning to the place researched twenty years before, the authors noticed the depth of social change that had followed its de-industrialisation and decided to produce a documentary film about the local workers, who welcomed the researchers as collaborators in their quest to preserve their local history. In this article, the authors assess the transformations of life experiences among textile workers from Paulista during an earlier period of Brazilian industrialisation in comparison to the more recent context of de-industrialisation, which has left its mark on many communities in the country. In comparing their past and present field experiences, the authors describe the history of the previous industrial regime as a process which combined new and traditional forms of legitimisation of class domination.

Keywords: working class, social memory, deindustrialisation, textile industry, Pernambuco, Brazil

Introduction

On our return to the city of Paulista in Pernambuco State in 2003, twenty years after completing our first period of research there (1976–1983), we were surprised by the radical change that had shaped this region: next to the enormous population density, we noticed that a recently opened four-lane highway, the PE-15 (Pernambuco highway number 15), bisected the town by cutting one of the CTP's two traditional factories in half. In the meantime, the CTP (*Companhia de Tecidos Paulista* or Textile Company of Paulista) had sold plots of land to the state housing company, and a great number of housing developments had sprung up. Between the 1970s and the 2000s, Paulista's population quadrupled, now standing at around 300,000 people. Until the 1960s, the workers village had received a large influx of rural families from Pernambuco and neighbouring states. There was a general drift from the countryside to the outskirts of the state capital, Recife, including Paulista. However, from the

1980s onwards, with the occupation of its new housing developments, the population flow inverted when a large number of people began to move from Recife to the suburbs of the metropolitan area. And the CTP factory, with its 2,000 workers until the late 1970s – when we conducted our initial fieldwork – was finally shut down in the 1990s.

It is important to mention that the city of Paulista, located 20 kilometres from the state capital Recife, was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century around the textile company. The first factory was built in 1892 inside an old sugar plantation. The Lundgren family, who were of Swedish origin, bought the company in 1904. This family originally migrated to Recife to become involved in commercial affairs at the local port. The Lundgren Brothers created a network of textile retail shops all over the Northeast of the country and managed to bypass the intermediate wholesale business (*Lojas Paulista*). This autarchic production-distribution network was successful and subsequently penetrated into the dominant southern markets where both consumer demand and production facilities were concentrated (*Casas Pernambucanas*). The municipality of Paulista, formerly a district of Olinda city, gained autonomy in 1935. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the CTP became one of the biggest textile industries in Brazil with about ten to fifteen thousand formalised factory workers and five to eight thousand non-registered workers outside the factory. The company town consisted of 6,000 houses in the early 1950s.

When we visited Paulista for the first time in 1976, the CTP – which held a virtual monopoly over the municipality until the end of the 1960s – had already sold many of its properties. Between 1966 and the end of the 1970, most of the houses of the CTP's workers village, which accounted for much of the built-up area in the municipal centre, had been purchased by their long-term workers as part of the company's severance payments, turning the former workers into home owners. The concomitant sale of lands for the creation of an industrial district in a formerly outlying area of the municipality (now traversed by the BR-101 federal highway, which spans almost the entire Brazilian coast), ended the industrial monopoly that had given rise to the city and driven its development. This led to the establishment of several new factories, the majority built by industrial companies from the south of the country. After 2000, however, the relatively new and modern factories from that period were also shutting down, which left a large section of the local population with the desire to preserve the social memory of the city as a former company town.

The local community's relationship to the past was already part of our research in the 1970s and 1980s. The workers in Paulista then emphasised their rural origins and their later urban life during a period when the textile company's apparent prosperity – as well as their own fights with the company for better living conditions – gave them a sense of dignity. They historicised their past in contrast to the difficulties of the present. When we completed the most intense and longest phase of our research with the Paulista factory workers, we believed that the history, memory and identity of this social group would

be transmitted to the following generations. We were leaving behind a group formed by dense kinship and neighbourhood networks, by a history of incidents and clashes involving not only local politics and social life, but also by more wide-reaching political events at the state and national levels (including episodes in the immediate aftermath of the 1930 revolution, during the conflict over the eight-hour workday; the relations between the government, the CTP and the union during the New State [*Estado Novo*] and the Second World War; the union activism of 1950s and 60s). This history culminated in a partial victory of the workers, as many of them acquired home ownership on the basis of severance agreements with the company. However, in the mid-1980s, the working conditions among the descendants of the original group of workers again changed. For the new generations there were fewer chances of stable employment in the industrial sector. Even through the local families tried to provide their children with a better education by keeping them longer at school, they were not able to gain better employment. Meanwhile the profile of the city's population had changed with a wave of migrants from Recife arriving to occupy the new housing developments.

This was the new context in which demands were transpiring through the public sphere to recover and systematically document the city's social memory. The subsequent return of the researchers to the locale on which they had previously produced PhD theses, articles and books did not go unnoticed among the agents who sought attention for their local history: the researcher/data collector then transformed in their eyes into someone capable of testifying, publicising and preserving their history; we suddenly became collaborators in this project. This article provides us with a pretext to assess the transformations experienced by textile workers from this municipality who can be regarded as representatives of a particular way of life from an earlier period of Brazilian industrialisation, and also as witnesses of the more recent de-industrialisation, which has affected so many communities throughout the country (and the world).

Our return to the field inevitably became entwined with the demands to remember the past. We were confronted with a new body of information on the recent transformations, as well as new information on the more distant past, which had previously been unavailable to us. We therefore decided to re-explore the specific nature of the former industrial regime, which combined new forms of legitimisation with the language of traditional forms of domination, to reconsider the conditions of the social conflicts and forms of associations amongst the workers, and to reflect on the network of self-trained local historians and their role in reinventing a threatened social identity.

The Reconstitution of the Factory-Worker Village System during its Peak: Landmarks of Social Memory

An embodied memory of domination

The social memory the locals wished to recover and preserve has primarily resided in the testimony of the former workers who were still alive from the period of intense recruitment of factory workforce in the 1930s. Although their memories vary considerably according to particular individual and family characteristics, they contain many common features that allowed us to identify a prescriptive narrative model of the social group. The recurring elements are: (a) the arrival of families from rural areas and the transformation of their members into factory workers, generally involving the recruitment of peasant families by specialised agents paid by the number of families they managed to hire; (b) the factory owner's presence at the performance of a ritual of entry into an institution (apprehensible as a total social fact), namely the worker's families presentation at the veranda, which will be explained below; (c) work for all members of the family, whose individual low wages combined produced a family wage; (d) the existence of non-monetary benefits, such as the concession of plots of land to family heads too old for factory work in order for them to plant food crops; the organisation of a food market with low prices enabled by rural production on the vast company lands; the promotion of traditional revelries and football leagues with subsidies to clubs; (e) the recognition of what was effectively a local government, holding a monopoly over the labour and housing market, as well as the company's physical and symbolic violence.

One of the most original features of the system of domination instituted by the Paulista factory is that during its period of expansion from 1930 to 1950 its workforce was directly recruited in the form of families rather than individual workers. The CTP thereby created, *ex-nihilo*, a group of workers of rural origin that could be controlled even in the regions from where they came. This type of recruitment reveals the place that the company allocated to different family members in the division of labour, according to their sex and age, both in the factory and in the activities peripheral to industrial production. Hence, the families played a very important role in establishing this type of domination and in enabling its later transformations. The dynamic of the relationship between the sexes and age groups within the families also played a substantive role.¹

1 The literature on the working classes in 19th century Europe only occasionally mentions similar cases of factories recruiting entire families. On England and France, cf. Louise A. Tilly/Joan Wallach Scott: *Les Femmes, le Travail et la Famille*, Paris 1987. An ethnographic investigation into a particular group of workers, linked to a factory and a company town, as in the Paulista case, is interesting since it enables us to observe the scale involved in a hiring policy of this kind extended over more than 20 years, as well as its consequences in terms of forming

From the 19th century until recently, the textile industry employed a sizeable number of women in its workforce in all countries where it developed. The spinning and weaving sections became standard places for female work and had a considerable symbolic importance in the development of moral and ideological analyses, which during this period focused on the phenomena of proletarianisation. However, in regions with low levels of urbanisation and proletarianisation – where the available workforce was insufficient, for example the Brazilian Northeast during the first half of the century – how could the textile industry overcome the international tradition of a gender-based division of labour, and hire the female half of the local workforce? This need for a female (and child) workforce to accompany the male contingent was resolved precisely by recruiting families directly.

Direct recruitment proved to be highly attractive to families who had a large number of young women. The peasant (or fishing) families, whose survival was most under threat, were almost always those with a higher ratio of girls to boys, since the latter were presumed to be the most capable of helping their ageing fathers in agricultural work. Thus there was a convergence between the demand for a female workforce and the supply of such labour from peasant families with high numbers of girls, as boys were preferred to work on farms and girls “freed” to be used the industry. It therefore became possible for the entire family group to emigrate simultaneously, preventing its dispersion. Finally, this form of recruitment helped ameliorate the poor reputation associated with factories that hired young women from peasant families.

Entry into the world of the factory and the workers village involved a rupture from the previous social life of the newcomers, intensified by the high degree of ritualisation involved. After their journey, organised by the hiring agents using the CTP’s buses or trucks – which highlighted the precariousness of their previous living conditions due to the improvisations and emergencies linked to the move – the families were temporarily lodged in a large building; men and women were housed separately, but met collectively for meals, waiting for the hiring ritual which took place in the presence of the factory owner. The families were taken in line, one-by-one on the veranda of the mansion, to be presented to the factory owner. The owner would ask the head of the family about his previous jobs, where he came from and what his religion was. He would then examine the adults’ hands and look into their eyes to decide which work to give them. Standing behind the owner, the staff manager and those responsible for the factory’s different sections wrote down his orders and sometimes suggested other posts that they could fulfill either immediately or later.

a local working class. Cf. Rosilene Alvim: *Constituição da Família e Trabalho Industrial*. Tese de doutorado em Antropologia Social, Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro 1985; José Sérgio Leite Lopes: *A Tecelagem dos Conflitos de Classe na Cidade das Chaminés*, São Paulo/Brasília 1988.

Performance of this rite ushered in a new form of domination, halfway between the mode of personalised domination typical of the traditional *morada*² and the mode of industrial capitalist domination objectified in the impersonal management of the workforce, a kind of industrial theatricalisation of the traditional form of domination.³ The initiation was primarily directed at the male heads of family as they were in charge of the household, keenly aware of the symbolism linked to the personalisation of patriarchal power in traditional relations of domination. At the same time, this ritual marked the limits of paternal authority, since the father would have no control over the first jobs assumed by his children or their future career in the industry. When recollecting this period, the former workers stress the detail of this ritual, highlighting its central place in the emergence of the Paulista group of workers – even when they personally had not undergone the ritual, as is the case of those who were not directly hired by the CTP. It is as though this ritual remained in the collective memory as the preferential model for joining the group of workers. As a form of exam, it selected some people and rejected others: the fact that the father's hands were too delicate, the religion of the parent or countless other motives could be a pretext for arbitrarily dispensing with the whole family.

The symbolic effectiveness of this ritual of institution stemmed from the fact that it symbolically incorporated the new waves of workers recruited by the company directly in their region of origin, while encouraging them to accept their new situation. This acceptance was facilitated by the contrast between the period of poverty they had recently left behind and the prospect of enjoying the better living conditions provided by the factory in the workers village. At the same time, the presence of established families placed the new recruits in a humiliating situation, making them even more inclined to assimilate by adopting the rules of the factory and the company town.⁴ Conversely, the arrival of these

2 A system in which a landowner would grant a house and a plot of land to an employee to keep him in his service. Cf. Afrânio Garcia Jr: *Libres et Assujetés, Marché du Travail et Modes de Domination au Nordeste*, Paris 1989; Moacir Palmeira: *Casa e Trabalho. Notas sobre as Relações Sociais na Plantation Tradicional*, in: *Atas do XLII Congresso Internacional de Americanistas*, vol. 1 (1976), pp. 305–315; and Lygia Sigaud: *A Nação dos Homens. Uma Análise Regional de Ideologia*, in: *Anuário Antropológico* 78 (1979), pp. 13–116.

3 Cf. José Sérgio Leite Lopes/Rosilene Alvim: *L'usine et la véranda. La théâtralisation de la domination patronale*, in: *Etudes Rurales* 131–132 (1993), pp. 39–56.

4 A motive of irony and hierarchical jokes between the already established workers and the recent arrivals turned on the apparent peasant-like naivety of those migrating to the new urban factory agglomeration. For example, one of the methods said to have been used by hiring agents in their trips to rural towns was to exploit rural fantasies of a utopic abundance of food in the urban world through publicity suggesting that the new industrial town had mountains of cuscuz (a food prepared from maize flour and milk) and fountains of milk. The inquiries from newcomers concerning the whereabouts of these mountains and fountains

new families imposed a new model of behavior on the old families, involving renewed obedience and a new distribution of roles within the household.

The hiring ritual announced the company's division of labour by sex and age, and simultaneously symbolised an era in which there was work for everyone. The more "delicate" young women were assigned to work in weaving, the rest in spinning.⁵ Young men were sent to work in pre-spinning, bleaching, dyeing or printing, or in machine workshops and factory maintenance. But they also had the chance to take part in various activities beyond the factory: chopping the wood to feed the boilers, building and maintaining the workers village, working on the company railway, or in surveillance activities within the company's private militia. Most of these male activities remained clandestine since they broke the labour legislation that was in force from the 1930s onwards.⁶ The male heads of family, for their part, were able to perform unskilled work inside the factory or took up jobs in the clandestine "external sector". When male family heads had a sufficient number of children working in the factory, they could also request a plot of land for growing crops, which allowed them to regain a semblance of their authority as head of a rural family, planting their own crops and administrating the work of their children – the latter work considered secondary within the family unit itself. The mother generally remained at home taking care of the domestic chores.

The company was thus able to find a productive use for most members of the recruited families. Both sexes were represented more or less evenly in terms of both the resident population and the workforce employed in the factory. However, this statistical balance should not hide the importance of the work undertaken by young women in the strategically important weaving and spinning sections, considered by both owners and workers the productive heart of the factory. The more precarious jobs of the senior family heads also deserve our attention: in effect, their hiring as unskilled workers or sweepers was generally felt to be humiliating, as the family biographies produced by their children attest. To avoid this situation, children were morally obliged to accept employment in the factory at an early age under the responsibility of their father.

provided an excuse for the established workers to make fun of their new colleagues (or for self-irony on the part of the latter when they looked back on this initial period).

- 5 The weaving section required a cool and damp environment for the machines to improve the weaving of the threads, while spinning on the contrary used heat to separate particles of cotton, which ended up sticking to the exposed parts of the worker's body. Although generating the same amount of noise, weaving was considered less heavy work than spinning, and the aesthetic qualities of the female recruits ended up influencing the male factory managers involved in selecting the workforce and allocating jobs, starting with Colonel Frederico himself.
- 6 For an analysis of the importance of labour laws in the structure of 20th century Brazilian society, see John D. French: *Drowning in Laws. Labour Law and Brazilian Political Culture*, Chapel Hill 2004; and Elina Pessanha/Regina Morel/Glaucia Villas Boas: *Evaristo de Moraes Filho. Um Intelectual Humanista*, Rio de Janeiro 2005.

It became crucial, therefore, for the CTP to provide an acceptable place in the company's universe for the male heads of family, as a way of ensuring the company retained the families it had recruited. The solution was based on the firm's experience of releasing rural workers from working with sugarcane crops on the land, the CTP was then buying up from sugar plantations and mills, in order to use the forests to obtain firewood for its boilers. By encouraging these men to work on plots of land granted to them on condition that they supply food produce exclusively to the Paulista open air market, the company was able to ensure an abundant supply to the latter and thus lower prices for the worker families, who for their part received lower wages than those employed in Recife's factories. Despite the imposed restriction, the rural families from these areas perceived the chance to plant their own crops as an improvement compared to their previous situation as *moradores* compelled to work in cane harvesting. The original solution of the CTP factory was to grant plots of land close to the outskirts of the workers village or in empty land within the city to the older male heads of family, recently arriving from rural areas who had permitted their children to work, but felt a loss of self-esteem without any role to perform at the factory. The legitimacy of this new type of industrial domination imposed on an uprooted rural population was due, in part, to the concessions made to older male family heads and apparently helped reduce the impact of the changes caused by the role of the family's main wage earner being transferred to their children.

The policy of direct recruitment significantly increased the participation of younger age groups in the workforce, forcing the company to invest in rapid training of the young men and women. But although the basic earnings of the recently arrived families were guaranteed by the young people's wages, the children's work was still perceived as assisting their fathers at home. This applied particularly to the young women, whose salary went towards household expenses. They were also expected to help their mother in domestic tasks. Later they would marry and become housewives like their mothers.

Work at the factory was therefore seen as a temporary project. Its ephemeral nature accentuated their passivity at work, allowing the employers to intensify their exploitation of the workers without running the risk of collective or individual complaints: what may be unbearable in a permanent work situation can become bearable when perceived as temporary.⁷

In fact, the workforce faced a continuous turnover, as workers were frequently dismissed and replaced. This paradox, considering the lack of mobility of the workforce inside the workers village, applied to men (especially young men) as well as women. The instability of the female workforce arose from diseases (tuberculosis was frequent in the 1940s) and work accidents, the allure of domestic work, the existence of other siblings who could replace them in the factory and, especially, marriage followed by children.

7 Alain Cottureau: *Usure au travail, destins masculins et destins féminins dans les cultures ouvrières en France au XIXème siècle*, in: *Mouvement Social* 124 (1983), pp. 71–112.

Among men, socially expected to obtain permanent work, the turnover may be surprising, bearing in mind the moral obligation to work emphasised by the factory management in all spheres of local social life. In actuality, the young, unmarried male contingent of the workforce experienced frequent job changes within the company, as though they were merely in a period of preliminary adaptation to the factory's rules of cooperation and discipline. It was as though acquiring this "factory culture" presupposed a series of minor conflicts with the immediate management, resolved through dismissals followed by rehiring in other sectors of the company.

In addition to this economic autocracy, the company formed what was effectively a local government. Its monopoly over the municipal space and the local work market was accompanied by its active involvement in organising social life, providing support and subsidies to the activities of the Catholic church in the 1940s and 50s, incentives to maintain and encourage folkloric traditions, sponsorship of social clubs and football clubs, including municipal championships with teams from the factory sectors and districts of the workers village. The largesse demonstrated by the company's organisation of the life of families outside work was symbolically crowned by the opening of the gardens of the owner's mansion for their Sunday leisure.⁸

The company's power over all local social life was also reflected in its relationship with local and state politics, although this was not always tranquil. While the oldest brother, Frederico Lundgren, looked after this *de facto* local government, his brother Arthur was mayor in the 1920s of the city of Olinda (of which Paulista was a district) and later a state deputy. In the 1950s, one of his numerous sons was mayor of Rio Tinto in the neighbouring state of Paraíba (where the company had another factory, and the workers village had grown into a town in the same manner as Paulista). In 1935 Paulista became an autonomous municipality and the company controlled the local government through choosing the mayors. But at the start of the 1940s, the head of the state government, appointed by the President of the Republic during the dictatorship of the New State (1937–1945), himself appointed a man he trusted to the Paulista mayoral office, thus challenging the

8 In this fenced garden, transformed into a park for the public on Sundays, various buildings and other features were gradually added, such as a bandstand for the company's musical band, and the bust of Frederico Lundgren made after his death in 1946. During his life, this owner, who left an emphatic mark on local social memory, kept a small zoo in the mansion's garden to be enjoyed by his workers on their Sunday walks. His symbolic sway over the workers was also displayed by some of his more striking idiosyncrasies, such as running a large stud farm close to the workers village, one of whose horses became nationally famous after winning the Brazilian Grand Prix in 1933, or the breeding of fighting cocks, both forms of acquiring prestige within the dominant class. The majesty of the four-story mansion, built in red brick, was complemented, next to one of the factories, by an enormous church built in the same style as the mansion, inaugurated in 1950 by Frederico's successor, his brother Arthur Lundgren.

local power of the Lundgren family. Later during the 1945–1964 democratic period, the CTP lost control of the local government in the mid-1950s when one of the company's former workers and member of the local Catholic groups (the Catholic Youth League and Catholic Workers League) won a heavily contested election against one of Arthur Lundgren's sons, despite the considerable economic clout used by the Lundgren family in the election.

Conflicts and the magnification of the past

The current demand to preserve the local historical memory from sectors of the city's civil society also stems from the fact that the magnitude of the company's projects was matched by the magnitude of the conflicts with a company that had always fought against the unionisation of its workers, as well as the social legislation gradually implemented from the 1930s to 1964. Behind the vicissitudes of the relations between the company and the workers union, however, there were unexpected responses from the local social organisation itself following the administrative changes in the company from the end of the 1950s, which prioritised production and disregarded further investment in the maintenance of the workers village.

From the 1950s onwards, when dismissals gradually began to outnumber new contracts, the turnover of the workforce began to affect the contingent of workers heavily. The men were more easily sacked as they held clandestine jobs in the "external sector". Young women, after dismissal, returned to their "natural" position of helping at home. In fact, many of them had been invited to leave their rural home by relatives housed in the workers village, or to substitute a sick member of the family at work in order to ensure the continued survival of the household,⁹ or to help other women in their domestic work. These young women remained in the workers village, waiting for the work to return if and when the factory started hiring again. The dismissed young men, who had no place in the domestic universe, soon ended up leaving in search of work elsewhere. Paradoxically, therefore, the young women's closer ties to the house and family often caused them to remain at the factory longer than their brothers (apart from those who held specialised posts or worked as supervisors). The women's dedication to their parents sometimes led them to carry on working at the factory in order to support them and to ensure they eventually benefited from a generally early retirement pension, since they had started work at a young age. Along with their position as family breadwinner, this was one of the most important factors in the development of celibacy among female workers, as the married ones tended to leave the factory.

9 To qualify for use of a house in the village, the family had to prove that at least one member worked at the factory. Indeed, the size of the house granted did not depend on the size of the family, but on the number of workers it contained.

As a result, from the end of the 1950s onwards the spinning and weaving workers formed one of the most stable groups in the factory, having the same aim as the supervisors of completing their professional careers with the company. It was to guarantee this possibility that these two groups, up until then the more passive one in the labour conflicts that had begun in the early 1950s, became, by the early 1960s, the most actively involved in the workers union.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the spinners campaigned alongside the workers who specialised in pre-spinning tasks, who organised most of the initiatives for claims and strikes.¹⁰ Proud of their technical skills, occupying a strategic place at the start of the production process which allowed them to block all subsequent production, and paid per piece like the spinners and weavers, these workers kept a constant watch on the company management's often fraudulent attempts to reduce wage payments.

Labour conflicts erupted in relation to these issues in 1943, 1952, 1954 and 1956, following work stoppages in the pre-spinning section. Indeed it was no coincidence that this was the first section affected by the modernisation of the company's equipment: the organisation of workers from this section was therefore destroyed from 1958 onwards by a wave of dismissals, the transformation of their working conditions and the redefinition of their jobs.

Temporarily spared the restructuring associated with the staff cutbacks arising from modernisations, the spinners and weavers – who along with the pre-spinning workers constituted “the visual and tactile organs of the productive apparatus”, following Halbwachs's expression¹¹ – “inherited” the confrontational approach of their sacked comrades at the start of the 1960s. The women had already supported them in the collective organisation of the workers' grievances against the company that became more numerous in the 1950s, after the Labour Tribunal was implemented locally with the creation of a Court of First Instance in 1944. And these same female workers became an active part of the infighting within the union that broke out in 1962 over a change its leadership.

This union dynamisation at the start of the 1960s would have been impossible without the vital role played by the Young Catholic Workers (JOC) groups in unifying the experiences of young workers during the rough process of uprooting residents of rural areas to work in urban factories. Until the beginning of the 1950s, these networks of sociability had provided active support to the CTP's symbolic domination of worker families and, more particularly, its control of this strategic part of the workforce formed by younger people. Later, though, the groups began to play a role in distancing this generation of *jocistas* from the company and fostered their opposition when the com-

10 Other important actors in the strikes were the dyeing and printing sections of the factory, sections employing male workers who by stopping work for days at a time could cause the cloth already fabricated by earlier sections to perish.

11 Maurice Halbwachs: *La Classe Ouvrière et les Niveaux de Vie*, Paris/New York 1970.

pany changed the rules of the game. As we mentioned earlier, during the 1955 municipal elections, Catholic workers campaigned for a worker standing against the company's candidate and the CTP was surprised to discover among its opponents the same workers whose training it had strongly supported with the aim of ensuring their discipline. On this occasion, the Catholic workers activists managed to substitute themselves for the communist militants who had tried to gain a foothold in the factory since 1945, but were always severely suppressed by the police and the CTP's private militia.¹²

Because of the local control exercised by the CTP, the attempt to implant the Communist Party after 1945 had to be made from the outside – from sending newspaper sellers to sending unknown union activists from the Recife factories in order to work inside the company – which was risky for the personal safety of the militants. In contrast to this type of action promoted from the outside, the political reconversion of the JOC's activists was one of the main routes through which the movement opposing the CTP took root amid the local population. This turning of the system against itself accelerated the emergence of conflicts.

The peak of the various clashes with the company, the 1963 strike, remains a counterpoint to the idealised version of the city's past elaborated by the former factory workers. While the workers' collective representations situate the origins of the saga involving the company and themselves in the patronal personalisation theatricalised in the entry of the families into the factory's world, the end of this old relation of interiorised and legitimated domination peaked with the equally personalised staging of the revolt. The strike pickets paralysed the two factories and the town. The strikers blocked the flow of piped water and restricted the water and electricity which supplied the owner's mansion.¹³ The decisive episode occurred when the pickets prevented the owner Arthur Lundgren from entering one of the factories to take his morning bath. This incident prompted Comendador Arthur to leave the mansion for good to live in Recife, never to return to the factory until his death in 1967.

The collective feeling of the group of workers, however, did not depend originally on the JOC or on religious or political groups, or on the occurrence of conflicts that nurtured the oral transmission of the tragic-comic nature of the events. Rather its origin stems from a wider sociability and history that developed out of the experience of the

- 12 The communists managed to survive there clandestinely until the mid-1950s, a period when they focused their work on the Recife factories where they possessed a stronger base and where they strove to take over the leadership of the textile union in the state capital. However at the start of the 1960s they were still an important force in the Paulista workers union.
- 13 Only the mansion and the houses of the managers and technicians (frequently foreigners in the past) benefited from mains water and electricity; the houses of the workers in the village were supplied by water piped to fountains located in some of the streets or directly to nearby brooks (where people bathed and washed their clothing). Lighting was supplied by oil-lamps.

specific relations of domination established in Paulista that partially escaped the company's control, despite its omnipresence. This feeling was built on a collective memory constituted from common experiences.¹⁴

But it is also true that these shared feelings – essential products of an idealisation of past domination that is also a form of implicit, if not explicit, denunciation of the new forms of owner-worker relations – could only be constituted as a collective memory due to the permanence across generations of the group that was the support for the direct accumulation of the history embodied in each of its members. In other workers villages, such as those of the sugar mills where only the men worked and hiring their children was increasingly difficult, the continuation of the families over time and in space became practically impossible.¹⁵ In contrast, a fairly sizeable contingent of the Paulista workers group managed to remain living in the area despite the dismissals, thanks to the density of the kinship networks developed on the basis of direct family recruitment, to the importance of women's work at the factory, and to the possibilities for former workers to move into small trades, such as the local open air market. It is this memory, threatened by the city's transformations over the last twenty-five years that sectors of local civil society have sought to revive in the mid-2000s.

The Overflowing of the Company Town into a City

In the years immediately following the military coup, in the context of the repression of organised workers and the implementation of new laws, the CTP began to implement a modernisation project that led to the dismissal *en masse* of the “long-term” workers, that is, those who had worked at the company for more than ten years and had been protected from dismissal by the former stability law – which the military regime eventually removed in 1967.¹⁶ The company's new measures badly affected the future plans of these

14 Such experiences include family recruitment and the rituals for entering the factory world; nostalgia for the past abundance of food produce that the CTP accumulated thanks to its monopoly over purchases; fear of the company's private militia, an army of more than 500 men; the experience of using silent gestural communications amid the din of the factory machines, which comprised part of a recalcitrant factory culture; the admiration for those old male heads of family who were so attached to their plantations that they would defy the company, which, having changed its policy, now wished to evict them.

15 José Sérgio Leite Lopes: *O Vapor do Diabo. O Trabalho dos Operários do Açúcar*, Rio de Janeiro 1976.

16 Job stability for employees who completed ten years work in the same company was introduced in the Consolidation of Labour Laws in Brazil, promulgated in 1942, copying the practice of corporate welfare plans, with the aim of providing stability to pension contributions. Dismissal of an employee who had worked for the company for ten years or more entailed to an indemnity payment of an amount equivalent to the final paid salary multiplied by double

workers. Many of those affected were the first generations that had been able to fulfill the common aim of benefiting from their pension rights. The new forces mobilising protests, which had come to the surface during the 1962 union uprising and the victorious strike of 1963, then reappeared after the initial fears caused by the persecutions in the days following the 1964 *coup d'état* had waned. Indeed it was the women from the spinning and weaving sections who took the lead in rousing the workers into action. For the first time, they formed the majority in the union leadership that came into office in 1967; most of them had belonged to local Catholic associations in the past. The union began a fight in the courts, supported by mass rallies and demonstrations, demanding the reinstatement of those who had been dismissed.

Collective grievances were presented to the tribunal. Women used all the earlier experience in religious-based activism to organise demonstrations and raise funds from donations to support the defiant families of dismissed workers who had to wait for more than a year for the tribunal's ruling. Although the courts rejected the request for reinstatement, the CTP was forced to pay such high compensations that it ended up proposing to pay a large part of the amount owed to the dismissed workers by transferring ownership of the houses in which they had lived. Gradually half of the 6,000 houses in the workers village became the property of local families. This dispute therefore allowed many of the generation recruited in the 1930s and 40s and their descendants to remain living in the area. This result reflected both the capacity for campaigning shown by workers in the face of their previous history, and the company's disinterest in maintaining the workers village along the same lines as the past.

The different modalities of conflicts and negotiations between companies and workers – including those relating to the conditions for dismantling the workers village, the company's modernisation and the reduction in its workforce and its fixed assets, the possible closure of the factory and the redirecting of its investments – have all been of interest to the historical memory of the remaining population and the perceived associations with their contemporary existential conditions.

the years of work completed by the dismissed employee. In 1967, the military government passed a law instituting the Government Severance Indemnity Fund for Employees (FGTS), a fund made up of small monthly contributions from companies accompanying their wage slips, so that at any moment the sacked worker could cash this fund, invested in his or her name and managed by the State. New employees already entered their new jobs covered by the new law. Long-term workers covered by the old law had the right to continue under the previous scheme, following rulings made by the labour courts. The CTP, like many other companies both locally and nationally, took advantage of the impact of the new law to dismiss its stable workers and then offer them small indemnity payments in trade off for them to desist from pursuing actions in the labour courts.

We can therefore summarise this process from the viewpoint of this overflowing and decline of the region's traditional industrial base, leading to the closure of factories, or their survival without the accompanying workers villages. Since the textile factories set up in the first half of the 20th century pursued the same form of industrialisation, seeking to attract and train new industrial workers, the workers villages owned by the companies are central to understanding the history of these companies and the biographies of their workers. The decline of this style of industrialisation includes processes such as: (i) the transfer of house ownership to the workers and the change in appearance and growth of working class districts; (ii) the sale of fixed assets belonging to the company and the foundation, on some of these lands, of new industries belonging to a new era of factories built next to highways with state incentives, rather than the old plants located within the towns to which they gave rise or where they possessed tight control over local politics and the way of life of the town's inhabitants; (iii) the transformation of local working class districts into dormitory zones feeding the flow of workers to the larger urban areas; (iv) the transformation of sociability from one generation to the next with the emergence of the "social problem" of younger members of the working class population, albeit accompanied by the continuing importance of family relations between the generations; and (iv) the sale of company lands and the destruction of the local historical heritage or difficulties in gaining recognition for the demands for its preservation.

For some sectors of local civil society, the latter trend – the dismantling of factories and other company properties, including those taken to be the most symbolic and representative of an era – raises the issue of the need to find ways of objectifying and reproducing an inter-generational memory that preserves something of the social identity built up over the course of the 20th century.

A Reflexive Ethnography

Our return in 2003 allowed us to renew the contacts with the social group over a three-year period, when we again began to reflect on its contemporary transformation, regarded from the viewpoint of our initial research in the late 1970s. A network was reestablished with old and new research subjects who were able to help write a social history dating from the start of the 20th century to the present day.

Our approach contained a strong element of what could be called reflexive ethnography,¹⁷ enabled by the fact that we were revisiting a social group intensely studied by ourselves in the past, some twenty years after the first sustained period of fieldwork. Indeed, when returning to a previously studied empirical object to implement a new

17 On this topic, see Michael Burawoy: *Revisits. An Outline of a Theory of Reflexive Ethnography*, in: *American Sociological Review* 68:5 (2003), pp. 645–679; and also Pierre Bourdieu/Loïc Wacquant: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago 1992.

research project, it is essential to pay attention to the changes that have occurred not only to the object itself, including in our case the transformation of a city, but also the changes to the research conditions of the anthropologists involved. This includes the introduction of new theoretical tools, as well as differences in academic status and age. In the twenty-year interval, the researchers have incorporated new theoretical approaches, new bibliographic references, long-term interaction with study centres abroad (post-doctoral work, for example; various exchanges of academic staff and researchers), as well as the transformations undergone by the wider intellectual field in which they work, and their own research experiences with other empirical objects. All these factors have inevitably modified their earlier view of the studied object. On the other hand, we are no longer young doctoral students, but established senior professors. During the earlier period of our research, most of our informants were older than us; today the majority belongs to the same or a younger age group, though many of the earlier informants have been re-encountered. In addition, our work as visiting professors at the local university tended to reduce our exotic condition as researchers from a distant city in Brazil's dominant south. Above all, though, our circumstances were perceived very differently: we are no longer two researchers gathering data for a future product, such as a thesis or book, but living witnesses to local history. The two books we previously published have been collected by people interested in local history and the reconstruction of the past. The fact that the locality has been an object of academic research and described in articles and books has also been a motive for self-valorisation within this network. Thus the reflexivity necessary to any ethnographic research becomes more patent when it concretely interferes in the studied people's perceptions of local history.

An illustration of this was gained when we again visited the textile workers union after several years and saw framed enlargements of two photos of strike rallies displayed in the boardroom. The photos had previously been reproduced in one of our books¹⁸, taken originally from the archives of the *Jornal do Comercio de Recife* in 1977, at a time when such images were still considered subversive by the military government then in power. The desire to recover local history prior to 1964 – a period unfamiliar to the generation now running the union – can be observed in this and other details. Although we had given copies of our two books on the city to various informants who later became friends,¹⁹ the book with the two cited photos had reached the union by another route, via a religious figure unknown to ourselves who no longer lived in the area. Our books were also later requested by members of the Pernambuco State historical heritage council to assist its analysis of a request for a preservation order on the local factory owners' mansion and its gardens following a local campaign.

18 José Sérgio Leite Lopes: *A Tecelagem dos Conflitos*.

19 Cf. Rosilene Alvim: *A Sedução da Cidade. Os operários camponeses dos Lundgren*, Rio de Janeiro 1995; and José Sérgio Leite Lopes: *A Tecelagem dos Conflitos*.

On the other hand, there was at least one strong contrast with the earlier research. Previously we had concentrated on a network of workers and ex-workers centered on activists or former activists from local social movements, people who had placed their trust in the researchers during a period rife with distrust and fear provoked by the repression imposed by the military regime. Now, though, we were able to gain access to a much wider range of local social groups and networks. As well as the effects of re-democratisation of the country, the disappearance of significant material traces of the past has brought together social groups that once belonged to distinct places within the local social space.

As well as providing us with information, our interviews at the union offices and our visits to past informants led to requests for help in documenting the history that local people felt to be seeping away with the deaths of those residents who had witnessed events directly. Some union leaders had photographically documented the destruction of one of the rows of houses in the workers village to build the PE-15 highway, as well as persuading a journalist to film various interviews as part of a report – though they only had a heavily edited copy of the latter.

In response to this demand for an embodied, sensual memory (primarily visual, but also aural), we provided scanned copies of the photos taken by us in the locality in 1977, so they could be compared with recent photos showing the transformations between the two periods. This led to a survey of the private photographic collections of local residents and their descendants, as well as former residents of the city. Finally the fresh interaction with the previously studied network allowed us access to new documents and points of view on the past, material inaccessible to us during our periods of fieldwork between 1976 and 1983. This interaction derived not only from the study of photos, documents and private writings (or texts produced by institutions such as the textile workers union or the local government), but also from the research involved in making a documentary film. Even when consulting past informants and interviewees where everything concerning the past had apparently been said, the presence of new data collection tools – even the most basic equipment, such as small digital cameras, tripods and lapel microphones – allowed the freedom to go back over themes already known to the researchers and that had become naturalised by both sides. This effect was magnified both by the involvement of a professional documentary maker and the virtual public imagined behind his filming, recording and photographic equipment.²⁰ This process in

20 We refer to the film documentarist Celso Brandão (from the Federal University of Alagoas) who had worked with us in 1986 while shooting his film *Memórias da Vida e do Trabalho* (Memories of life and work) on the Alagoas state textile factories and their workers villages. He agreed to produce a visual documentation of a series of past and new informants who had worked in the textile factories of Paulista and other Pernambuco municipalities.

turn led to the recording of well-known facts and versions in different forms, as well as new, previously unknown material.

Another difference is the contemporary freedom of expression compared to the self-censure met during the period of military rule and its atmosphere of distrust and fear. The same applies to the disappearance of past forms of avoidance or at least the increased mutual tolerance between individuals from different or opposing local social groups. We can also point to the existence of new institutional tools for researchers and for some of the research subjects, such as public access to information from the files of the political police or access to information held on individuals in these archives by those concerned or their families.

We were also able to renew our search for information from the factory owners' side, which had been less of a priority in the past due to the opposition between the network of workers – the entry point to our fieldwork – and the company. Furthermore, when information had been sought, we usually met a barrier from the company, including the factory managers. More recently, though, our work as visiting professors at the federal university in Recife has fostered a long-term relationship with colleagues and students, enabling contacts that were previously unthinkable. For example, through one student, we were able to interview some of the daughters of two brothers of the company's owners, already deceased.²¹ Likewise, we also gained permission from the local courts to consult the will left by the eldest of the two brothers, which had led to a turbulent dispute over the inheritance within the Lundgren family.

But as well as new information on the era when the textile company monopolised the local labour and real estate markets, as well as social life in general, our new research also allowed us to situate this past better in comparison to more recent developments in the municipality. This time we were able to work closely with the leadership of the Paulista textile workers union on the project of recording local social memory, something that had proven impossible during the earlier studies. Our initial period of research between 1976 and 83 had coincided with a long phase of compliance from the union's leadership, which had followed a period of strong action from the president and leadership from their election in 1967 to the start of the 1970s, lending support to the struggle of longer serving workers against the CTP's initiatives to dispense with them in the years following the 1964 military coup. It was only in 1989, after a decade of social movements spreading across the country, including strong growth in Pernambuco, that a rival group of union activists managed to win the union's internal elections, based on its success in the new factories in the industrial district, throwing out the old president and revitalising the union's activities. It was this union leadership – which retained power over successive mandates, rotating its leaders between the presidency and the other main posts – that

21 Rosilene Alvim at the time supervised Mônica Gusmão, a research student for her master's degree in anthropology, who is now a lawyer.

we found when we initiated our new research in 2003. And it was this leadership that faced a second wave of de-industrialisation affecting not only the region's traditional textile industries, already in clear decline, but also those that had led a second period of industrialisation spanning from the 1970s to 1990.

Attempts to Construct an Objectified History as a Tool for Reproducing Embodied History

In various old industrial areas such as the former workers villages run by textile factories (and other industrial sectors) in the metropolitan area of Recife, local social movements are fighting for greater participation of residents in local government, looking to reduce the impacts disfiguring the traditional layout of these neighbourhoods, including extreme cases where local roads are transformed into multi-lane highways, their route determined purely in economic terms, destroying the local landscape, as exemplified in the city of Paulista itself. In these areas, the potential historical heritage represented by the worker villages – sometimes recognised and promoted by agents without any specific power, such as the Paulista weavers union, or by those with considerable political influence, as in the case of the participative planning process of the United Nations Agenda 21 program in the municipality of Camaragibe, in Pernambuco, pushed forward by the local council – is being disfigured and transformed without the emergence of any public policies to protect and promote local history and culture. The transformations in these former industrial towns have tended to disperse the previously concentrated local workforce across the entire metropolitan region, increasing the distance commuted by workers. The lands owned by the old factories are sold and many housing developments (in the Paulista case) and occupations on terrain subject to landslides (in Camaragibe) have formed since the 1980s, increasing the population density and transforming the social neighbourhood bonds formed in these towns during the period when the workers villages predominated between the 1930s and 1970s.

The Paulista textile workers union's interest in systemising and publicising local history, emphasising its working class traditions, was the main reason why our new research in the locality in the 2000s ended up focusing on collecting visual and acoustic records that could be publicly divulged. Since the union base has become increasingly composed of retired workers over recent years, its leadership decided to found an autonomous association to campaign specifically on senior people's rights, in particular their pension rights. Many former union activists became active once again in the fight to protect rights won in the pension and welfare area, as well as campaign for better pay and improved health and safety measures. Following the introduction of new laws allowing free public transport to people over 65, many of these former workers became selfless and rejuvenated activists, delivering information and petitions to friends and former work colleagues scattered throughout the metropolitan region and attending meetings and rallies organised by pensioner associations and federations.

The daily life of the union members – most of them from generations who passed through the industrial district’s new factories and who joined the union on the crest of the social movements of the 1980s – is increasingly taken up with meetings in municipal and state councils concerning different public policies for healthcare, employment, professional education and urban issues. So despite the drastic reduction in the active union membership due to the huge cutbacks in the industrial workforce, the union is still managing to retain its presence at the centre of the local social movements.

The process of making a film documentary on the recollections of former workers of their career and day-to-day life during the “time of the company”, based on testimonies from some of our past research subjects from the 1970s and 80s, led to the accumulation of visual material and the emergence of new personalities and events linked to the (re) construction of this social memory. One of these events, called “The Weavers’ Memory”, realised as a May Day (1 May 2005, Labour Day) meeting, stimulated the exchange of information and placed the focus on the viability of initiatives to promote local history. Three years later, in November 2008 we were able to exhibit locally our finished documentary, *Tecido Memória* (Weaving Memory).²²

In the May Day 2005 workshop we met a group of young people with university training and secondary school teachers resident in the city, some of them children and grandchildren of former company workers, also interested in revitalising local memory. At the end of 2005, they set up the Paulista Pro-Museum Movement in response to rumours that the mansion and its gardens would be sold by the CTP’s owners to a large national department store, specialising in food, clothing and household electrical goods, which would lead to the destruction of the “colonel’s gardens”. The movement defends the municipality’s material and immaterial heritage, though it prioritises the mansion and gardens.²³ Interestingly, the impossibility of finding a public use for the ruins of the

22 This documentary, directed by the two of us along with Celso Brandão, won the 2010 edition of the Pierre Verger Prize of the Brazilian Association of Anthropologists (ABA).

23 The Pro-Museum Movement is an alliance formed in 2005 to defend the preservation of the tangible, intangible and natural heritage of the city of Paulista. In commemoration of the 73rd anniversary of the political-administrative emancipation of the city of Paulista, on the 4th September, Pro-Museum is launching a campaign to vote for the five most symbolic and expressive postcard views of the city centre, chosen from the historical context of the 20th century, with its traditions, working class memory and the collective identity of Paulista people. Their primary aim is to make new generations aware of the need to preserve the extensive heritage found in the Paulista city centre by examining and understanding its history. The movement also seeks to bring the memory of past generations, survivors of the former factory period, into contact with the new social actors of the present. The project has been structured into four stages: 20th century material heritage, material heritage of the colonial period, immaterial heritage and natural heritage, see at: <http://www.movimentopromuseu.org.br> (accessed on 13 February 2013).

two Paulista factories,²⁴ along with the lack of historically and symbolically significant public spaces in the multiple streets of the architectural complex of the large workers village,²⁵ have meant that local civil society groups have fixed on the patronal mansion and its gardens as a monument to the memory of the city and the worker families that built it (relatives of many of the current families). One of Arthur Lundgren's children, who lost the dispute over the father's will with the other surviving heir, has shown a tentative interest in creating a museum dedicated to the company and the town in the mansion. However the other brother who won the dispute has distanced himself from the locality and the state of Pernambuco and controls from afar the real estate company into which the company was transformed locally. The firm collects rent from houses in the workers village that were not transferred to the former workers, from goods deposits in the factory warehouses, and from the sale of terrain for new land developments.²⁶ As part of this process, the sale of the mansion grounds and its gardens to a department store would be one of the biggest transactions involving the CTP's assets. This initiative failed to receive much support from those sectors of the Paulista public space, such as the textile workers union, concerned with preserving the city's working class memory and experienced in conducting negotiations due to their work on a wide range of councils (in contrast to the exclusively economic interests of the professional class). Instead it was supported by young university students and secondary school teachers living in the city, some of them with experience in local government. In 2007 a website was created for the Pro-Museum Movement with projects in schools (with pupils asked to choose via internet the city's main sites and attractions) and with the Pernambuco Culture Council, whose seal of approval has legitimated the campaign for turning the building into a heritage centre. For the town's former workers, the mansion is associated with the "time of the colonels", with its grand initiatives and conflicts, from its use as a leisure facility granted by the boss to his workers, with visitors having their photos taken beneath the statue of Colonel Frederico, to the strike episodes of 1963 and the encircling of the mansion to cut off water and electricity supplies. A history that pivots on the action of the pickets

24 Ruins used by the company by providing services to other firms for depositing and storing merchandise, while waiting for a better opportunity to sell the area profitably to land developers.

25 Whose residents gradually altered their homes through small functional reforms.

26 The large compensation received from the state for permission to build a highway through the middle of one of the factories, disfiguring the city centre and isolating some of its neighbourhoods, may have also been a reason for the campaign to preserve the town's memory. The construction of the highway through the factory site led to the demolition of a small church existing inside the grounds, which had been the church of Frei Caneca, one of the heroes of the nation and Pernambuco state in the anti-colonial revolution of 1817, and therefore a building of historic value from the point of view of a traditional conception of cultural heritage.

in preventing the owner from entering the factory – to use a private facility for domestic use, like an extension of the mansion inside the factory, a bath to be taken under siege: an event that lies at the origin of the owning family's gradual abandonment of the mansion.

After a long period of debate in the Pernambuco Culture Council and after discussions on whether this industrial preservation order was a priority, the council finally issued a decision in favour of making it a heritage site. It remains to find out how the space and the cultural centre will be created and kept running, and its effectiveness in transmitting a memory of the century-long relationship between the family owning the factory and the families of workers. Whatever the outcome, there seems little prospect of an end to the social conflicts and the extinguishing of local people's memory of a specific form of domination in the wake of de-industrialisation and population growth, given the conversion of old social groups to new disputes and the appearance of new social agents (with their new generations), public policy tools and new social rights.

José Sergio Leite Lopes is a full professor of Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). He has been investigating for more than thirty years working-class cultures in Brazil. Among his articles and book chapters this one was translated to German: "Die Freude des Volkes erlischt – Überlegungen zu Leben und Tod des Fußballers Garrincha", in: Eva Kreisky and Georg Spitaler (eds.): *Arena der Männlichkeit: Über das Verhältnis von Fußball und Geschlecht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2006.)

Rosilene Alvim is a professor of Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). She has been investigating working-class family, childhood and youth and has articles such as "A Brazilian Worker's Autobiography in an Unexpected Form; Interweaving the Interview and the Novel", in: Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson: *Narrative and Genre* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 2004); and "Familles ouvrières, familles d'ouvrières", in: Eva Kreisky and Georg Spitaler (eds.): *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 84 (1990), pp. 78–84 (with José Sergio Leite Lopes).