

# Pires Against Camargo: Feud and Vengeance in Colonial Brazil.

Brendon Silva <sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Social Science Undergraduate, Institute of Humanities and Philosophy, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, [brendonlucas@id.uff.br](mailto:brendonlucas@id.uff.br).

**Abstract.** This article aims to analyze the bloodfeud that occurred between the families of “senhores de engenho” Pires and Camargo during the years 1640-1651, in the captaincy of São Vicente, in colonial Brazil, and to compare it with the cases of Feud and Vengeance that occurred in Medieval Europe. This “Private War” was one of the most famous in colonial Brazil, as it brings a Shakespearean memory of the rivalry between the Capulet and Montague.

**Keywords.** Vengeance, Feud, Senhor de Engenho, Blood Feud, Colonial.

## 1. Introduction

This bloodfeud begins when, in 1640, Alberto Pires, murders his wife Leonor Camargo, claiming that she was having an affair with her brother-in-law, and this triggers a private war lasting more than 10 years, with periods of violent crises, periods of peace and periods of political conflict, becoming much more than a matter of revenge, becoming a matter of honor, and a battle for political control of the captaincy of São Vincent. This private war had a magnitude so great that it forever marked the Captaincy of São Vicente, being to this day the most famous bloodfeud case in Colonial Brazil.

Even after 10 years of its beginning, the conflict remained strong, with both families trying to control the Chamber from your village. The conflict only came to an end when it entered the legal field, due to a peace agreement carried out by the government, even the clergy had to collaborate in order to establish peace.

Throughout the article, the concepts of feud and bloodfeud will be investigated, and their particularities when applied in colonial Brazil. The political and economic role of the *Senhor de Engenho* will be highlighted, in comparison with the role of the feudal lord. The private war between the Pires and the Camargo will be investigated in detail, with the main events being emphasized.

## 2. Feud and Bloodfeud definition

Define the meaning of the word feud, is a difficult task, since it has a wide range of meanings, feuding societies as diverse as Saga Iceland and modern Montenegro had no single word to describe the state of ‘being in blood’. In the France of sixteenth century, for example, the terms as *querelle*, *inimitié*, *haine mortelle* and *ennemi capital* describe not so much subjective feelings as an objective, public relationship which often lasted for a considerable period of time [1].

According to Jesse L. Byock [2] we can characterize feud as:

1) An animosity leading to exchanges of insults and/or recurrent violent acts against property or persons. Exchanges involve individuals or groups, the latter often families, clans, or tribes, but also gangs and political and/or religious groups. Feud is both an ancient and modern phenomenon.

2) Animosity, shame, and claims for revenge, may be transmitted to subsequent generations. Injuries exchanges continue until the parties wear themselves out, seek settlement, or are forced into settlement by others.

3) Temporary settlements are often enacted, but lasting peace is more difficult. Peace often requires stifling animosities among individuals and groups that hate each other. Hate and acrimony do not easily end. A basic rule of peacemaking is that one does not make peace with one’s friends. In other words, one

must trust one's enemies in order to terminate a feud. In many cases it is easier to continue feuding than to trust such people.

The concept of feud is directly related to the emergence of modern state, in a sociological view: "Before the territorial city was established, the great peoples whose history we know, seem to have passed through a stage of social organization in which the only bond that constitutes society is the community of blood." [3] Indeed, the evolution of human social organizations seems to have taken place in such a way that the blood community preceded the territorial community. Before the complexity of economic and social life, with the evolution of forms of production that from being domestic to larger structures, determined the emergence of the city as a total group, another social formation, which was the family or society of relatives, performed these functions of a total group, satisfying in itself all social needs.

During the later eleventh and early twelfth century the feud was a central part of noble life, mainly because there was not well-developed state. "For the period was one in which no single power monopolized the legitimate use of force and no well-developed state existed. Thus, people often used force to avenge injuries they had sustained, not only because they were not legally barred from doing so, but also because there was no one else to do so regularly." And not only to avenge injuries that feud exists, but also to reinforce feudal lordship, since the noblemen use their military advantage to oppress the peasants "because of social stratification, the main victims of the feuds that were waged between noblemen were peasants who had no chance of defending themselves. This made the peasants 'more vulnerable to seigneurial exploitation. [4]"

Complementary to the feud, we have the bloodfeud, which we can describe as "a restricted, managed conflict, undertaken mostly in situations where open warfare is not tolerated. Examples are inter- and intra-tribal reprisals in simple (primitive and egalitarian) societies and gang conflicts within modern, complex communities, such as cities and within small states and regions such as in part of the Middle East. Modern political and nationalistic struggles, share many of these aspects. In bloodfeud, the group aspect of animosity is decisive, resulting in acts of self-sacrifice and destruction that otherwise might not seem rational. [2]"

It is important to make it clear that feuding is not always bloodfeud, feuding is a pervasive form of human behavior that can take place between just two people: two neighbors, two school children, two people at the office. Bloodfeud, however, requires groups, since individuals are violently affected or removed [2].

### 3. Colonial Brazil and the role of Senhor de Engenho

During the years of 1530-1822, Brazil was a colony of Portugal, this period is known as "colonial Brazil", during this period of time, the Brazilian economy was based mainly on the plantation and sale of sugar and coffee, and it was a society where the family concentrated all social functions for itself: economic unity, religious unity and political unity, with its laws and its inner justice, "above which there would be no other to which it could appeal, in a word "a small state" [5]. Colonial Brazil was marked by being slave society for 300 years, which triggered social problems that persist to the current days.

Brazil was not undergoing an independent process of state formation, as it was a colony of Portugal. However, there was a figure who played the similar role of feudal lords, the *senhor de engenho*, it was an owner of an engenho, that is a large-scale farm that focuses on the planting of sugar cane and transform to sugar, the engenho is where lives the senhor de engenho, their family and his slaves. In addition, they had a very high social prestige, political influence and power, being the social and economic elite of colonial Brazil. Franklin M. Thompson [6] defines them as:

"The senhor de engenho was more than just a landed proprietor and wealthy planter: he was the keystone of the social order. He was the legitimate representative of a world that has passed away, a world of gracious living and high emprise; a man who, though he may have enjoyed great and almost unparalleled opportunities, likewise had great responsibilities thrust upon him, responsibilities which he did not shirk, even though he frequently sank beneath them, to rise no more. The very name became one to conjure with and has passed into the everyday speech of the region to denote a type. As a class the senhores were arrogant, reactionary, intolerant of views different from their own, suspicious of all innovations, but friendly and hospitable in the grand manner."

Even though colonial Brazil had laws and a government, in practice, those who commanded and controlled the Brazilian regions were the senhores de engenho. We can see this in Alcântara Machado's work [7]:

"It is from the latifundia that the determination of social values starts; it is there that the spheres of influence are traced; it is the latifundia that classifies and declassifies men; without it there is no effective power, authority real, stable prestige. No organized force opposes him. Outside the great families rooted to the ground, what you find is half a dozen employees, it's the herd of slaves. In such an environment, the figure central and dominant must be by the irresistible will of things: the senhor de engenho, the farmer, the owner of the land."

Alcântara Machado also defines the colonial Brazil as a society of kin, the patriarchal family, solidly based on the economic foundation of large property, that absorbs all social functions [7].

## 4. Pires Against Camargo

The most famous bloodfeud that happened in Brazil was the private war between the Camargo and Pires families, it was a hard, long and intermittent fight, with some peace breaks. This private war was compared to the Shakespearean rivalry between the Capulet and Montague by the notorious Brazilian historian Afonso d'Escragolle Taunay [8].

"These are the facts included in what is called the conflict between the Pires and the Camargo's, after the two great families whose irreconcilability resulted in a true civil war, similar to the municipal struggles that raged in medieval Italian cities, the best known of which is that of the Capulet and Montague families of Verona, immortalized by Shakespeare!"

Although they present different interpretations for the fact, all those who made the history of the fights between Pires and Camargo refer to the passionate affair that would have caused or, certainly, aggravated the hatred between the two families, in which case the figures of Alberto Pires, Leonor Camargo and Antonio Pedroso de Barros appear<sup>13</sup>. The date of this occurrence is not specified by historians; Carvalho Franco, after considering several hypotheses about this date, concludes that it must have been around 1640 [9].

The bloodfeud started when Alberto Pires murders Leonor Camargo, his wife and his brother-in-law, Antônio Pedroso de Barros claiming that they were having an affair and that he needed to wash his dignity as a man with blood, killing the adulterers.

After this murder, the Camargo family and Pedroso de Barros family started their revenge, "then the brothers of the dead in numerous corps of arms, each party requested the despicue by those who occupied it, also sought to wash the offense of their evil in the blood of its author, taking his life in cold iron. [10]", thus, the families of the victims, united against Alberto Pires, goes to the revenge.

The *engenho* of Pires was surrounded by its enemies, and to save the life of her son, the matron (Inês Monteiro) appeared at the door of the house holding a crucifix and asked the besiegers to give up killing Alberto Pires in his house and agree to the judgment of the courts. The Camargo's made a deal and protested that they would conform to the verdict of the bay where Alberto Pires would have to be tried.

Alberto Pires was transported to Rio de Janeiro, and, through mountains and valleys, his mother follows him trying to get his freedom. In Ilha Grande, the boat carrying Alberto Pires docked on the island. Knowing that Inês Monteiro was also going to Rio de Janeiro with the intention of getting her son's freedom,

Alberto Pires' escort decided to eliminate the accused right there, which they did by tying a stone to his neck and throwing him into the sea. After that, Inês Monteiro becomes the Nemesis of her *gens* in the terrible fight against the Camargo.

Another clash that happened between Camargo and Pires Family, was the clash between Pedro Taques de Almeida, relative of the Pires and Fernando de Camargo, and unsheathing both swords and daggers in the Patio da Matriz in Vila de São Paulo, such a fierce struggle took place that, with numerous contests in favor of both parties, this challenge became a lively war combat [9]. The spirits, after all, calmed down, but the fear of a new meeting remained. Numerous victims resulted from the shock that shook, in medieval fashion, the small Vincentian village. But the leaders and initiators of the rumbling escaped with their lives; and the hatred, now that the blood had already flowed, will only be appeased in the reprisals in which both factions are tireless.

Thus, "in 1641, while Pedro Taques was talking to a friend and with his back to the crossed door of the parish church of São Paulo, Fernando de Camargo came, and running the dagger down Pedro Taques back, he soon lost his life in the rigors of the blow.". This murder, evidently a consequence of the encounter between the two parties in the previous year, means the continuation of the struggle. After this conflict, Pedro Taques relatives went into voluntary exile, including his brother who went to Paraíba do Sul, in order to avoid the continuation of the fight and the exposure of his family to the ferocity of revenge. But a brother of Pedro Taques, Lourenço Castanho Taques, relying on "numerous forces" did not want to go into exile and fortified himself on his farm, actively participating alongside the Pires in the clashes that would follow.

In the year of 1653, the Camargo's dominated the Chamber of Vila de São Paulo. And they didn't want to hand over the mandates to the newly elected ones as they were by right, trying to extend theirs for more than a year. The Pires protested before the General Ombudsman, Dr. João Velho de Azevedo, against the faction that wanted to perpetuate itself in the Chamber. The ombudsman goes to São Paulo and arrives there on March 26, 1653, ready to act against the Camargo's who intended to perpetuate themselves in Governance. Velho de Azevedo goes to the Council House but finds the door locked, as Jerônimo de Camargo had done so on purpose, then disappears with the key. The Ombudsman had no doubts: he ordered the door to be broken down, held a new election and the elected Chamber was sworn in. The Pires began to dominate the Chamber and João Velho deposes José Ortiz de Camargo as Ombudsman of the Captancy [9].

Not resigning themselves to ostracism, Fernando and José de Camargo go to Bahia, seat of the general government, to protest against the acts of the Ombudsman Velho de Azevedo, while their partners tried in every way to impede the action of the new

Chamber controlled by the Pires. And so, the following year, when the Chamber went to hand over the mandate to its successor, once again the department had to be broken into because one of its keys was with Geraldo Correia Soares, part of the Camargo family, who did not appear there as he should.

José Ortiz, obtained in Bahia, his reintegration in the ombudsman, and he came to São Paulo, overcoming distances, "with a large armed entourage" as it was said in the village [11].

The Pires, in turn, gathered the partials and with the strength they had they prepared for resistance, determined not to give in. Great conflict was expected, such were the forces presented by the two sides. The chamber posted a notice disavowing a priori any act practiced by José Ortiz de Camargo and urging the people of the captaincy not to recognize him as an Ombudsman. At the same time, he informed the Major Captain of the approach of Chief Camargo and asked him to intervene in order to get José Ortiz to enter the village without the escort he was bringing [9].

The anticipation was terrifying; it was on the eve of a real battle. That's when the "prelates of religions", headed by Father Simão de Vasconcelos, intervened to appease the heated spirits. The "February Concordat" is then signed. With this concordat, achieved on the initiative of the São Paulo clergy, a new and tremendous armed clash between the two families was avoided [9].

The reappointment of José Ortiz to the Ombudsman's Office and the retreat of the Pires by virtue of the concordat mark a new dominance of the Camargo's in the Town Council. Brief, however, would be this domain. The government in Bahia had undergone changes and the new governor general of Brazil was D. Jerônimo de Ataíde, the Count of Atouguia.

The Letter of November 11, 1654, dismisses José Ortiz de Camargo again, all the acts he had performed in the Ombudsman's office are unauthorized.

The Camargo's respond "by resorting to violent endeavor". New clashes and friction disturb Vincentian life, despite the efforts of the general government to appease the two feuded factions.

Now supported by the letter of December 11, 1654, the Pires dominate the Chamber again.

In the same month and year, the General Ombudsman João Velho de Azevedo sends the proceeded investigation to Bahia. The momentous question would be decided. Both families then agree to send each a proxy to represent their respective interests in the relationship.

In the discussions and negotiations that took place in Bahia, the Conde de Atouguia's provision for peace resulted, given in two copies to each of the attorneys for the families of São Paulo [9].

## 5. Conclusion

As we can see in the previous topic, the conflict between the Pires and the Camargo was not only a bloody conflict, but it was also a political conflict. Every rivalry that was built over the years, aimed not only to defend the honor of families, but also to have the political control of the region, and consequently economic control.

It is interesting to note that this conflict had several characteristics common to medieval feuds: revenge, exile, private war, honor defense, long-duration (+10 years), periods of peace and third-party mediated peace, although colonial Brazil is a society with a completely different context. This shows us that a pre-state society is not necessary for the feud, the feud/bloodfeud are characteristics present in any type of society, and although the State manages to reduce the occurrence of bloodshed due to the feuds, the feuds still exist and will still exist. In modern societies it is present in the mafias, in the Japanese Yazuka, in the Brazilian criminal factions, etc.

Otherwise, Brazil, being a colony of Portugal, certainly imported many customs and traditions from its Metropolis, I have the hypothesis that the similarities of Brazilian feuding with medieval European feud came from this cultural import from Portugal.

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