



# The Bumba-Meu-Boi rei da boiada festival: Reflections on a cultural tourist attraction of the city of Parnaíba – Piauí

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**ABSTRACT:** The Bumba-meu-boi is a traditional festival that takes place in the Northeast of Brazil, and is one of the most important festivals in Brazilian popular culture. In Parnaíba, in the state of Piauí, there is Rei da Boiada cultural group that carries high symbolic value for those who take part in the ritual. This group is part of the cultural heritage of the city that is home to the participants, who invest a great deal of love, dedication and effort to the art, dance and local culture. Based on a case study of the Rei da Boiada Group, this qualitative research study investigates whether the Bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada cultural festival can be considered a tourist attraction. The methods used in this research included a bibliographic review, field study and interviews. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and field observations from 2015 to 2019. The descriptive and explanatory method was used for the data analysis. It was concluded that the group is culturally rich and can be considered a tourist attraction, as it is part of the “Festa de Juninha” – the June festival that attracts tourists. But there has been little research on the Bumba-meu-boi itself, despite its great potential to contribute to the development of cultural tourism in the city.

**Keywords:** Bumba-meu-boi;  
Rei da Boiada;  
Tourist-cultural attraction.

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## INTRODUCTION

Parnaíba, a coastal city in the Brazilian state of Piauí, has a historical-cultural heritage that is rich in meaning and values, represented by streets, neighborhoods, monuments, historic sites and intangible cultural manifestations that tell the history of the city. However, it lacks actions that strengthen its culture. This discourages community leaders from implementing cultural activities, even though they insist on preserving the cultural memory of their people. Chauí (2006, p.138) believes that memory is "the human capacity to retain and keep the time that is gone, saving it from total loss" and that it is something that acquires materiality in everyday life, over the generations, especially when it comes to situations and events that never must be forgotten.

One of the most representative cultural manifestations of Parnaíba is the Bumba-meu-boi (which, roughly translated, means "bang to the beat of my ox"). The aesthetics focused on the cultural expression of the festival portrays Brazilian society, given that "the entire scenario and characters of Bumba-meu-boi are Brazilian, even the fantastic ones [...] Bumba-meu-boi breathes Brazil in any region where it exists and with any name given to it" (Santos, 2019, p. 20). The group Rei da Boiada (translated as "King of the Cattle"), located in the community of Catanduvas, and the object of this research, is an icon in the local scenario, standing out as a make of the identity and cultural heritage of the city of Parnaíba.

The cultural manifestation of the ox is historically approached as a religious attraction, used in cults, as an offering in sacrifice to the gods, a symbol of fecundity and fertility, and an object of worship, seen as a sacred animal, later to be recreated as a folkloric attraction (Nunes, 2011). It is believed that this story was created in Brazil during the cattle cycle, when the ox carried great symbolic and economic importance (Santos, 2016). The Bumba-meu-boi is one of the most significant folkloric festivals, and takes place in almost all regions of Brazil, but it is particularly observed in the Brazilian Northeast. In the state of Piauí, its origin is not known. Its historical and cultural importance spans decades, and the tradition is perpetuated in an attempt to keep the memory of the ancestors alive.

The Bumba-meu-boi, or ox festival, commonly known among the people of Piauí, involves a series of gestures and forms that maintain high symbolic value for those who take part in the ritual. As such, it is responsible for the interaction between the participating members (Lima, Silva, & Vasconcelos, 2012). This research discusses the cultural group "Rei da Boiada", an intangible cultural heritage of the city of

Parnaíba, and its validity as a tourist attraction. The place defined for this research was the neighborhood of Catanduvas, near the so called "Testa Branca", a large cattle ranch that later became a village with a few inhabitants. It is one of the historical nuclei that gave rise to the city of Parnaíba, and it is where the first landmark of the village of São João da Parnaíba is recorded, dating back to 1762 (Santos, 2019). This historical fact is remembered by the Rei da Boiada group in one of their tunes. The Rei da Boiada group stands out in the city for having, in the words of its adherents, "love, effort and dedication to the art, dance and culture" of this region. Over the years, the group has undergone quite significant changes and, through its cultural representation, has attracted the interest of several researchers.

This research work aims to analyze whether the cultural manifestation of the Bumba-meu-boi Rei de Boiada group can be considered a tourist attraction. Hence, this research aims to contribute to public management as a source of knowledge, for the creation or improvement of public policies that support the cultural manifestations of Parnaíba. The results of this research may also be of use to public and private managers in the planning and evaluation of actions related to the Bumba-meu-boi festival. In the academic field, it is hoped that this study will encourage researchers to explore the topic further, as there are few works that address the subject. There are several aspects about popular culture and its relationship with cultural manifestations, such as the ox, which can be addressed, giving society an opportunity to build a critical opinion about social and cultural events.

### The Bumba-meu-Boi as a Cultural Heritage and Tourist Attraction in Northeast Brazil

To understand what constitutes cultural heritage, it is first necessary to highlight the concept of culture. Geertz (1989) points out that culture is composed of a pattern of historically transmitted meanings; a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which men communicate, transmit to other generations and develop their knowledge and activities in relation to life.

Popular culture represents a set of values that brings together elements and traditions associated with popular and oral language that traditionally belong to strata of subaltern culture. Canclini (1983, p.43), differentiating popular cultures (plural) from the term popular culture (singular), describes them as constituted by "a process of unequal appropriation of the economic and cultural assets of a nation or ethnic group by its subaltern sectors, and by the understanding, reproduction and transformation of the general and specific conditions of work and life".



The terms folklore and popular culture are closely linked, as folklore is popular knowledge transmitted collectively, adapted according to the environment in which individuals live. "Since then, folklore has become synonymous with "popular culture", although not all popular culture is folklore. More recent, but no less complex, is the relationship between folklore and popular culture as the concept of intangible cultural heritage" (Rocha, 2009, p.219). It is important to point out that popular culture also produces material elements, such as the clothes and props used in the presentations of the Bumba-meu-boi play, musical instruments used to compose the tunes, and cordel booklets, among other elements.

Etymologically it can be inferred that the word folklore has English origins and means the knowledge of the people. The English archaeologist William John Thoms created the term on August 22, 1846 and such knowledge is present in beliefs, customs and festivals. Folklore and popular knowledge are, in short, the varied manifestations of the popular soul through collective ideas and feelings made and remade over time (Lima, Silva, & Vasconcelos, 2012).

For this reason, it is said that folklore is the basis for the formation of peoples. In marginalized groups the exaltation of origins through artistic manifestations is even more evident, as they do not deny it, but reaffirm it through their persistence in keeping their traditions alive, through actions such as the Bumba-meu-boi play. For these individuals, many of whom belong to marginalized groups, this ritual carries strong significance. Despite technological advances and globalization, a prejudiced view of this kind of popular cultural manifestation still exists (Lima, Silva, & Vasconcelos, 2012). Although society is advancing in terms of technology, it has not managed to reduce prejudice. The cultural elements that are chosen as important representatives of the culture of a people become its cultural heritage, being understood in Brazil as "goods of a material and immaterial nature, taken individually or together, bearers of reference to identity, action, memory of the different groups that form Brazilian society". Such goods can be divided into five categories: "I - forms of expression; II - the ways of creating, doing and living; III- artistic, scientific and technological creations; IV - works, objects, documents, buildings and other spaces intended for artistic and cultural manifestations; and V- urban sets and sites of historical, scenic, artistic, archaeological, paleontological, ecological and scientific value" (Brasil, 1988, art. 216).

In this sense, the cultural heritage comprises the set of material or tangible and immaterial or intangible goods that constitute a legacy of social, economic, scientific and cultural importance of a nation. According to the interpretation of cultural heritage, it can be understood as the heritage assets that are linked to the history of customs, beliefs, memories and individual or

collective experiences, becoming an element of the expressiveness of man's knowledge inserted in history. It is an educational tool, as it allows people to take possession of their past in order to better understand the present. Thus, heritage is "the ways in which human beings exist, think and express themselves, as well as the symbolic manifestations of knowledge, artistic and ceremonial practices, systems of values and traditions" (Pelegriani, 2006, p. 118).

According to the statements of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Castro e Londres, 2008), intangible cultural heritage comprises the expressions of life and traditions that communities, groups and individuals in all parts of the world receive from their ancestors and pass on to their descendants. The UNESCO description above includes the folkloric festivity of Bumba-meu-boi, the central theme of the present work, as a form of expression of Brazilian culture, with its dances, rhythms, tunes, satires and mystical and mythical characters. It is worth mentioning that cultural manifestations such as the ox are capable of attracting people from other areas, with potential for developing tourism and consequently the city's economy.

The chance to experiencing new cultures attracts individuals to travel, and, consequently, has a positive impact on the city's economy, through tourists' expenditure. It is believed that experiencing new cultures is a major factor for the growth of tourism, as people are keen to learn more about other places and cultures, making them attractions that can boost tourist activity. Thus, the so-called Cultural Tourism segment is a form of tourism that combines various cultural manifestations, such as "museums, galleries, cultural events, festivals, parties, architecture, historic sites, artistic performances and others, which, identified with a particular culture, are part of a set that identifies a community and attracts visitors interested in knowing unique characteristics of other peoples" (Dias, 2006, p. 39).

One of the attractions of cultural tourism is the material and immaterial heritage of a place, hence, the insertion of cultural manifestations and popular traditions, like the Bumba-meu-boi, is viable as component of cultural tourism. According to Dias (2006), cultural tourism cannot be restricted to visits "to museums, monuments and historical ensembles, or to archaeological ruins" as though culture were something static, to be merely observed, "but it comprises all cultural manifestations: handicrafts, gastronomy, theatrical performances, dances, folklore, events, in short, everything that represents the cultural identity of a particular cultural community" (Dias, 2006, p. 44). Cultural tourism is related to artistic, cultural, educational, informative or academic events. According to Jane Santos, cultural tourism can be an instrument to



help value and preserve the culture and cultural heritage of a city (Santos, 2016).

However, it is important that tourism be planned in a sustainable way, in order to avoid negative impacts, such as changes in local habits, due to the exchange between cultures. This exchange can be positive, with cultural interchange, but negative when new cultural elements are imposed on a location or group of people. In short, cultural heritage is a factor that motivates tourist trips, becoming a valuable ally of the local economy. Thus, each location should develop its own policies to promote and boost its local economy and preserve its cultural memory, identity and folklore manifestations. We believe that tourism, in the case of Bumba-meu-boi in Parnaíba, can contribute to the preservation of the festival. One of the biggest threats seen is when its participants feel devalued by the local community, public authorities and business people in the municipality. Tourism can redefine the value of the Bumba-meu-boi for practitioners, through the greater recognition of its cultural value, even becoming a source of revenue.

Leisure travel, including cultural tourism, is based on visiting tourist attractions. According to Cooper et al. (2007, p. 346), tourist attractions are the biggest motivators of the tourism demand flows, since "many of the components of tourism travel – for example, transport and accommodation are demands derived from the consumer's desire to enjoy all that a destination has to offer in terms of "things to see and do". Attractions are the main factors to be considered when choosing a destination, therefore, they need to be better structured, i.e., they must be prepared to receive tourists, promoting a quality tourist experience.

The transformation of a cultural asset into a tourist attraction is a process that involves recognition and promotion. In addition to being culturally valued and considered as a heritage by the community, this same asset can also be seen as a product that can be consumed by tourists. Therefore, cultural tourism can be carried out in a sustainable way, that values and respects the local residents and the territories where the cultural manifestation takes place.

According to Machin and Silberberg apud Costa (2009), there are characteristics that can guide the use of a tourist resource in order to make it attractive, such as uniqueness, attractiveness, degree of conservation and managerial characteristics. Key points are the perceived quality of the resource, visitor perception, visitor assistance, sustainability, community support and involvement, and commitment and administrative capacity for resource management.

Manifestations of popular culture can also become cultural attractions, like the Bumba-meu-boi. Since ancient times, there have been historical accounts in which the ox figures as a religious attraction, used in cults, as an offering in sacrifice to the Gods, a symbol

of fecundity and fertility, an object of worship. The ox was seen as a sacred animal; it is one of the symbols of the zodiac and astral systems, and it is also mentioned as a means of riding (vaquejo), as a sacrificial animal, and in Egyptian, Greek and Roman mythology, to later be recreated and seen as a folkloric attraction (Nunes, 2011).

The Bumba-meu-boi is part of the imagination of Brazilian folklore, as it is a traditional festival that is more widespread in the Northeast region (Furlanetto, 2010). It is strongly marked by the artistic trait, combining elements of dance, music and theatrical staging in the same show. All the elements seek to exhibit and exalt the main subject of the presentation, the figure of the ox, which in the popular imagination, is seen as a fabulous being, representative of strength and resistance against the oppressive system of the lords of the colonial period. Its emergence in Brazil, according to historians, dates back to between the 17th and 18th centuries, under the influence of European, African and South American indigenous culture, in the period of the cattle cycle, in the Northeast region, where the ox had economic value for the country (Furlanetto, 2010). Depending on the region, its meaning can also be defined as "beat, my ox". Thus, the term "bumba" can refer to a bass drum, or to the act of beating, a typical sign of popular festivals marked by the strong rhythmic beat of the musical instruments (Santos, 2008). In the character of religiosity, the relationship with the ox is divided into two parts: in the first part, the ox dies, and in the second, it is resurrected. Thus, there is a clear allusion to Christianity, with the figure of the ox appearing even in the birth of Jesus, a common theme in Christian iconographic representations such as nativity scenes.

The Bumba-meu-boi has been changing, depending on the region in which it is celebrated, thus receiving different denominations such as Boi-bumbá in the states of Pará and Amazonas, Boi de reis in Ceará, Boi Janeiro in Bahia, Boi-demourão in Paraná and in Santa Catarina, among others (Marques, 1999). This cultural manifestation has undergone changes in the plot, rhythm, costumes and characters. However, despite the different meanings in each region of the country, it has common roots. But culture is not static and is always in a process of change.

The Bumba meu boi is a traditional festival, yet up-to-date, as it addresses everyday issues such as social problems and/or criticism of politicians. "New animals and figures appear and disappear. The characters of the cowboy, the ox, the caipora, and the seahorse are always present in the ox play, but in each state, the festival has local elements that differentiate it from other regions" (Casculo, 1954, p. 124).

In Câmara Casculo's conception, these folkloric manifestations, although distinct, always preserve the essence of their original construction. In the play,

through comedy, satire, drama and tragedy, the respect for their religious beliefs and the unequal social relations in which afro descendants and native Brazilians lived in relation to the planters are portrayed as a form of protest. According to Carvalho (1995), the Bumba-meu-boi was one of the favorite games of the slaves in Brazil who, when placed on the margins of society, used it as a way to vent their frustration, revolt, aggression and protest. "This was seen by the authorities as a disturbance, an attack on public order, hence the persecution and bans placed on this demonstration. Its character of satire and claim was difficult to tolerate or allow, as it brought to light the contradictions present in the Brazilian reality" (Carvalho, 1995, p.37).

The narrative of the story revolves around the death and resurrection of the much-esteemed ox of a great farmer. The ox is killed by a trusted slave named Pai Francisco, at the request of his wife, Catirina, who, being pregnant, feels the desire to eat ox tongue (Reis, 1980). Upon realizing the disappearance of the esteemed animal, the farmer goes looking for it and finds it dead. Angry, the farmer punishes Pai Francisco who, to preserve his life, asks the shaman for help to cure the ox, which finally ends up being resurrected. The joy is so great that the farmer forgives Pai Francisco and orders great feast to celebrate, with music and dancing. During the festival, the participants wear costumes according to the culture of the region where the dance is played out. The costumes may be made with sequins, satin, feathers, and bugle beads, according to the functions performed by each actor in the plot (Santos, 2016).

According to Viviane Pedrazani (2010), the characters have social meaning and are categorized as something part-way between humans, animals and fantastic beings. The most prominent characters are (Figure 1) the ox, symbolizing strength and resistance against social injustices and a companion in the work of the enslaved; the farmer, the master, owner of the ox and lord of the mill who holds power on the farm, having social status as a landowner; Pai Francisco, one of the main characters of the party, responsible for the theft and death of the ox; Catirina, Pai Francisco's wife who being pregnant, has a craving to eat the tongue of the strongest ox on the farm; the cowboys, representing the image of the workers who carry out orders without questioning, and how are responsible for locating the whereabouts of Pai Francisco; the Indians (native Brazilians), who capture Pai Francisco and are presented with cheerful clothes, giving rhythm and a bright visual appearance to the festival; the shaman (pagê), a character who stands out for his skirt made from banana leaves, a mystical character from the forests, who knows about plant lore; and the donkey, made out of a wire frame covered in cloth, symbolizing a two-headed centaur

(human and animal).

The groups strictly follow the stages of preparation that include the making of costumes and rehearsals, aiming for the best performance in festival presentations, which take place mainly in June, and in the death of the ox, which traditionally takes place in the second week of August.

Figure 1: Catrevagem, characters from bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada.



Source: Personal Collection, 2019.

Although mainly restricted to small towns, the Bumba-meu-boi reached national prominence in the state of Maranhão, where the Bumba-meu-Boi Cultural Complex is located, registered in the Book of Celebrations in 2011. In 2019, the popular manifestation received the title of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. In the state of Amazonas, the Parintins festival also takes place on the island of Tupinambarana, with just over 50,000 inhabitants, and is attended by many residents and tourists each year. Participants are divided into blue and red, depending on their association with the Boi Caprichoso or the Boi Garantido. The two groups perform for three nights at the Centro Cultural e Esportivo Amazonino Mendes, known as the Bumbódromo (Furlanetto, 2011).

The Parintins festival is the stage of the duel between the Boi Garantido and the Boi Caprichoso, which dates back to 1966. The festival takes place at the end of June, and attracts visitors from all over the country and abroad. In Maranhão and Amazonas, especially in the city of Parintins, one can see the use and appreciation of the cultural heritage of the Bumba-meu-boi as an aggregator of event tourism and tourist attraction. In Maranhão, the São Luís Bumba-meu-boi is, today, one of the most important popular manifestations in terms of symbology, myths, rhythms, fables and magic (Castro, 2000). The Bumba-meu-boi is considered an essential part of the region's June festivities. In the month of June, there are days of intense emotion, where people sing and dance to the sound of the matracas (a wooden rattle), zabumbas (a type of bass



drum) and tambourines, producing a grandiose spectacle of brightness, light and color (Castro, 2000).

In Parnaíba, the cultural groups that organize the square dance and Bumba-meu-boi are the main attractions of the June festivities. The June festivals are held in July for a week, a fact resulting from more political than cultural issues; a management decision due to the fact that the June festivals also occur in other places such as Teresina, the capital of Piauí. However, since 2017, with the arrival of a new manager, the festivities have taken place throughout the month of June, resuming the June Festival, with celebrations in the various neighborhoods of the city, including the countryside. It ends on June 27 and 30 with the São João da Parnaíba festival, a show of lights and colors presented by the square dance and ox groups, with cash prizes, making the rivalry between the cultural groups all the fiercer. The disputes are held in Mandu Ladino Square, which becomes a large arena, affectionately nicknamed by the populace as the “quadrihódromo”, a space originally created for the presentation of musical shows and local and national bands, promoted by the Municipality of Parnaíba.

Traditionally, the city has three large “currais” (places for the presentation of oxen): Catanduvas, near the Airport, Tucuns, now the neighborhood of São José, and the island of Santa Isabel (Abrão, 2019). Presenting an ox in these three neighborhoods has become a tradition that seems unbreakable. None of its residents is happy if a year goes by without their neighborhood having an ox. Currently, each neighborhood has two battalions, made up of all the players, one for adults and one for children (Frota, 2019).

However, many changes have taken place from the way the first performances were organized. The main change in the activity of the groups was the presence of women participants, as in the past, the group presentations were composed only of men. Women were only involved in making the costumes. Another change is that the presentations of the ox have become increasingly lavish (Frota, 2019) driven by the spirit of competition that is strong at the June festivals organized by the city of Parnaíba, with a champion group being chosen each year. This scenario has led to financial difficulties for the groups, as their performances have become more and more expensive, increasing their dependence on sponsorship and public funding.

The story of the ox represents the cycle of continuity, as the ox dies and is resurrected the following year. The play is being modified to comply with the schedule of the Secretariat of Culture of the city of Parnaíba, as the presentation time was approximately one hour and thirty minutes; currently it is only twenty minutes for each ox, limiting the presentation to three or four tunes. The city has a league called the “Sociedade de Bois” that even recommended that its members not

participate in the “São João da Parnaíba de 2014” due to a lack of support from the municipal executive power, the main body responsible for funding the play over the last two decades (Abrão, 2016).

Nowadays, it is almost impossible to keep cultural groups in full swing using only their own resources, despite the fact that they are constantly developing cultural activities and preparing their presentations. It is increasingly difficult to bear the expenses, as the number of contracts for presentation in the streets or at the doors of houses has decreased, with presentations taking place almost exclusively during the São João da Parnaíba event, in the Mandu Ladino square.

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This is a qualitative research study, which is concerned, as stated by Gerhardt and Silveira (2009), with aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, focusing on understanding and explaining the dynamics of social relationships. This is a case study, as it analyses the reality of the group Bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada.

The methodology of this work was developed through bibliographical research in bulletins, newspapers, magazines, books, monographs, theses, and cartographic materials, among others. The purpose of bibliographic research is to put the researcher in direct contact with what has been produced and published on a given subject (Lakatos & Marconi, 2001). In addition, field observations of Bumba-meu-boi presentations were carried out between 2015 and 2019.

### The Rei da Boiada Cultural Group

According to Batista Filho, president of the Rei da Boiada cultural group, the group was founded on August 10, 1963, as the result of a coming together of three traditional families of the Catanduvas community: the Reis, the Morenos and the Mosquitos. At the time, there were two rival groups of Bumba-meu-boi, branches to the same family: the Montenegro of Zé Elias, Duca e Gavião and the Nacional of João Batista's grandfather, Sebastião Jerônimo, known as the best ox master in the region. Family feuds occurred over trivial reasons, such as land issues, with each side refusing to give way to the other. According to Batista Filho “a very old thought of theirs, which actually has nothing to do with valuing culture, but unfortunately it happened too much, not only there in Catanduvas, but in all the neighborhoods of the city when the ox met, there was a fight” (Direct research, 2017).

Benjamim Santos (2019) states that nowadays, no ox is against any other, but some exceptions are possible. However, some time ago, the rivalry was so intense that

it reached the point of aggression and violence that would often end up with the participants going to the police station or to hospital.

In order to put an end to the fights that were becoming more and more frequent and violent between members of the family itself, the owners of the Nacional and Montenegro oxen came together, sealing an agreement to end the rivalry. This agreement resulted in the creation of the Rei da Boiada Cultural Group, as a way of honoring families, adding value and representing the same interests in the community. One of the records to the fact narrates, "in the beginning, the heads of the two families put opposite oxen [...] Taken as opposites of greatest rivalry in the history of our cattle. Then they joined as one [...] Being the famous Rei das Campinas who later became the Rei da Boiada" (Jornal o Bembem, 2010, p. 07).

Mr. Batista Filho, when asked about the changes that have taken place over time, stated that following the course of modernity, the ox has evolved in terms of the materials used, but there is a concern to keep the tradition alive. In another part of the interview, João Batista points out:

"The changes have been enormous, right, we've started to put women to play... the investment... you used to wear a straw hat, it was a cardboard helmet, today the investment is huge, with feathers, you know... the straw hat no longer exists, we used to dress in lacquer clothes that were simple, now it's all satin, I mean, it's become much more expensive... and more beautiful, and this has really brought lots of grandeur to the Rei da Boiada, and even though this wealth was used, the group maintained the tradition of killing the ox on the second Saturday in August. So this tradition is the only one that still stands and that attracts ten thousand people there for the death of the ox, eight thousand people from all the neighborhoods of the city. (Batista Filho, direct research, 2017)."

The history of the Rei da Boiada has been marked by numerous titles, won through effort, dedication and, as described by the members a "love for the culture". It won fifteen titles at the festival of São João da Parnaíba. The group has a title from the only Regional Championship in 2005, a state title and a national one for tunes, played at the Albertão stadium in 2007 to an audience of approximately forty thousand people, who witnessed the group's tribute to the city of Parnaíba when it was elevated from the village of São João da Parnaíba, always striving to emphasize the natural beauty of the place.

The Rei da Boiada cultural group is composed of approximately a hundred and seventy-nine players, including being them: twenty-six royal caboclos, sixteen adult cowboys, eleven cowgirls, three knives, one roncadeira, two warrior Indians, a standard bearer, a shaman, a lady, thirty-six male ox dancers, twelve child

cowboys, twelve Indian women, two sergeants, a cavaço, a banjo, an iaporanga woman, three masters, a chief and a shaman. Thus, we have the complete Catreragem, that is, a set of characters, human or fantastic, comic and picaresque (ox, donkey, leaves, Pai Francisco and Catirina), the organizers (sixteen people responsible for the production of the play) and the drummer (Abrão, 2016).

The Rei da Boiada group is a great cultural representation of the city of Parnaíba, especially when we analyze the creativity of the ox masters (singers) in the construction of tunes, with songs being led by the master and repeated by the players. Thus, the Rei da Boiada maintains characteristics that have not been lost with urban development and advances in technology, valuing the symbology and traditions that mark the history of the city, portrayed in its songs. Below is a translation of the "Exaltation to Parnaíba tune" written by João Batista Filho (Batista do Catanduvás):

"In 1762 the foundation of Vila de São João, based in Testa Branca, in Catanduvás, people. Saint Judas Tadeu, holy protector, protect my Rei da Boiada and make it a winner. Catanduvás have their riches; I mention our mangroves, what a delight our crab is! The airport is international. Sport and culture are also on the rise, folks. Saint Judas Tadeu, patron Saint of Catanduvás, with love. Saint of the impossible cause, I beg you, Lord, protect my Rei da Boiada and make it the winner (João Batista Filho, direct research, 2017). "

The importance of the Rei da Boiada group is expressed through its art, dance, tunes, projects and the titles won, bringing the cultural identity of the community to life (Figure 2), through the involvement of the people in preserving this intangible asset, and through the dissemination of customs. It is the most traditional of all the oxen that play in Parnaíba today and, curiously, the most distinguished. The oldest Battalion in the city is a secular ox, and it is the one most loaded with history and tradition (Costa Norte, 2019). According to Benjamim Santos, the Rei da Boiada is a group that dates back to, at least, the beginning of the 20th century. The group had several names, until finally receiving the name of Rei da Boiada on its back, under the coordination of João Batista dos Santos, nicknamed "João Peinha" (Santos, 2019).

Figure 2: Presentation of the cultural group Rei da Boiada at the XIX São João da Parnaíba festival.



Source: Jornal da Parnaíba, 2019.

Culture is a tool for social inclusion and a priority for the group, which carries out social work, seeking to encourage, support and value the residents and families of the players through projects that generate employment and income. These actions are developed in the workshops, where the players' costumes are made by the seamstresses of the community. The Boi Mirim Garantido project was created in 2001, formed by the children of the adult ox players. To participate, the children had to show good grades I school. The concern to continue the tradition and the social inclusion of the children of the community was also addressed by the interviewee:

"We have the children's cultural group called Garantido, made up of the children of the Rei da Boiada players. To take part - they are crazy about the ox - they have to really finish the school year, they have to have good grades, if they fail, they don't get to take part with the ox. We go to school and ask about all of their grades in the first and second semesters, and those who fail cannot take part with the ox. This idea came about because the boys would rehearse together with the adults. Then we started the children's group with this condition, we expect the parents to uphold it, and we go to the principal, we go to the teacher and ask about the children's behavior too. If they haven't behaved well, then we'll take that child out of the group. Then, the following year, if their behavior has improved, they can go back to the group. To give you an idea, the children's group has been in existence for fifteen years, it has only lost two championships, won thirteen, in those fifteen years. [...] It's just workshops that we do, generating jobs for the people of the neighborhood... in the manufacture of helmets, hats, ornaments, the seamstresses are all from the Catanduvas neighborhood (Batista Filho, direct research, 2017)."

In view of the great representation, it is necessary to reflect on how the Rei da Boiada, as well as other cultural groups, have overcome the difficulties regarding the challenges of maintaining the group as a heritage of the community. According to Mr. Batista Filho, the group is responsible for publicizing the events, always trying to keep in touch with people. The participation of the municipal government is restricted to the period when the São João da Parnaíba event takes place and. But although limited, it is an essential help, as described by the president of the group:

"I believe that the event of the death of Rei da Boiada was supposed to be included in the cultural calendar of Piauí, because we see that every cultural event that brings together two thousand people is included in the calendar, which brings together five hundred people is included in the calendar, our event brings together ten thousand people in a field that is very crowded with people and you can't get that support. We did not get a Real to perform a Bumba-meu-boi event, the death of the ox that takes place in the Catanduvas neighborhood. We are missing out a lot and based on the determination of my will and the members themselves, we hold this event year after year (Batista Filho, direct research, 2017)."

In terms of investments, the state of Maranhão can be taken as an example; it invests and encourages the ox performances, while in the state of Piauí, there is no recognition of the festival by the state government or municipal management. This lack of investment is a factor that disadvantages the Bumba-meu-boi, because the oxen of Parnaíba cannot represent the state and the Piauí culture in other regions. The Simpliçã Trophy, in honor of Simplício Dias da Silva, was awarded to the Rei da Boiada in 2004 by the then Secretary of Culture, Benjamim Santos, in the mayoral administration of Parnaíba Paulo Eudes Carneiro, being awarded for the best ox in the evolution category (Santos, 2010). The local newspaper highlighted that the group is the most awarded in the municipality and cited some of its achievements: the Simpliçã Trophy (2004); the Grand Champion of the National Festival of Tunes, in Teresina (2005), and the Regional Champion, when it competed with several oxen from the northern region of Piauí (2007). As for the 2005 award, the Rei da Boiada is the only ox group from Parnaíba to win the festival, and the only one whose tunes have been recorded on CD (Costa Norte, 2019).

In Parnaíba, the cultural groups themselves are the first agents to disseminate and safeguard the Bumba-meu-boi among the population, seeking the support of the local community to as a way of consolidating and articulating their art. However, the ox groups have no projects that would help maintain the culture, such as the inclusion of the Bumba-meu-boi in the calendar of major events, or other events where the play could be



shown at significant places in the city. Batista Filho (2017) suggests:

" [...] so we have an airport, tourists arrive. Let's put a group there to play, to welcome them. Maranhão does this, other places do it. If we have a Porto das Barcas we have to put the groups to play during the vacation period there. If we have a very good place by the river that was inaugurated, but that point of culture is there, put the groups to play. A place like Pedra do Sal put them to play, promote workshops at a schools [...] a lecture, it's guiding, training an ox in a school so it can play, because I think the people who are there in the public power have to be aware that through the Bumba-meu-boi, of this culture, we can even help form citizens, right? and lead the children to take an interest in the Bumba-meu-boi [...] Unfortunately we don't have it, this is very much needed in the city of Parnaíba (Batista Filho, direct research, 2017). "

The president of the Rei da Boiada group mentions the importance of having Bumba-meu-boi presentations in strategic places, such as the tourist spots of Parnaíba, and also schools in the city, to help preserve the culture and promote the local economy.

### The Rei da Boiada Group as a Tourist Attraction

The group performs at the quadrilhões during the São João da Parnaíba festival (Figure 3) attracting locals and tourists. According to a survey carried out in 2018 by the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Tourism (EITUR), 89% of those who attend the event are local residents and 11% are tourists from other Brazilian states, who attend the adults' oxen groups competitions (Perinotto; Vieira, 2018).

Figure 3: Quadrilhões in Parnaíba at the Mandu Ladino square.



Source: Superintendence of Culture of Parnaíba, 2020

One aspect of the Rei da Boiada cultural group is the

day of the traditional death of the ox, an event that generates great expectations even before it takes place. This celebration has the collective support of the majority of the community that is involved in the organization of events, from the simplest activity to the most complex carried out by the group. The death of the ox traditionally takes place in the second week of August, and attracts an audience of around ten thousand people, including residents and tourists, at the Botafogo soccer field in the neighborhood of Catanduvas, normally used by the local residents for sports practice (Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4: Presentation of the cultural group Rei da Boiada in the Botafogo soccer field.



Source: Personal Collection, 2019.

The event starts with a walk, leaving the headquarters of the ox at 1:30 pm and returning to the Botafogo field, in front of the headquarters, at 5 pm, after visiting several neighborhoods of the city. The walk also includes the participation of some members of the Garantido group, composed of children between 14 and 15 years old, as part of kind of initiation ritual for the Rei da Boiada group. The ritual attracts a large crowd, at least equal to the great death rituals of São Luís, in the state of Maranhão (Abrão, 2016).

Figure 5: Indians of the Bumba-meu-boi.



Source: Personal Collection, 2019.

During the reenactment of the death of the ox, the white ox is hunted several times, creating an exciting spectacle. The ox flees for a few meters from the corral, but is chased and captured by the cowboys who lead it back into the pen. The ox shows great strength and resistance, refusing to go back into the corral. After the performance of the seventh tune, the master sings "go to die, go to finish" and the ox is knocked down and dragged to the fence post by the cowboys, where it is symbolically trapped and bled. The blood of the ox is represented by wine, which is distributed to the participants of the celebration (Abrão, 2016).

In 2000, the cultural group Rei da Boiada paid tribute to the city of Parnaíba, extolling the natural riches and the touristic and historical points of the city. As part of the dramatical presentation, João Batista Filho, president of the cultural group Rei da Boiada, recited the verses:

"Good night, everyone!

I'm coming just to cheer you up, the Delta of the Americas is in Piauí.

Our wealth comes to discover (in the paw)

And the Rei da Boiada arrived to play, oh dear city, I want to honor you,

Here we have our Portinho, the Pedra do Sal, the Porto das Barcas and the Environmental Park (João Batista Filho)."

The festival of the dead of the "Rei da Boiada" is one of the main cultural events in the city, despite not being included in the official list of the municipality events (Figure 6). "In the heart of the people of Parnaíba plays a tune, born, as Mestre Cascudo remembers, from the Brazilian mestizo, welcomed and richly recreated by the poor people of the city of Parnaíba" (Abrão, 2016, p.10).

Figure 6: The traditional festival of the dead of the Rei da Boiada event.



Source: Jornal da Parnaíba, 2020.

It is understood that the event of the death of the ox can be structured to become a cultural tourist attraction in the city. For this, it is important to plan the event so that it can accommodate tourists, while retaining the identity characteristics of the group. The group manager is interested in transforming the ox into a tourist attraction; but it is important to have participatory planning aimed at the cultural sustainability of the group, to ensure that the tourism does not cause negative impacts.

The Rei da Boiada cultural group has characteristics that allow it to contribute to and boost tourism in the region. The Rei da Boiada itself can become a tourist attraction, generating employment and income, as its presentations attract large numbers of people. Vitória Tude, daughter of businessman Paulo Rodrigues, created the Bumba-meu-boi Revitalization Project, between 2001 and 2004. The project aimed to put on performances by the groups throughout the year, taking advantage of the main tourist attractions of Parnaíba, rather than being restricted to specific festivals, or presentations put on sporadically by the municipality. Unfortunately, the project was unsuccessful, and Vitória was not able to carry out this promising plan of creating a partnership between culture and tourism.

The Rei da Boiada group does not have a headquarters as such; its base is the master's house, but this is only a meeting point. One way to make the group a more consolidated tourist attraction starts would be to establishing a base, preferably on land donated by the municipality, where the group can carry out its managerial activities, as well as being an exhibition space for photos, costumes and props, and a place that can be visited by tourists. The lack of interest on the part of entrepreneurs and public management in Parnaíba makes it difficult to project the Rei da Boiada as a tourist attraction. It is understood that resuscitating Vitória Tude's project, and structuring of a headquarters, would encourage a greater appreciation of the Bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada as a cultural heritage and tourist attraction.

The festivities of the June period may constitute a tourist product, due to their potential and degree of importance for the cities where they are celebrated (Souza; Perinotto, 2015). Such events usually attract large numbers of people, who try out traditional foods, take part in the June square dances, and enjoy various cultural and musical attractions. It can be said that the São João de Parnaíba is a cultural attraction, despite having a repressed demand to attract tourists.

The Bumba-meu-boi festival, in Parnaíba, which has been changing over the years, also has the potential to attract tourists. However, structural changes are needed for its development, in order to receive people, e.g. safer spectator stands with several accesses, a large



screen for the presentations, better transport logistics, increased security, portable toilets, bigger marquees, more advance publicity for the event, better acoustics, and more value for local artists.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This analyzes whether the cultural manifestation of the Bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada can be considered a tourist attraction. Throughout the study, the uniqueness and importance of this cultural manifestation, for the residents of Parnaíba and for tourists, is demonstrated. Based on the studies carried out, it is considered that with proper structuring, the Bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada has potential to become a cultural tourist attraction.

The group has great prominence on the night of the "ox competition" during the São João da Parnaíba event, always occupying one of the three best places in the dispute, besides serving as an inspiration for other groups, due to its cultural legacy dating back to 1963. However, this event needs to be better structured in order to attract tourists. Some points for improvement are the circulation and transport of tourists within the city, having more signs for tourists, creating updated itineraries, and having a headquarters for the Bumba-meu-boi Rei da Boiada, which tourists can visit to find out more about the history of this cultural manifestation.

One of the main traditional events in the city is the ritual of the death of the Rei da Boiada. The event attracted around ten thousand people in 2019, demonstrating its potential for tourism, and its uniqueness and cultural wealth. The Rei da Boiada cultural group runs social projects in schools and actions in the community that generate employment and income for residents and the players' families, through workshops for making the Bumba-meu-boi costumes, produced by seamstresses in the Catanduevas neighborhood. The group develops the Garantido project, the children's ox group, and encourages the academic success of the children involved, as a prerequisite to take part in the ox presentations in the city of Parnaíba. However, despite all their cultural importance for the city, the group's actions are not included in the official list of the municipality as one of the main events in the city of Parnaíba. Thus, the visibility of the Bumba-meu-boi is restricted to just one month of June, as part of the June festivities.

The structuring of the group as an attraction with a greater number of presentations for tourists, and the building of a new headquarters to receive visitors, can contribute economically to enabling the Rei da Boiada to maintain its social and cultural activities. It is under-

stood that there are several ways to obtain financial resources through cultural tourism, whether by charging tickets to attend cultural performances, charging an entry fee to visit the future headquarters, or selling products related to the Bumba-meu-boi, among others. However, all the actions must be planned in a sustainable way, aiming to minimize the negative cultural impacts and maximize the positive ones (Oliveira, 2011). Added to this scenario is the fact that the Rei da Boiada cultural group does not receive financial support from the municipality, municipal managers and big businessmen in the city to carry out their presentations and welcome tourists in places such as the airport, bus station or hotels. The group does not have financial or structural help to perform at the city's tourist attractions during the peak season, or any financial assistance to take part in the Bumba-meu-boi championships, whether in the Northeast of the country or in elsewhere. The valorization of the Bumba-meu-boi has the potential to contribute to the development of cultural tourism in the city. The Rei da Boiada group is one of the great cultural assets of the region and, even without the necessary support from the municipality, it has managed to maintain its traditions and pass on its customs and values from one generation to the next, upholding its cultural importance in the city of Parnaíba.

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