

A Hundred Years of Caruaru: Music, Memory and Cultural Representations¹

Cem Anos de Caruaru: Música, Memória e Representações Culturais

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Abstract

This article explores the celebration of Caruaru's centennial, which took place in 1957, and the impact of this celebration on the construction of the city's cultural identity. Throughout the text, we discuss the role of local institutions, the press, and national intellectuals like Jorge Amado in the festivities. We also highlight the importance of the music produced in honor of the city, especially the compositions by Luiz Gonzaga and Onildo Almeida, which helped establish Caruaru as a cultural hub in the Northeast. The cultural representations and the connection between the event and the Caruaru Fair reinforce the role of music and popular culture in creating a collective memory of the city. The methodology was based on documentary research and was guided by theoretical approaches from Cultural History authors. We hope to contribute to debates about regional history, particularly that of Caruaru, in the mid-20th century.

Keywords: Caruaru centennial; city; representations; music.

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¹ Research funded by the Foundation for the Support of Science and Technology of the State of Pernambuco (FACEPE, Brazilian acronym for Fundação de Amparo à Ciência e Tecnologia do Estado de Pernambuco).



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Resumo

Este artigo explora a celebração do centenário de Caruaru, ocorrido em 1957, e o impacto dessa comemoração na construção da identidade cultural da cidade. Ao longo do texto, discutimos o papel das instituições locais, da imprensa e de intelectuais nacionais nas festividades. Também abordamos a importância das músicas produzidas em homenagem à cidade, com destaque para as composições de Luiz Gonzaga e Onildo Almeida, que consolidaram a imagem de Caruaru como um centro cultural do Nordeste. As representações culturais e a integração entre o evento e a Feira de Caruaru reforçam o papel da música e da cultura popular na criação de uma memória coletiva da cidade. A metodologia baseou-se em uma pesquisa documental e teve como pressupostos teóricos autores da História Cultural. Esperamos contribuir com os debates sobre a história regional, particularmente da cidade de Caruaru, em meados do século XX.

Palavras-chave: Centenário de Caruaru; cidade; representações; música.

Introduction

Caruaru's centennial, commemorated on May 18th, 1957, marked a significant moment for the city, consolidating it as a relevant cultural and economic center in Northeastern Brazil. Located in the so-called Agreste of Pernambuco, Caruaru became known for its cultural energy, mainly expressed in the famous Caruaru Fair, one of the main hubs of commerce and popular traditions of that region. However, the centennial was not only a celebration of its long life, but also the peak of the construction of its urban identity which crossed regional borders and reached the national scenario.

The celebration revealed a clear construction of the city's cultural representations, manifested in both public celebrations and musical productions. Roger Chartier's cultural representations theory is useful to understand this phenomenon. For that author, representations are not mere consequences of an objective reality, but rather "practices that build up, manipulate and transform reality"¹. Regarding Caruaru, the city was not only portrayed as a growing economic center, but also as a space of culture and popular tradition, reinforced by media discourses and songs composed for the occasion.

The local people looked forward to the centennial celebrations for years as shown by the registers of the time. Publications such as the *Vanguarda*

¹ CHARTIER, Roger. *A história cultural: entre práticas e representações*. Lisboa: Difel, 1990, p.16.

newspaper already mentioned the historical milestone in 1955, Thus expressing the atmosphere of expectation that permeated the city and neighboring areas. Not only did the local population, important institutions such as the Catholic church, political parties, the Trade Board, and the Masonry gather, but also influent intellectual and journalists joined efforts to make the centennial a grand fete. The idea of showing Caruaru as a prosperous, progressist city of national relevance was strongly cultivated throughout the event preparation.

The event attracted the media's attention, both at the regional and national levels, and newspapers such as the *Diário de Pernambuco* and *Correio da Manhã* covered the celebrations. In addition, the presence of a group of renowned intellectuals, including Jorge Amado, Lygia Fagundes Telles and Aníbal Machado, emphasized the city's symbolic importance in the Brazilian cultural scenario. Such participation guaranteed Caruaru's inclusion in the literary and artistic map and also helped to consolidate the image of the city as the home of culture and popular tradition.

Another central aspect of the celebrations was the role of music. The accordion player Luiz Gonzaga, one of the greatest names of the northeastern music, immortalized the city with his compositions paying homage to the centennial. Songs such as "A Feira de Caruaru", by Onildo Almeida, and "Capital do Agreste", by Gonzaga and Nelson Barbalho, immortalized the city and strengthened its cultural representations. These two songs portrayed Caruaru as a vibrant city, whose culture and economy revolved around the famous Fair, a true symbol of its identity.

Therefore, Caruaru's centennial was not only a local celebration. In fact, it became an event that echoed nationally, consolidating the city as a space of relevant cultural production. This article seeks to explore the different representations of Caruaru during its centennial, analyzing the role of local institutions, the press, intellectuals, and the songs composed to pay homage to the city, showing how these multiple narratives contributed to the construction of an identity that remains until these days.

This is a qualitative study focusing on document analysis and interpretation of primary and secondary sources. The research was conducted in three main phases: the first phase consisted in the survey and analysis of document sources, including newsletters, magazines and publications of that time, such as the newspapers *Vanguarda*, *Diário de Pernambuco*, *Correio da Manhã* and *Jornal de Letras*.

Those sources were analyzed to understand how Caruaru's centennial was represented by the local and national press, and to map the event reception by the population and intellectuals involved. The document analysis aimed to identify the main narratives about the city, paying special attention to the participation of local institutions such as the church, masonry, and political parties. It also focused on the importance of the Caruaru Fair as a cultural and economic symbol.

The second phase involved the analysis of musical compositions produced to pay homage to the centennial, among which "A Feira de Caruaru", by Onildo Almeida, and "Capital do Agreste", by Luiz Gonzaga and Nelson Barbalho, stood out. By analyzing the song's lyrics, we identified how those songs contributed to the construction of Caruaru's cultural identity, emphasizing local traditions and historical characters. The methodology employed was discourse analysis aiming at understanding the cultural and identity representations that emerged from the songs and how they helped to disseminate Caruaru's image nationally.

The third phase of the study involved the interpretation of reports and testimonies given by personalities who took part in the festivities, such as Jorge Amado, Aníbal Machado and Nelson Barbalho. A comparison was made between positive comments and critique such as Barbalho's remarks about Amado's behavior during the event. This aimed to explore the tensions between the city's cultural idealization and real interactions during the celebrations. The analysis of such reports was guided by the theory of social representations, seeking to understand how individual experiences influenced and contributed to the collective construction of Caruaru's identity.

Finally, a comparative analysis was carried out between the different representations of the city in the media and music discourses, contrasting them with personal perceptions of public personalities who participated in the event. The synthesis of those perspectives allowed the identification of several cultural layers, that is, music, press, intellectuals, and local population, intertwined to shape the image of Caruaru as a cultural and economic center during the centennial commemorations.

The role of institutions and the press

In May 1957, more precisely on the eighteenth, the city of Caruaru celebrated its centennial with great enthusiasm. The anniversary of the municipality in the Agreste region of the state of Pernambuco did not go

unnoticed since “very few cities in Northeastern Brazil enjoy the privilege of celebrating one hundred years of existence in such enviable conditions as Caruaru”².

The city’s anniversary created expectations years before as evidenced by the enthusiasm registered in publications such as the *Vanguarda* newspaper, the main periodical publication of the city, which also circulated in neighboring municipalities and had mentioned the centennial celebrations in 1955. This historical landmark raised great interest in and generated great expectations related to the celebrations.

From inside the city, the effort of public powers, the Catholic church, Evangelical churches, Trade Board, political parties, Masonry, and Rotary Club, in addition to the work of writers, journalists, artists and intellectuals contributed to leave their mark in the centennial fete. The event, scheduled for eighteenth May 1957, became the motto through which those agents sought to build up the idea of a great city, product of the effort of individual subjects who boosted its development.³

Apart from the local publications such as *A Defesa*, *Jornal do Agreste* and *Revista do Agreste*, the commemoration was also recorded by newspapers that circulated nationally.

In *Diário de Pernambuco*, registers were found of Caruaru’s centennial around a year before its date. In April 1956, the journalist Antônio Miranda already expressed his concern with the lack of progress in the construction of the Caruaru’s city hall building, with headlines “Centennial is approaching, and the city hall does not have a building⁴”. In August of the same year, the chronicler Samuel Soares, wrote an article called “Caruaru’s Centennial” describing that “at least to date, no event, in the life of the interior of this state, could reach the significance and importance of the celebration of Caruaru’s centennial⁵”.

In Rio de Janeiro, the newspaper *Diário da Noite* informed in 1957, the arrival of senator Apolônio Salles to the capital of the country at that

² CEM anos de vida. *Vanguarda*, Caruaru-PE, ano XXVI, n. 1256, May 18, 1957.

³ SANTOS, José Veridiano dos. *Falas da cidade: um estudo sobre as estratégias discursivas que constituíram historicamente a cidade de Caruaru-PE (1950-1970)*. 132 f. Dissertation (History Master’s Program) - Programa de Pós-Graduação em História, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Recife, 2006. p. 45.

⁴ MIRANDA, Antonio. O CENTENÁRIO ESTÁ PRÓXIMO E A PREFEITURA NÃO TEM PRÉDIO. *Diário de Pernambuco*, Recife, n. 00179, Apr 3, 1956.

⁵ SOARES, Samuel. Centenário de Caruaru. *Diário de Pernambuco*, Recife, n. 00077, Aug 5, 1956.

time, Rio de Janeiro, to travel to the city and “attend the commemoration of Caruaru’s centennial”.⁶

Also, the “marvellous city” press, more precisely the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper, in February 1957, recorded the arrival of the “mayor of the most important city of Pernambuco after Recife, that is Caruaru”, Sizenando Guilherme de Azevedo, to the capital of the country. According to that newspaper, the mayor of Caruaru came “to discuss matters related to the municipality he managed “ and “speed the preparation of the centennial celebration”, thus highlighting Caruaru as “one of the cities that was most talked about in the country “⁷

The *Jornal de Letras* newspaper, run by the Condé brothers, João Condé and Elysio Condé, writers from Caruaru who were widely celebrated in music, informed in April the arrival of the “group of intellectuals”. This publication reinforced the cultural identity of Caruaru, often called the “Land of the Condés” due to those brothers’ influence. The newspaper reported that the group arrived in Recife with the purpose of following to Caruaru to “attend the commemoration event”, emphasizing that an “attractive program of cultural celebration was being organized”⁸. Such movement evidenced the cultural impact and relevance of Caruaru’s centennial events, attracting attention and participation of important celebrities in the intellectual scenario of that time.

The group of intellectuals, led by the Condé brothers, gathered an impressive list of prominent names of the national literature and intellectuality. The group included the renowned novel writer Jorge Amado, the influent columnist of the “*Diário de Notícias*” newspaper, Osório Borba, and the director of the Document Service of the Ministry of Education, José Simeão Leal. Furthermore, the brothers José, Elysio and João Condé also participated alongside the writers Aníbal Machado, Lygia Fagundes Telles and Eneida, and the talented painter and illustrator Augusto Rodrigues.

Representing the governor of São Paulo, the secretary of education arrived accompanied by the journalists Yllen Kerr and Antônio Rudge, from the “*Revista da Semana*” magazine and the “*O Cruzeiro*” newspaper, respectively. The group of visitors also included the writer and columnist of the “*Estado de São Paulo*” newspaper as well as the director of the Public

⁶ APOLONIO Salles visita Cordeiro. *Jornal Diário da Noite*, Rio de Janeiro, n. B06693, May 20, 1957.

⁷ CARUARU vai comemorar seu primeiro centenário: Ouvindo o sr. Sizenando Guilherme de Azevedo, prefeito da mais importante cidade do interior pernambucano [...]. *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 19603, Feb 19, 1957.

⁸ CENTENÁRIO Caruaru. *Jornal de Letras*, Rio de Janeiro, ano IX, n. 93, Apr, 1957.

Library of São Paulo, Sérgio Millet, and the president of the Poetry Club of São Paulo, Antônio Rangel Bandeira.⁹

Each participant, representing different communication media such as those already listed *Jornal de Letras*, *Correio da Manhã*, *Revista da Semana*, and *Diário de Notícias*, among others, had the chance of sharing their experience in Caruaru and their impressions about the celebrations. Such diversity of perspectives resulted in several mentions of Caruaru in different publications, each one offering a unique view of the event.

One example is the article published by Jorge Amado in his monthly newsletter called *Paratodos* in June 1957, in Rio de Janeiro, entitled “Celebrating Caruaru”.

That was the most Brazilian of all celebrations, with that charm of the Northeastern *agreste*, folk traditions e cordiality, grace and intelligence, joy and abundance in sharing even from the poorest ones. I am grateful to the Condés brothers, acclaimed and cherished sons of Caruaru for the invitation and mainly for being insistent. There wasn't a single note out of tune in the parties of the centennial of a progressive city of the interior, where the word culture is not an empty term, where Álvaro Lins and Vitalino, Limeira Tejo and Heleno, the three Condés were born. The literature of viola players: men involved with critique, fiction, literary journalism, and those involved with popular art, of clay worked with their hands, who are illiterate but wise, of improvised verses and poor rhymes presenting from time to time pure poetry.¹⁰

In Jorge Amado's writings, Caruaru appears as a microcosmos of Brazil, reflecting a rich tapestry of traditions and folklore. Individuals like Mestre Vitalino and the Condé brothers are emblematic in the city, highlighting it as vibrant and authentic cultural space. Amado recognizes and celebrates this identity, emphasizing the poetic qualities and the dedication of the people from Caruaru, who live and breathe popular culture. This view is confirmed by the appreciation of the Condé brothers, local writers whose work reinforces Caruaru's reputation as a center of cultural production.

However, Nelson Barbalho, a great writer and chronicler from Caruaru, presents an intriguing disagreement. Although Jorge Amado expressed

⁹ BARBALHO, Nelson. *Caruaru: centenário da cidade*. Recife: CEPE, 2020.

¹⁰ AMADO, Jorge, 1957 apud BARBALHO, 2020. p. 144.

gratitude and enchantment with Caruaru's festivities, Barbalho suggests that Amado's personal experience in the city was less positive. Barbalho observes that Amado, famous for his statements about the writer's role as an active participant involved with the audience, did not keep this posture in Caruaru. In fact, he behaved in an elitist and distant manner, resembling the stereotype of the "writer on the ivory tower"¹¹.

Well accommodated at a banker's house, he did not even drink Caruaru's water. While he was in the city, the only liquid he ingested was pure Scotch whisky. He did not taste the roll-your-own tobacco from the Caruaru Fair. He only smoked North American cigarettes, imported by smugglers. I started conversation with him more than once at Clóvis Cursino's place, about his book *Os Subterrâneos da Liberdade* (The undergrounds of freedom). He always avoided the subject and talked about something else all the time. He said he was under surveillance. He seemed to be stepping on a minefield. He did not trust anybody. He did not have an open conversation at all.¹²

Barbalho's analysis highlights the complexity of human and cultural interactions. The presence of such a renowned literary representative as Jorge Amado in Caruaru should, in theory, reinforce the city's narrative as the epicenter of popular culture. However, Amado's noticeable behavior subverted such expectation, thus revealing tensions between the idealization of an author and his real actions.

Such duality of perceptions might also result from the high expectations the literary and cultural community of Caruaru might have had in relation to the illustrious visitors. The city, already known for its rich cultural heritage, might have expected a deeper and more authentic involvement from Amado. When he was far from meeting such expectations, their deception was amplified by his own rhetoric of being a popular writer.

The participation of intellectuals such as Jorge Amado and the discussions about his posture in festivities must be understood in the light of Chartier's perspective. For him, representations are always "multiple and conflicting" (Chartier, 1990)¹³, which can be observed in the tension between the idealization of Amado as a popular writer and his alleged distance from

¹¹ Ibidem. p. 143.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ CHARTIER, op.cit. p. 16.

local reality as pointed out by Nelson Barbalho. Such contradiction shows the complexity of representation practices, in which different agents build up diverse views of the same cultural object.

In addition, the presence of the group of intellectuals had great coverage from local newspapers and those from the capital of Pernambuco, enlarging the audience of the centennial celebrations. As a result, the Caruaru event reached a broader audience and left a long-lasting mark, not only in the local memory, but also in the country's cultural and journalistic scenario.

The fete was marked by expressive participation, with a large number of people coming from all cities of Pernambuco to celebrate together. It lasted nine days, from May 18th to 26th, the event attracted around fifty thousand participants, who cramped the streets with their cars and their lively presence.

There were school parades, representing all local schools and other educational entities of the state. They stood out in the program alongside artistic exhibitions, musical presentations, carnival parades and fireworks. In addition, several stalls and playful activities were made available on the streets, offering a variety of products and things to do.¹⁴

The composers sing 'happy anniversary' to the city

One of the highlights of the city's centennial were the songs composed to honor it. The section "Discoteca" of the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper highlighted this musical production, listing the several recordings carried out in Rio de Janeiro to celebrate the city's anniversary. "At the RCA Victor, the accordion player and interpreter from Northeast Luiz Gonzaga, recorded "Feira de Caruaru" and "Capital do Agreste". Under the Continental label, the Bandinha 19 de Abril, perpetuated the song by Vero and Chiquinho "Viva Caruaru" and the samba "Centenário de Caruaru".¹⁵

One of the first compositions to gain great national and international recognition was the "A Feira de Caruaru", written by Onildo Almeida¹⁶ in 1956 and recorded by Luiz Gonzaga in 1957. The 78 rpm single, with Luiz Gonzaga's unmistakable voice at the RCA VICTOR record label, contained only two songs.

¹⁴ MIRANDA, Antonio. Festas do centenário. *Diário de Pernambuco*, Recife, May 28, 1957.

¹⁵ DISCOTECA: Roteiro informativo. *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 19676, May 19, 1957.

¹⁶ Singer and composer from Caruaru, who had over 500 songs recorded, most with popular themes and invoking Caruaru.

The single that sold over a hundred thousand copies and became a hit, showed on the A-side the song “Feira de Caruaru”. On the B-side was the song “Capital do Agreste”, which Luiz Gonzaga had asked Onildo Almeida and Nelson Barbalho to compose to pay a homage to Caruaru in its first centennial.

Those compositions celebrated Caruaru’s centennial and also played a fundamental role in the dissemination and strengthening of the city imaginary. Those songs advertised the cultural and urban identity of Caruaru, creating and recreating representations of the city in several contexts. The lyrics of “A Feira de Caruaru” are presented below:

A Feira de Caruaru	The Caruaru Fair
Faz gosto a gente ver ¹⁷	It is nice to see
De tudo que há no mundo	Everything there is in the world
Nela tem pra vender	They sell it there
Na feira de Caruaru	At the Caruaru fair
Tem massa de mandioca	There is cassava dough
Castanha assada, tem ovo cru	Roasted chestnuts, raw eggs
Banana, laranja, manga	Banana, oranges, mango
Batata, doce, queijo e caju	Potato, sweet potato, cheese and cashew
Cenoura, jaboticaba	Carrot, jaboticaba
Guiné, galinha, pato e peru	Guinea fowl, Chicken, duck and turkey
Tem bode, carneiro, porco	There is goat, sheep and pig
Se duvidar inté cururu	If you doubt, even a frog
Tem cesto, balaio, corda	There is basket, woven basket, rope
Tamanco, gréia, tem cuêi-tatu	Clogs, grill and cassava grater
Tem fumo, tem tabaqueiro	There is tobacco, a tobacco case
Feito de chifre de boi zebu	Made of zebu ox horn
Caneco alcoviteiro	A gossip mug
Peneira boa e mé de urucu	Good sieve and urucu honey
Tem carça de arvorada	Arvorada pants
Que é pra matuto não andar nu	So the contryman doesn't walk around naked

Continue

¹⁷ ALMEIDA, Onildo. *A Feira de Caruaru*. [Gravação]. Luiz Gonzaga. Rio de Janeiro: RCA VICTOR, 1957. Disco sonoro.

Conclusion

Tem rede, tem balieira	There is hammock, there is bird trap
Mode menino caçar nambu	For the boy to hunt tinamous
Maxixe, cebola verde	Cucumber, green onions
Tomate, cumentro, couve e chuchu	Tomato, coriander, green leaves and chayote
Armoço feito nas torda	Lunch made in the stalls
Pirão mexido que nem angü	Stirred cassava flour thickened broth like a porridge
Mobilha de tamburete	Furniture like stools
Feita do tronco do mulungu	Made from the trunk of mulungu (tree)
Tem louça, tem ferro velho	There is crockery, there is scrap
Sorvete de raspa que faz jaú	Rolled ice cream that makes you drool
Gelada, cardo de cana	Icy sugarcane juice
Fruta de palma e mandacaru	Prickly pear fruit and mandacaru cactus
Bonecos de Vitalino	Vitalino's dolls
Que são conhecidos até no Sul	Which are known even in the South
De tudo que há no mundo	Everything there is in the world
Tem na Feira de Caruaru	You find in the Caruaru Fair

This song, full of terms used in colloquial speech, with regional terms, transports us to the vibrant atmosphere of that fair, which was for a long time the city's economic center, characterized as the place that has "everything there is in the world". According to Dossier number 9 of the National History and Arts Institute (IPHAN – Brazilian acronym for Instituto Histórico e Artístico Nacional), which describes the fair, considered Brazilian Immaterial Cultural Heritage since 2006:

In 1956, Luiz Gonzaga arrived in Caruaru to present in the Difusora Radio and listened to the song "A Feira de Caruaru". With great enthusiasm, he asked Onildo's permission to record it, and over a hundred thousand copies of that recording were sold in 1957. The Fair was also strengthened since people came to verify the items listed in the song and complained about the absence of some goods. Currently, there is no record of the number of singers who recorded this song and over 34 countries

know it. Onildo states: “Once the Berlin Symphonic Orchestra included this song in their repertoire and interpreted ‘A Feira de Caruaru’”.¹⁸

The fair origin is deeply intertwined with the history of Caruaru since “this is a city born from the fair, which expanded and consolidated their existence simultaneously. One cannot be separated from the other, they are really dependent on each other, thus composing an organic whole, in true symbiosis”¹⁹. The fair started around the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Conception, built in 1781, and is considered the cornerstone of the Caruaru village.

Every time people came to the mass, they also brought their produce or handcrafts to sell there. The small fair became the central area of the village, thus aggregating economic, social, and cultural values, and creating more bonds between the inhabitants’ everyday lives and the Caruaru fair.

Figure 1 - Caruaru (PE) Weekly fair



Source: Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics -IBGE

¹⁸ BRASIL. Ministério da Cultura. Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional. *Dossiê IPHAN 9 – Feira de Caruaru*. Brasília, DF, 2009.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 13.

In figure 1, a photo taken in 1955 shows an aerial view of the fair when it was in the city center²⁰, with its storehouses and the thousands of people who came specially to buy and sell diverse products. On the left, there is the Our Lady of Conception church, the village cornerstone, and in the background on the right, the Bom Jesus Mountain appears, the highest point of the city. During the centennial, the mount was being renewed with the construction of stairs to favor access to the tourist point, providing a panoramic view of the city.

The song, which resulted from thorough field research carried out by Onildo so that each verse would rhyme with the city's name, gives an idea of the objects commercialized there:

That is, what is a '*carça de arvorada*'? It is what we call jeans nowadays. What jeans are, if jeans were invented by the Americans, it was...but it... it is characteristic type of fabric, a similar one, only the... the... the... canvas, the *alvorada*, it was called *alvorada*. *Alvorada* is a type of canvas, a fabric made of canvas, it is sun and rain proof. The countrymen would by a cloak, a pair of those pants, and would go to the farm wearing them, then would wash them and come to the fair with them. Those were their eternal clothes, they would spend the whole year in them, strong clothes, which would not tear easily, because it was canvas, this is how they were similar to jeans, because the jeans color is exactly the color of the *alvorada* pants, do you see? ²¹

In Figure 2, also taken in that year, we can see one part inside the fair where there is great movement of people to commercialize fruit and vegetables.

Currently, the Caruaru Fair plays a significant role in the local economy presenting a wide range of sectors. Among such sectors, the ones that stand out are the Handcraft fair, the Imported items, the Sulanca fair (popular clothes), the Fruit and Vegetable fair, the Root and Medicinal Herb Fair, the Exchange Fair, the Flower and Ornamental Plant Fair, the Leather Fair, the

²⁰ The fair was moved to the 18 de Maio Park in 1992 since due to its continuous growth, its location at Rua do Comércio, where it was held for around two centuries, started to disturb the urban dynamics and create management problems.

²¹ ALMEIDA, Onildo. in BRASIL. Ministério da Cultura. Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional. *Dossiê IPHAN 9 – Feira de Caruaru*. Brasília, DF, 2009, p. 12.

Clothes Fair, the Cake Fair, Bed, Table, and Bath Items, the Hardware fair, and the Tobacco fair.

Each of these sectors attracts thousands of tourists and contributes to the economy of Caruaru, strengthening its importance as a regional commercial center. With its customers varying according to the time of year, “around 25 to 30 thousand people circulate only in the Sulanca Fair, where it is possible to find low-priced clothes and, according to the historian José Urbano, it is believed to commercialize around BRL 80 million in a 24-hour period”²²

Figure 2: Caruaru Weekly Fair (PE)



Source: IBGE

Below (Figure 3), there is a more recent image, a photo taken in 2021, in which the composer and singer Onildo Almeida, who helped to consolidate the fair, walks through the Handcraft Fair. In the background, a wide range of articles is seen such as artisanal toys, coins safes made of plaster, bags, hammocks, *cordel* literature, small decoration pieces, garden sculptures made of clay, and baskets, among others.

²² RODRIGUES, Larissa; CASTRO, Tarsila. Berço de Caruaru, feira é impulso para o futuro. *Folha de Pernambuco*, Recife, 23 mar. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.folhape.com.br/politica/berco-de-caruaru-feira-e-impulso-para-o-futuro/325064/>. Accessed on: Jul 27, 2024.

Figure 3: Onildo Almeida, Gonzaga's partner and composer of "A Feira de Caruaru"



Source: Folha de Pernambuco

The cultural representations of Caruaru, built up during the centennial celebrations, exemplify what Chartier describes as the role of "representations in the production and circulation of meanings".²³ The song "A Feira de Caruaru", for example, goes beyond a simple homage to the fair; it shapes and perpetuates the image of a city as a space where "everything there is in the world" can be found, thus creating a symbolic representation that transcends the objective reality of the fair. Therefore, the song works as a cultural practice that reinforces and disseminates Caruaru's identity.

On the single B-side, we find the song "Capital do Agreste". This song was ordered by

Luiz Gonzaga, who wanted to pay homage to the city where he always found partnership and audience, even when *baião* as a rhythm started to decline in the country.

In the lyrics of this song, the city's history is progressively narrated, introducing the characters that took part in its history and development by means of structures that the authors considered the symbols of a successful city, such as schools, shelters, children's hospital and churches.

²³ CHARTIER, Roger. *As representações culturais: formas de construção do mundo social*. Porto Alegre: Editora Universidade/UFRGS, 1991, p. 25.

Quem conhece o meu Nordeste	Those who know my Northeast
Certamente há de saber	Will certainly know
Que Caruaru, de bonito	That Caruaru, so beautiful
Há cem anos veio nascer	Was born a hundred years ago
De fazenda Cururu	From Caruaru Farm
Povoado se tornou	A settlement it became
Foi crescendo, foi crescendo	It grew and grew
E à Vila, logo chegou	And soon was a Village
João Vieira de Melo	João Vieira de Melo
Coronel Cabra da Peste	A tough colonel
Da vila fez a cidade	Turned the village into town
Hoje Capital do Agreste	And it is the Agreste Capital now
Oh!Cidade encantadora	Oh! Charming city
Terra do Major Dandinho	The land of Major Dandinho
Neco Porto, João Guilherme	Neco Porto, João Guilherme
O saudoso Vigarinho	The late Vigarinho
O progresso foi tão grande	Progress came fast
Tudo, tudo evoluiu	Everything, everything evolved
Tem escolas, tem abrigos	It has schools, it has shelters
Também Hospital Infantil	There is also the children's hospital
As igrejas são tão lindas	The churches are gorgeous
Habitantes, mais de cem mil	Inhabitants, over a hundred thousand
Pedaço de Pernambuco	A part of Pernambuco
Orgulho do meu Brasil	The pride of Brazil
Oh! Cidade Centenária	Oh! Centennial City
Caruaru!	Caruaru!
És bonita, és lendária	You are pretty, you are legendary
Caruaru!	Caruaru!
Teus caboclos tão cantando	Your people are singing

Continue

Conclusion

Não há terra como tu	There is no land like you
Quem tá longe, tá chorando	Those who are far away, are crying
Longe de Caruaru	Away from Caruaru,
Caruaru, Caruaru	Caruaru, Caruaru

The composers do not just skim on boastful adjectives, describing Caruaru as “pretty” and “legendary”. The composition also portrays the homesickness and sadness of those who, due to bad fate, had to leave it and be away from the city, crying their misfortune for not finding a comparable land.

The dichotomy between the way some authors describe the city in local newspapers and how it is represented in a song to be sung by a renowned singer as Luiz Gonzaga, is quite interesting. While newspapers might adopt a more descriptive and critical posture, highlighting specific aspects of the city, the song tends to present a more emotional and broader representation, seeking to emphasize the feeling of belonging to certain community and its grandeur.

It is also noticeable how this different approach might influence the city’s public perception, mainly considering the national spread and cultural impact of songs interpreted by Gonzaga, for instance.

Conclusion

Caruaru’s centennial, celebrated in 1957, was a milestone that transcended local borders, projecting the city as a relevant cultural and economic center of the Brazilian northeast. By means of broad mobilization of local institutions, press and renowned intellectual personalities, the event celebrated the city’s historical date and also consolidated its cultural identity based on popular traditions and the economic dynamics of the Caruaru Fair.

The songs composed for the centennial, mainly “A Feira de Caruaru” by Onildo Almeida, recorded by Luiz Gonzaga, played a fundamental role in the dissemination of such identity, making Caruaru a symbol of culture and resistance of the Northeastern interior. Those songs, full of references to the fair and historical personalities of the city, created a powerful imagery, connecting Caruaru to its roots and at the same time promoting it at a national level.

However, the tensions between the idealization of public personalities and their real actions, as exemplified by Nelson Barbalho's critique of Jorge Amado, reveal that Caruaru's image construction was not free of conflicts. The presence of well-known intellectuals raised the cultural profile of the city, but also exposed expectations and frustrations around the participation of those personalities in popular celebrations.

Following Chartier's thought, we can say that Caruaru's centennial was a crucial moment in the construction and circulation of the city's cultural representations, which were shaped by means of discourses in the media, public events and musical productions. The idea of Caruaru as a progressist, culturally rich and economically active city is not limited to a reflex of its reality, but rather a social construction resulting from cultural practices and representations that emerged from that historical moment. As emphasized by Chartier, representations "not only describe the world, they constitute it"²⁴, and as regards Caruaru, such constitution continues to influence its identity until these days.

Finally, Caruaru's centennial demonstrated how celebrative events might play a crucial role in the construction of collective identity, reinforcing cultural and economic bonds and projecting a unified image to the outside. The events, songs and narratives that emerged from that milestone continue to resonate in the city's cultural memory, thus consolidating Caruaru as a symbolic space of culture and tradition in Brazil.

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²⁴ CHARTIER, 1990, op. cit. p. 17.

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Article received for publication on 25/07/2025 and approved on 24/09/2025.