

MOORS VERSUS CHRISTIANS: FROM THE DIFFERENCE EXPLAINING WAR TO THE CULTURAL ENCOUNTER

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ABSTRACT

São João de Sobrado, also known as *Bugiada e Mouriscada*, is both a singular object and an event that dialogues with other similar festivities, thus raising different levels of analysis and discussion. Although we may find in Portugal other evocative festivals where Christian-Moors fights are staged, the one that is celebrated in Sobrado reveals a very unique character. The absence of a written text to support this representation adds to the complex structure of the festival, with the fusion of several seemingly disconnected moments, ranging from carnivalesque evocations to medieval-inspired farces. On the other hand, when considered in its relationship with other festivals associated with the wars between Moors and Christians, the *Bugiada e Mouriscada* stimulates the discussion on various topics, defining different axes of analysis. The debate about the relationship between identity and difference is one of these issues, allowing us to discuss, among other aspects, possible processes of reframing the interpretations of the festival, valuing for example the idea of cultural encounter. Also the contemporary processes of cultural heritage conservation should be considered, by which a third axis of analysis is defined, exactly what results from the confrontation of the *Bugiada e Mouriscada* of Sobrado with other similar festivities, either taking place in Portugal and Spain, or those that migrated to distant places as a result of colonisation, evangelization and other similar processes. Seeking to explore some of these dimensions, this work – as part of an ongoing research – does not have the ambition to be conclusive or even to propose a systemic or integrated approach, but merely to give a contribution.

KEYWORDS

festivities; heritage; Moors and Christians; inversion processes

MOUROS CONTRA CRISTÃOS: DA DIFERENÇA QUE EXPLICA A GUERRA AO ENCONTRO DE CULTURAS

RESUMO

O São João de Sobrado, também conhecido por *Bugiada e Mouriscada*, constitui, simultaneamente, um objeto singular e um evento capaz de dialogar com outras festas similares, dessa forma suscitando diferentes níveis de análise e de debate. Apesar de também em Portugal existirem outras festas evocativas das guerras entre mouros e cristãos, a que se celebra em Sobrado revela singularidades expressivas. À ausência de um texto escrito que suporte a representação, associa-se uma estrutura complexa, onde se fundem vários momentos festivos aparentemente desconexos, que vão desde evocações de tipo carnavalesco a farsas de inspiração medieval. Por outro lado, quando considerada na sua relação com outras festas associadas às guerras entre mouros e cristãos, a *Bugiada e Mouriscada* estimula a discussão de várias questões, definindo diferentes eixos de análise. O debate acerca da relação entre identidade e diferença é uma dessas questões, permitindo discutir, entre outros aspetos, eventuais processos de resignificação das leituras da festa, desde logo pela valorização da ideia de encontro de culturas. Também os processos contemporâneos de patrimonialização deste género de eventos podem ser considerados

a partir desta festa concreta, pela qual se define um terceiro eixo de análise, exatamente o que resulta do confronto da Bugiada e Mouriscada de Sobrado com outras festas congêneres, quer as que se realizam no nosso país e em Espanha, quer as que migraram para lugares distantes em consequência dos processos coloniais, de evangelização e similares. Procurando explorar algumas destas dimensões, este trabalho não tem a ambição de ser conclusivo ou sequer a de propor uma abordagem sistémica ou integrada, pretendendo apenas constituir-se como um contributo mais no quadro de uma investigação em curso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

festa, património, mouros e cristãos, processos de inversão

SÃO JOÃO DE SOBRADO: A FESTIVAL WITH SEVERAL MEANINGS

In the town of Sobrado, in Valongo municipality, the São João (Saint John the Baptist) celebrations stray from the typical pattern, or at least that of the São João festivities which, due to their scale, media coverage and capacity to attract crowds, have come to represent the archetype¹. Celebrated on Saint John's Day, and not at night, this festival does not centre around the *arrail*. There are no *rusgas* parades or *cascatas são-joaninas* (altars depicting local scenes). Even the herbs, fire and water, often associated with the date are notable by their absence. The São João celebrations in Sobrado, also known as the *Mouriscada e Bugiada*, are based on a staged confrontation between Christians and Moors, organised into two armies. Over the course of the day, they introduce themselves through dance, before going head to head in battle, each in their own castle, exchanging cannon fire, terminating in a Moorish victory. Ultimately, though, through magical or miraculous intervention [the appearance of a *Serpe* (Wyvern)], the Christian group (the *Bugios*) recover their King (the *Velho da Bugiada*), who had been imprisoned, thus restoring the pre-battle balance. Unlike other celebrations of its type, although the festival depicts a scene of military conflict, no specific date, real or legendary, is attached to the events portrayed – the occupation of the region by Moors². Taking place on the same date each year (24 June, a municipal public holiday), this festival forms part of what Caro Baroja terms the *Summer festivals*, which coincide with a key period of the agricultural calendar³.

¹ For various reasons, in particular the evident, but unprovable, relationship with the summer solstice, the night of Saint John has been, and remains, enormously significant. In Portugal, it takes on a variety of forms and expressions (Oliveira, 1995/1984, p. 119 and following). When we refer to 'archetypal festivals', in terms of media coverage and visitor numbers, we are thinking of the São João festivals of Porto or Braga, whose growth in recent decades has afforded them considerable prominence.

² This is the case in some of the many areas of Andalusia and the Levante region of Spain where festivals of Moors and Christians take place. For example in Válor (Eastern Andalusia), the narrative of the festival, as it appears in the Programme and the press, alludes, although only vaguely, to historical events – the Moorish revolution of 1568 or the landing of exiled Moors in 1620 (Baumann, 2003, p. 76). Another example is that of Aínsa (Aragão), where the *morisma* festival depicts a legendary battle, won by King Garci-Gimena in 742 (Puccio, 2003, p. 135).

³ Although, as Caro Baroja understands it, São João marks the transition from the spring festivals to the summer festivals, it is in his book entitled *El Estio Festivo (The Summer Festivals)* that he dedicates a chapter to the "Dances of the Moors and Christians".

As we will see, references to farming activity are also present in this festival. The battle between Moors and Christians, however, has no apparent connection to the date, other than a tenuous association with the image of Saint John, whose seizure by the Moors sparks the conflict. In this regard, this Saint who, it should be noted, is not the patron of the Sobrado village, serves as a trigger for the confrontation, due to the fact that both sides believe he possesses healing powers. In other words, the figure of Saint John can be seen as a mediator and a promotor of the – tense but ultimately pacified – coming together of the two armies. I will return to this subject later, but first we must paint a portrait of a complex feast that is much more than just the staged conflict between Moors and *Bugios*⁴.

This festival contains several layers of meaning without truly merging them, creating a complex palimpsest, which ranges from performances that faithfully replicate a familiar narrative template, to others in which surprise and innovation are to be expected. One methodological approach when faced with such complexity is to consider the *Bugiada e Mouriscada* as central to the entire festival, viewing it as the hub around which the event revolves. The day begins early in the morning with the assembly of the two armies close to the residences of their respective leaders (known as the *Velho da Bugiada* and *Reimoeiro*), and ends with the dance of the Saint, performed by both armies as night falls. When we consider the festival in this way, the other episodes that occur throughout the day can be seen as dividers, or *intermezzos*, provided that by characterising them as such, we do not downplay their significance. Indeed, while the various components of the festival may have diverse origins and may well have been assimilated into the event in different eras, locals view it as a whole, every aspect of which is essential⁵.

One of these elements, the *entraçadas*, or *estardalhadas*, represents the most unpredictable moment of the festival, not because spectators are unaware of what will happen, but because it takes surprising new forms each year. In this section, which could be defined as carnivalesque, as it is by Pinto (2000, p. 5), the community takes a critical look at itself, or those close to it. Freely prepared by individuals or groups, this section of the festival (which takes place at the end of the morning, after the highly popular *Danças de Entrada* – Entrance Dances) offers a comical or satirical take on happenings in the community or country⁶. The performance has no fixed structure. Any member of the community is free to express his or her criticisms, making this section quite unpredictable, as it combines relatively structured and complex skits, which require teamwork, resources and considerable organisation, with simpler and more spontaneous contributions, some of which use expressions of unbridled or excessive sexuality as a form of provocation.

⁴The origin and meaning of this term are unclear, although the *Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language* gives us some clues. The most immediate links the term *bugio* to a variety of primate, but there are other definitions worth noting: a *bugio* can also be a person who imitates or mocks others, or a type of dance that imitates a monkey.

⁵To date, no documentary evidence of the history of this festival has been discovered. Pinto (1983, p. 32) suggests that these battles were incorporated into an existing festival, with origins in other ceremonies or traditions. Certain elements can be associated with *Corpus Christi*, as Oliveira indicates with reference to the presence of a wyvern (Oliveira, 1995/1984, p. 279).

⁶The combination of social criticism and battles between Moors and Christians is also seen elsewhere, for example in Laroya (Almeria), “the players channel references to the everyday lives of the People in their criticism” (González Alcántud, 2003, p. 50), this criticism being so ferocious that it is said to have driven one of its targets to suicide.

Other elements of the festival also fall into this category of *intermezzo*. Although they follow each other chronologically and share the same generic name (*Serviços da Tarde*, or Afternoon Services), these must be divided into at least two groups. The first can be interpreted as an expression of the rural origins of the community, portraying this activity in the same humorous register as the *entraçadas* and also involving audience participation. However, compared to the *entraçadas*, the room for improvisation is considerably narrower, resulting solely from interaction with the audience. Only males take part and all participants are masked and shabbily dressed, in contrast to the exuberant costumes worn by the *mourisqueiros* and *bugios*. The first episode of this series of performances is the *Cobrança dos Direitos*, in other words, the collection of the taxes owed after the harvest. The tax collector, armed with a ledger and a stick for administering punishments, enters atop a donkey, the first in a series of reversals that are worthy of detailed analysis. This is followed by the *Lavra da Praça* (the Tilling of the Square), an obvious portrayal of agricultural labour, as its name suggests, but one in which the usual sequence of events is inverted. The square, which is the hub of the festivities, and in which the two armies will later confront one another, is first sewn, then harrowed and finally tilled, all of these operations following a familiar pattern of humour and disorder – a clear reversal of the discipline and exertion usually associated with the *good labourer*.

The following performance should be considered separately, as, despite maintaining, or even accentuating, the humorous tone, its approach is different. The setting depicted is still the village. This time, a craftsman is at the centre of the action. This is the *Sapateirada* (the Cobbler's Tale), a performance that has much in common with Medieval farce, although it is not based on a written script. As befitting of a farce, there are few characters (a blind man and his servant, and a cobbler, his wife and his servant) and the plot is simple: a disagreement between the cobbler and the blind man – who has just arrived in the village, guided by his servant – and the wife of the cobbler absconding with the aforementioned servant. This woman, played by a man, like all of the other characters, ends up returning to the cobbler, restoring the situation prior to the arrival of the blind man. The fact that there is no written script does not prevent stringent adherence to the plot, meaning that the margin for improvisation is limited to interaction with the audience, which is an integral part of the act⁷. As stated above, the humorous tone prevails, as does an element of criticism, or even subversion, of the usual order, though this is restored at the end. There are two aspects that I believe deserve closer analysis. On the one hand, the fact that order is subverted by an outsider, and, on the other, the presence of two elements that are typical of *São João* festivals, water and fire, the usual significance of which is, once again, subverted. The water is dirty, mixed with mud and animal waste, and splatters the spectators, and the fire is used to burn old cans. Traditionally, these were thrown over the heads of the spectators, sometimes causing injury (Pinto, 1983, p. 24).

⁷This interaction is so strong and so constant that it could be speculated that it is the result of contamination by a well-documented written text: “17th century society experiences theatre not only as a spectator of the feast for the senses, but also by incorporating it into their existence, as in the *Siglo de Oro* (Spanish Golden Age), all of life is a performance and all men are actors in the great theatre of the world” (Fernández Juárez & Martín Gil, 2002, p. 112).

BUGIOS AND MOURISCOS: INVERSION AND RITUAL

As noted above, the festival centres around the *Bugiada e Mouriscada*, the confrontation between the two armies, who first introduce themselves through dance, then go head to head in battle, each in their own castle⁸. This element of the festival has already been described in great detail (Pinto, 1983, 2000), so I will not dwell on this, instead choosing to focus on two specific, interconnected aspects: the composition and structure of the armies and the *principle of reversal*, which we have already seen in other elements of the festival. Insofar as the first of these aspects is concerned, the differences between the two armies are abundantly clear. The Christian army (the *Bugios*) is enormous (around 500 people) and unstructured, composed of people of diverse ages, marital statuses and genders, all of whom are masked. Disorderly and undisciplined, this group bears little resemblance to a real army: it does not march or bear arms. Instead, it simply dances, leaping and creating a great hullabaloo, and carrying castanets, horns, or even dolls, in place of weapons. The other group (the *Mouriscada*) is a genuine military corps. Smaller in numbers (around 40), it is completely homogenous, being composed entirely of young, unmarried men, representing the prime of the Sobrado community. Their faces unmasked, these orderly young men, armed with rapiers, march to the rhythm set by their leader, assisted by three pairs of “officials” (*rabos*, *meios* and *guias*), organised according to a strict hierarchy. Judging from the data available in the corpus developed by Albert-Llorca & González Alcantud (2003), such a significant difference between the Moors and the Christians is uncommon⁹. Note that this is not merely a difference in the number of participants, although this is the most immediately noticeable aspect. More significant are the access requirements, very restrictive in the case of the *mouriscada* and practically non-existent in the case of the *bugios*¹⁰. This differentiation and its interpretation raise the question of reversals, a factor that, inevitably, takes on particular significance in the context of this festival.

When looking at simulated battles between the Moors and Christians, it is not unusual for the former to have the upper hand in military terms, but in Sobrado, this superiority conceals a deeper structural condition, based on the dichotomy between *order and disorder*. The initial victory of the Moorish army is common, and practically the norm

⁸ In an attempt to classify the countless “Moors and Christians” festivals that exist in Spain, Anta Félez (2003, p. 70) distinguishes between the Andalusian and Levantine traditions. In the former, the conflict arises from the theft of an image of the patron saint, while in the latter, the castle is at stake – in other words, a territorial dispute is involved. According to these categories, the Sobrado festival appears to be a hybrid: there is a castle, but no references to conquest or invasion, and while an image is seized (albeit not that of the patron saint), this is due to mutual veneration, and not disrespect for a religious icon.

⁹ The significance of festivals of this sort in Spain, reflected in the dozens of towns and villages in which they are celebrated and their many thousands of participants, led to the establishment of the UNDEF – National Union of Moors and Christians Festival Bodies. Its official site, as well as the quarterly magazine it publishes (InfoFiesta), available online, are a good source of comparative knowledge.

¹⁰ The case of female participation clearly illustrates this difference. In the past, only males were supposed to participate, although the use of masks by the *bugios* made it possible to subvert this rule. However, women are still banned from participating as part of the *mouriscada*, and there is no sign of this restriction being lifted – on calls for women to have the right to participate in festivals of this type (Heuzé, 2003).

in such festivals. This is followed by a turn of events, almost always resulting from magical or divine intervention, as is the case in Sobrado, where a *Serpe* comes to the aid of the Christians, freeing their leader, the *Velho*. Therefore, what makes this festival unique among similar events is not the military superiority itself or the supernatural nature of the assistance, but the extent and nature of this superiority¹¹. It is only at the height of the confrontation, when Passal (the central square of Sobrado) becomes a battlefield, with each castle firing its respective cannon at the enemy, that the military element of the *Bugios* becomes apparent. In contrast to the disciplined march of the *mouriscada*, the *bugiada* is characterised by chaos, and unwarlike and irrational behaviour. This approach prevails throughout the military confrontation, as evident in the way the *bugios* jump in a childlike and far-from-militaristic manner after every shot. It is also manifest in the manner of their defeat – the gunpowder in their barracks running out. Although I do not wish to labour the *structuralist* aspect or the relationship between nature and culture, it is worth highlighting a few factors that steer us toward such interpretations. One of these relates to the fact that no *bugios* take part in religious ceremonies, unlike the *mouriscada*, whose ranks participate in Mass and carry the altars of Saint John and the Patron Saint Andrew during the procession. Another factor that points in the same direction relates to the presence or absence of masks, as these are only worn by the *mourisqueiros*. All participants in the so-called *Serviços da Tarde* also wear masks – a fact that can be read as an affirmation of the contrast between *personification* (the *mouriscada*) and non-differentiation (*bugiada*). Finally, it should also be noted that signs of reversal also reveal themselves in less structural ways, for example through semantic inversions, as illustrated by the use of the word *jantar* (dinner), to refer to the full meal served in the late morning, which always plays an important role in the festivities¹².

As we can see, these principals of inversion which, it should be recalled, are also evident in the *Serviços da Tarde*, appear to constitute a *system*. But they are also a *symptom* of the way in which the community relates to this festival. The critical role played by the *entrajadas* helps illustrate this point, in particular with regard to the criticism aimed directly at the local authorities – the Parish Council and the Municipal Council of Valongo. Firstly, there is a physical and symbolic distance between representatives of these authorities and those criticising them. The role of *representation* and also hosting of political figures from outside the community makes this distance advisable, as do the *traditional* methods of airing complaints and grievances, which can range from furious tirades to the throwing of water, mud, sawdust, etc. The second aspect that is worth highlighting is the strong ritualization of these events, not because they play out in exactly the same way, but because they obey a fairly structured template, which combines

¹¹ On this subject, see observations made on a festival in Valencia: “in the logic of the rituals, everything tends towards equality between the two groups and, according to very widespread opinion, the Moorish group is actually the more prestigious of the two” (Albert, 2003, p. 94).

¹² This substantial meal, attended by all participants, is currently served in the *Casa do Bugio*, the two groups eating in separate halls, interacting through ritualised provocation (offering bones and leftovers to the opposing group) at the end of the meal. In the past, the *jantar* was served in the barns or yards of the wealthiest farmers, affording it symbolic significance while also presenting an opportunity for disadvantaged groups to access a good meal.

carnavalesque pantomime and sexual profligacy with civic activism, condemning unacceptable behaviours or situations. Safe in the Parish Council building, local politicians witness this spectacle, unable either to miss it or appear uninterested, or to succumb to the real or implicit desire to impose restrictions. The *entrajadas* are a *public discourse* in the sense in which this term is used by James Scott. In other words, they do not target all that is at play in the power dynamics of those present. In this sense, they appear to conform to a rule of thumb proposed by Scott (2013, p. 29): “the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate, and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast”. Recognising that there is a need to pursue this line of interpretation in greater detail, in particular through an ethnographic history of the event, I cannot help but make a connection between this criticism and the sense of resistance to change in the festivities, in which the majority of Sobrado residents appear united.

DIFFUSE SIGNALS TO A RESEARCH SCRIPT

Far from claiming to be exhaustive, or even to begin to draw conclusions, this paper aims only to identify avenues for further research, contributing to the questioning of the festival, which is being studied as part of the Festivity project. With this in mind, I would like to conclude this fragmented and partial overview by identifying three questions that could, and should, be considered in greater detail by future research into the *Bugiada* of Sobrado. The first of these relates to the relationship between *identity* and *difference*, starting, evidently, with the way in which Moors and Christians are depicted in the festival. In this regard, I wish to argue that these opposing parties should be considered as a unique expression of a generic, structural conflict. In other words, the Moors and Christians should be viewed in a wider context, in which assumed identity interacts with projected identity. Expanding on this hypothesis requires the cross-referencing of two analytical axes, a *syntactic* axis, positing the structural significance of the ever-present relationship between *us* and the *other*, and a *morphological* axis, which enables us to identify which *category* the various figures involved belong to – Moors/Christians; male/female; single/married; young men/mature men; or even Portuguese/French, a revealing contrast when we consider the aesthetics of the costumes worn by the *mouriscada* army in Sobrado. Such a reading would help explain the success of staged “Moors and Christians” battles in places that have never experienced a conflict of this sort, particularly in Latin America, where they arrived with the Spaniards and Portuguese. What was *exported* was, of course, a generic template of Christian struggle, in many cases brought by the missionaries; a template permeable enough to allow the *Moors* to become *Indians*, while maintaining its essence, in other words the presence of otherness, accompanied by the principle of conversion and assimilation¹³.

¹³ Support for this idea is documented by Macedo (2008, p. 7): “the conquistadors and colonisers continued to identify with medieval Christian heroes. On the other hand, they projected onto the Indians the image of their traditional enemy, the Moors”.

Meanwhile, in addition to the two aforementioned analytical axes, we must consider the diachronic factor. This enables us to understand the effect of time on narratives of identity. Through his analysis of the transformations experienced in Andalusia, Baumann (2003, p. 77 and following) clearly illustrates the importance of the diachronic approach. In the case of Válor, the town he studied for his doctoral thesis, documentary records of the festival date back to 1694, but in the late 19th century, when the first descriptions produced by an anthropologist emerged, the festival was used by local elites as a symbol of power and prestige, the latter taking the main roles. The Civil War led to a temporary ban on these festivities, which took on a new meaning when they resumed: as a symbol of the Spanish *Reconquista*. After a period of decline, resulting from the rural exodus, the festival gained new impetus with the advent of democracy, a transformation that fostered “the invention of the “Arabic” past” in the Alpujarra region and a resurgence in interest in Moors and Christians festivals” (Baumann, 2003, p. 77). Recent events have also lent new significance to staged clashes between Moors and Christians. This is what appears to have been the case for the arrival of North Africans in the South of Spain, to work in the agricultural greenhouses: “As my old ‘Christian and Moorish’ ‘comrades in arms’ used to affirm, the residents of El Ejido were right to rebel against the Moors who were invading Spain, once again!” (Baumann, 2003, p. 85-86). In general terms, the appreciation of immigration and cultural difference in contemporary society has given new meaning to the implicit content of these festivals, transforming the *clash* into an *encounter between cultures*. (Albert-Llorca & González Alcantud, 2003, p. 16). As for Sobrado, the changes to the understanding and interpretation of otherness have not been as significant. At most, we can observe the addition of an explanatory narrative at the climax of the festival, the imprisonment of Christian leader, the *Velho da Bugiada*. As there is no fixed written script, the interpretation of events tends to vary according to the narrator, who sometimes highlights religious differences, alluding to Christian superiority. However, this is never the focus of the festival, nor should we view religion as the most significant dividing line in the *Bugiada*. Instead, the divisions here are based on the community’s relationship with itself. In other words, they are divisions between social groups (eg. married/unmarried or male/female), but also between fixed binaries (for example order/disorder or insider/outsider status in the community).

A second aspect that I consider important relates explicitly to an old cultural debate, that of the circulation between *high culture* and *popular culture* of actors and practices. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the relationship between *oral* and *written*, but we can also consider the way in which today’s festival submits itself to the act of description, with a view to being recognised as *cultural heritage*. When discussing the former, it is helpful to view Moors and Christians festivals as the result of the overlapping of various layers of discourse, the degree of convergence between these layers varying from one festival to another. The production of a written script based on the oral tradition by a local scholar, as occurred in Aínsa (Aragon) in the 1930s (Puccio, 2003, p. 135), illustrates one such process of *patchworking*. As we know, unlike Sobrado, many festivals

of this type are based on a written text, usually a Chivalric novel, which is then staged. These texts exhibit strong literary influences, for example *The Song of Roland* or *Orlando Furioso*, often reconstructed through the oral tradition and their (re)interpretation in “cordel literature”¹⁴. Another example of this permeability is the movement of theatrical performances out of court and into street festivals, in particular during the Baroque period. There are records of Moors and Christians dances taking place in court since at least 1463, thus predating the conquest of the Kingdom of Granada (1492). Though I am aware we are entering the shaky ground of speculation, the festival in Sobrado also exhibits various instances of overlapping, owing to the presence of certain vestiges of Baroque culture, such as the significance of audience participation in the public spectacles (for example, during the *Serviços da Tarde*), or the central role of dance. It is this, rather than war, that constitutes the heart of the festivities. There are other points to be raised with regard to the absorption and appropriation by *popular culture* of elements from different sources, the most obvious example of this in Sobrado being the incorporation of a common figure from *Corpus Christi* celebrations, the *Serpe* – a creature that plays a decisive role in the final outcome of the conflict.

The dialectic between the scholarly and the popular must be also considered from another perspective, concerning the relationship between the festival and processes of *heritage preservation*. Thinking solely of the example of Sobrado, I would argue that the inevitable recourse to voices from outside the community in the process of legitimising the value of the festival as cultural heritage tends to create a *double bind* effect, as defined by researchers in Palo Alto in the 1950s. In other words, the arrival of the academics, or *specialists*, required in order to create a bridge between the community and the bodies responsible for certifying the heritage value of the festival generates potentially conflicting demands. The community is faced not only with an outsider gaze on the festival, but also with a densification and problematisation of the narrative, thus generating potential conflict between the *reading* of tradition by the community, and the *explanation* of the festival by this same community to those studying it. A dialectical tension exists between the different forms of authority, one anchored in *knowledge of tradition* and the other based on *recognition*, which, though external to the community, is vital to the visibility and status of the festival. These potentially conflicting demands are intrinsically linked to the role of *mediation*, be this mediation by researchers between the community and the certifying bodies, or the connections between members of the community most heavily involved in the organisation of the festival and external *specialists*. Viewed from the inside, this dialectical tension between the various agencies (organisers/researchers) is clearly reflected in divisions within the community, regarding the distribution of power and authority over the festival.

The third aspect to which I wish to draw attention – purely for the purpose of starting a conversation, without attempting to reach any kind of conclusion – concerns *comparison*.

¹⁴ The *Romanceiro Espanhol* devotes a chapter to “frontier novels”, the category into which this narrative model falls (Iáñez, 2002/1989, p. 230). We can find a summary of literary influence on Moors and Christians festival in Spain in Caro Baroja (1984, p. 116 and following).

As I have already stressed, the *Bugiada e Mouriscada* festival of Sobrado belongs to a vast category of celebrations, examples of which can be found in several regions of all continents. While, given this expansiveness, there is a clear need for comparison, we must not fail to consider the terms and purpose of any such comparison. The regions of Spain in which celebrations of this type are most common, Andalusia and the Levante, differ from Portugal, not only in terms of the number of festivals of this type, but, more significantly, for structural reasons related to what can be called *historical evidence*. The defeat of the last Muslim enclave in the Iberian Peninsula, the Kingdom of Granada, only occurred in 1492, and though they were forced to convert and suffered many forms of discrimination, *moriscos*, or people of Moorish descent, continued to occupy this territory. In 1568, the conflict between Philip II and the Turkish Empire worsened, leading to a civil war in the region, which culminated with the expulsion of the Moors to North Africa and repopulation by *cristãos velhos* (old Christians, as opposed to converts). Even after this, reports continued to surface – with varying degrees of factual accuracy - of *Turks* or *Moors* landing in the region, in an attempt to reassert their dominance in the area, as occurred in 1620 (Baumann, 2003). This very brief historical parenthesis helps us understand the differing contexts of Moors and Christians festivals in Portugal and Spain. In the latter, the earliest events of this type took place contemporaneously with real historical occurrences, while in Portugal, the historical basis is much more vague¹⁵.

We know that the tradition of staged clashes between Moors and Christians travelled with the Portuguese and Spaniards on ships bound for the Americas, and the tradition is still alive in communities in several regions. Here, once again, we see a broad process, two aspects of which should be highlighted. Firstly, we must differentiate between the forms and intentions of the depictions exported. Sometimes, battles between the Moors and the Christians were brought to the New World by missionaries, which shows that they were used as an evangelisation tool. In other cases, similar events arrived, by civilian or military means, as a transposition of medieval imagery preserved in Chivalric novels. Once again, the circulation of these *cultural products* between different strata of society has given rise to overlapping layers of meaning, sometimes leading to the replacement of the Muslim infidel with the savage Indian or the incorporation of Medieval-style equestrian tournaments into battle scenes, as is the case in the *cavalcadas*, the generic term used for festivals of Moors and Christians in Brazil¹⁶. The second of these aspects concerns the need for more detailed analysis of the processes of circulation between opposite sides of the Atlantic, and the specific ways in which the relationship between

¹⁵ It should be noted that this distinction does not result in the *objectification* of history, as the near chronological overlapping between the festival and historical events does not prevent the festival from being understood as essentially *presentist*. In spite of this, the UNDEF has assumed the role of guardian of the authenticity of festivals in Spain, insisting on historical accuracy, in particular by combatting anachronism, such as the emergence, in certain festivals, of organised groups of students and pirates, while also combatting what they see as the contamination of the festival by the Carnival. In any case, when constructing a comparative framework, close attention must be paid to the relationship between *social memory* and *historical memory*, an important distinction.

¹⁶ There are extensive records of festivals of this type in the North-eastern states, as well as in Goiás, Mato Grosso, Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Paraná, as well as evidence of their recent disappearance from other locations – for example Porto Alegre, where they took place for the last time in 1935 (Macedo, 2008, p. 1).

the oral and the written played out in these contexts. In terms of circulation, it should be stressed that this is a dialectical relationship, meaning that it must be understood to travel in both directions¹⁷. On the question of interplay between the oral and the written word, it is worth stressing that both the abundant and rich “cordel” literature of Brazil and “high” literature contained references to Medieval imagery – for example in the Indianist novels of José de Alencar – and to Carolingian chronicle, notably in Guimarães Rosa’s masterpiece, *Grande Sertão, Veredas* [The Devil to Pay in the Backlands].

THE FEAST PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY TIME

From atop one of these ephemeral castles in Sobrado, which are born and die with the festival, you can see the world. The events that take place every year, filling this space with actors and creating shockwaves – a break from the banality of everyday life – go far beyond what is advertised in the programme. In the farce of the cobbler and the blind man, the disorientation of those tilling the square in reverse, the warlike dance of the Moors and the anarchic, carnivalesque leaps of the Christians, there is something bigger than the series of acts, repeated year on year. There is a community in motion; one which reinvents itself and questions itself when faced with an historic duty, seeking to ensure that despite this duty, the *tradition* prevails. A community in motion, torn between the satisfaction of seeing their festival’s significance recognised and the fear that it may be reduced to a mere *spectacle*. Anyone studying this festival must understand the world reflected in it, its similarities to other festivals of its type, its real or perceived points of uniqueness, and its inevitable degradation and renewal over time, even when the form remains the same. Universities, science and research lend legitimacy to a voice and provide a space for it to be heard, but it is always within the community that this voice is reverberates most strongly. If it helps shed light on the world that the festival reveals, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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¹⁷ See Rui Vieira Nery’s (2004) analysis of the origins of fado, rightly stressing circulation between Portugal and Brazil.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

With a degree in Social Anthropology from the Institute of Labor and Business Sciences (ISCTE) and a doctorate in Anthropology from the University of Minho, Luís Cunha has been teaching at this University since 1990, having been responsible for several anthropology curricular units and related areas, taught in undergraduate and graduate. As a researcher, he is a member of CRIA (Center for Research in Anthropology – UID/

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