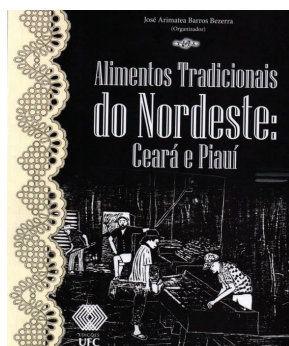


Looking for traditional flavors and knowledge



ALIMENTOS TRADICIONAIS DO NORDESTE: Ceará e Piauí
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Alimentos Tradicionais do Nordeste: Ceará e Piauí (Traditional Foods from the Northeast: Ceará and Piauí) is a work in which participated 22 researchers of the most diverse educational backgrounds, and was organized by José Arimateia Barros Bezerra. Throughout 11 chapters, we became familiar with the results of field works conducted by the organizer himself and his teams*, who were from the Federal University of Ceará, Regional Cariri University, State University of Piauí and also the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Ceará (IFCE).

The work, as far as we know, is pioneer in its approach. It is the outcome of research works conducted by Northeast Foods (ALINA), which pursued, as shown in the presentation, the following four main goals: a) proceed to the survey of traditional foods and dishes from Ceará and Piauí (added to

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these two states, there is an exception, a dish from the state of Alagoas); b) identify the foods and dishes that are appropriate in their traditional forms, so that they could be means of support and expansion of family farming and income increase by inserting these foods in food and nutrition public policies, especially in the National Program of School Nutrition (PNAE); c) provide a description of the main local dishes, including any particular cultural knowledge, techniques, and utensils, all of them in their respective contexts; and (d) identify the possibilities of including these foods in PNAE.

To accomplish these four goals, the methodology used consisted of forming teams of one to five researchers, who travelled to various locations, especially to the countryside of the states of Ceará and Piauí. The work, which was carried out with funds provided by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCT), enabled a direct contact with the local people, observation of the meals in their places of origin, and the preparation of some sweets and salty dishes, as well as photographic records of the various preparation stages.

Each chapter of the work can be defined as a fieldwork report. Therefore, it does not consist of any traditional academic paper; however, the option chosen, which might be risky, did not entail loss of scientific accuracy and gained in intelligibility, making the work accessible to diverse publics, particularly to the people who welcomed the teams, made possible and participated in the preparation of the dishes and shared their spaces and knowledge so generously. The texts laid bare some inconveniences and difficulties, from complications in finding road accesses, passing through discomforts such as sleeping in the open, or having less personal hygiene during some stays. Not a cookery book, the work contains some recipes, namely: *baião de fava* (rice with large white beans); *carne de sol* (cured meat), *chouriço (doce)* (sweet chorizo), *doce de banana* (banana sweet), *doce de leite* (milk sweet), *Maria Isabel de carne seca* (rice with salt-cured meat), *muzangá* (corn, beans and cuts of pork), *pamonha* (sweet or savory tamale), *pé de moleque* (peanut chikki), *peta* (cassava starch biscuit) and *rapadura tijolo* (brown cane sugar brick) .

From the state of Ceará, object of studies were the following products and savory dishes: a) babassu oil, i.e., a coconut oil that requires about eight hours to be extracted manually, beginning with the fruits harvesting, which are used locally in rice preparations, *bruaca* (kind of pancake), meat and beans, besides the fact that the seeds, or part of them, are used for non-edible purposes; cassava flour, which involves complex handling, from the roots production to the flour making, ending in how to prepare *tapioca*; b) *baião de fava*, a dish very similar to the *Maria Isabel de carne seca*, from Piauí, which is substantial, nutritious and understood to likely help improve the living conditions of the poor if the traditional food culture is maintained; c) *muzangá*, a dish made with yellow corn, string beans and salted pork. Importantly is that *muzangá* – which takes time to be cooked – is present in daily meals, *festas juninas* (June fests) and school meals; d) *pamonha* (tamale),

which can be salty or sweet, the latter with the addition of sugar to the remaining ingredients, whose preparation includes butter, green corn, milk cream, curd cheese and salt; e) grilled fish with *pirão*, a seacoast dish that is made of sour cashew, mackerel, onion, cassava flour, coconut milk, tomato, sweet pepper, and spices, involving a set of complex cooking steps. Worryingly, such dish is falling into disuse, especially among the young people, because of rival foods such as red meat, poultry, dairy products and some breads.

Sweet preparations, less numerous, included sweet chorizo, banana sweet, milk sweet, peanut chikki, cassava starch biscuit and brown sugar brick. Sweet *chorizo* stands out, a dish made of peanuts, lard, nuts, cassava flour, sesame seeds, molasses and swine blood. The fact that the sweet requires handling blood, and, consequently, involves watching a slaughter, it was the most stressful experience that the researchers involved in this survey had. City-born, unfamiliar with rural realities and human-animal relationships in a utilitarian context, besides other realities, the report reveals the distances and singularities of two worlds more and more distant from each other.

From the state of Piauí, the object of study consisted of salty dish and a drink: a) Maria Isabel of salt-cured beef, a strong preparation, said “cattleman food”, based on cuts of deboned beef, salted and dried in the shade, and other ingredients, including rice, onion, tomatoes, annatto and spices; and b) *cajuína*, the only beverage that was object of observation in this work. In this case, it is a preparation that has been largely encouraged, with courses being promoted at the Centro de Ensino São Francisco de Assis, an educational institution in Floriano, intended for farmers and families so that they can maximize the use of cashew, one of the regional richness.

Finally, from the state of Alagoas the object of observation and study was the preparation of *bolo cagão* (literally, chickenshit cake). Despite its quite discouraging designation, the sweet looks innocuous. According to this report, we can learn that the word *guisado* – commonly understood as stew, the cooking technique that consists of simmering foods in low heat, using water, wine or even milk – in Mairi de Baixo (Coruripe) and also in some other regions of Alagoas, it has a completely different meaning. That is, it is a designation used for cassava products (*beiju*, which is a pancake-like preparation made of cassava flour), corn bread, flour, *tapiocas*) which are made for sale or involve various persons in the preparation. Returning to the *bolo cagão*, it is one of the *guisados* of the location, similar to peanut chikki, containing sugar, grated coconut, coconut milk, margarine (a recent ingredient), *puba* (flour made from fermented cassava roots), cinnamon, clove and salt. A tradition with nearly hundred years, *bolo cagão* appeared to be nearly extinct, because of the lack of a key ingredient, cassava, a culture that has been replaced by sugarcane, and in recent years because of weather conditions that have prevented good crop yields, raising the price of the flour.

When we finished reading the work, we looked again to its goals. Effectively, it succeeded in identifying the traditional foods and dishes from various locations; several preparations were

observed and described, taking into account the traditional knowledge, techniques and utensils; those that would be appropriate in their traditional forms to foster family farming and increase household income were identified.

However, there is a long way to go regarding the inclusion of some foods and preparations in the food and nutrition public policies, especially those of the National Program of School Nutrition (PNAE). In this regard, a success case can be highlighted: *muzangá*, which integrates the school meals in the municipality of Novo Oriente-CE, with proven acceptance by the children.

The difficulties to keep traditions alive are also visible and tend to increase: competition with less nutritious, but more appealing, foods and dishes, including fast foods; taste changes, as a result of the increased purchasing power by younger populations; shortage of some foodstuffs, resulting from the substitution of some crops for others, monopoly sales, etc. The combination of these factors, as well as time-consuming preparations and the influence of fashion, advertised aggressively through the media, clearly endangers the tradition, knowledge and how-to-make culture of the past. Key issues that the work denounces and problematizes, but of course, cannot prevent.

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