

Revitalizing European Rituals

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3 Public celebrations in a Spanish valley

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In Navaconcejo, a village about 200 kilometres west of Madrid, the curious visitor may eventually hear the following verse:

*Cuando daban pan y queso
subíamos con gran quebranto,
y ahora que ya no lo dan
nadie se acuerda del santo.*

(When bread and cheese were given
we used to go up no matter what,
And now that they are not given any more,
nobody cares about the saint.)

The saint referred to is St. George, and the festival that celebrates him is one of several that have lost their importance in recent decades. Villagers used to go up the mountain on a one-day pilgrimage, and bread and cheese were distributed to the celebrants. By evoking a time when this food could be seen as a motive for undertaking the effort of hiking up the mountainside, the verse offers, in a humorous way, a clue to the reasons for the decline of the festival.

Without taking the native bread-and-circuses hypothesis implicit in the verse too literally, we will here examine the persistence, decline, or transformation of various celebrations in the vicinity of Navaconcejo. We will explore the forms that celebrations take in the Jerte Valley and their functions in the life of these communities, and we will go on to ask what these data tell us about the development of public celebrations in the area. Perhaps, in the end, talking about bread and cheese is just a subtle and indirect way of suggesting the broad transformation of people's needs and motives associated with the modernization of rural life.

We rely on ethnographic accounts produced since 1987.¹ Ours is

not properly a 'revitalization' study; we lack longitudinal data about the history of celebrations different from those included in informants' accounts, and these latter constitute not an objective register of the past but an effort to interpret the past in its relation to the present (García 1987). Moreover, the various transformations documented display continuity with earlier times and therefore could hardly be called 'revitalization' in the classical sense (Wallace 1956; Fernandez 1978). All this notwithstanding, we hope that our data may be of some value for understanding how economic and social modernization is affecting public celebrations in small rural communities.

THE JERTE VALLEY

The Jerte Valley is a clearly defined area in northern Extremadura (western Spain) that embraces ten villages with a total population of more than 12,000. Between two chains of high mountains that meet at the pass of Tornavacas, the highway runs parallel to the Jerte River along the bottom of the valley. Some of the villages, like Cabezuela, the largest, with 2,606 inhabitants, are located close to the river. Others, like the small village of Rebollar (population 273), nestle into the slope of the mountain. The population is concentrated in definite settlements, most of them having their own local councils, schools, and parishes. At the head of the valley is Plasencia, the town on which all these villages depend for administrative purposes and for health services and secondary education.

The majority of families grow cherries, a crop adapted to the mountain agriculture of this area that has gradually taken the place of the traditional economy based on domestic crops combined with cattle husbandry (Cruz Reyes 1983: 226-355). Nowadays cattle are scarce, and the cherries require all the care and attention of the smallholders. Most of the valley's villages participate in an important co-operative association that markets the crop.

The area has preserved a good number of its traditional festivities. Some of them, advertised by folklorists and travellers, have become popular enough to attract spectators from outside the region. It is in this sense that 'revitalization' may not be a very accurate way of describing the development, as they have never stopped 'living'. We can speak of changes, however, and try to analyse the ways in which traditional public celebrations coexist with and are affected by the more general processes of economic and social modernization.

'Modernization' refers to a broad set of cultural changes that derive from a rationalization of economic activity in the context of

a market economy, the rise of voluntary and interest associations, and the mediating intervention of universalist institutions in public life. These processes can probably be considered general for the country as a whole. More specifically, in our ethnography, the transformation of the concept of intracommunal reciprocity proves to be an important aspect of these processes. Some of the ancient customary practices of ritualized exchange of money and help among families within the community are no longer economically functional because of the emergence of a network of welfare services, such as insurance for crops and housing, unemployment benefits, and pensions for the retired and the disabled. Accordingly, autonomy is attributed increasing value, redefining the traditional relations of mutual interdependence within the local group.²

In what follows, we describe the different types of celebrations in terms of the changes that can be perceived in them. We will try to show that the interplay of tradition and modernity implies a renegotiation of the expressive resources of the community. In this negotiation, whether it is links to the past (through tradition) or to modernity (through new activities) that are reinforced depends on the festive context. By reproducing customarily sanctioned practices, the participants build a ritual image of social continuity, while by adopting new ones they enact their engagement with modern trends of social change. Far from being disconnected processes, both are part of the social dynamic marked by the periodic return of emigrants and the progressive inclusion of the village's life in wider economic, institutional, and cultural contexts.

DECLINING CELEBRATIONS

When one asks in the valley about the feasts³ traditionally celebrated, it becomes obvious that a number of *romerías*, or minor religious festivities, linked with the liturgical calendar between April and July have vanished or are in decline. A *romería* is a short, festive pilgrimage to a destination outside the settlement. Although in many places in Spain a *romería* attracts people from a wide area, the ones we refer to here have merely local relevance. The above-mentioned offering to St. George in Navaconcejo (23 April) has become less important; celebrants no longer go to the mountain but stay in and around the village. Holy Cross Day, 3 May, used to be observed in almost every village; nowadays, only three maintain it as nothing more than a special mass. In the past, the festivals of St. John and St. Peter, in June, also included bullfights, pole climbing, and bonfires; today

no one celebrates them. Corpus Christi is mainly a church feast, lacking its former splendour (except in Tornavacas, where it is still considered the most distinctive festivity of the village). The same can be said of St. James and, in Navaconcejo and Casas del Castañar, of St. Isidore.

Basically, these celebrations pivoted around religious services, but they used to include other ritual acts as well: celebrations in shrines or sanctuaries (*ermitas*) on the edges of the settlement, offerings, promises, and prayers to the saint, processions carrying its icon, auction of the right to return the icon to its chapel, and outdoor commensality. In the cases of St. John and St. Peter there were playful activities, too, such as running ahead of the bull, pole climbing, singing in the streets at night, and making bonfires.

The current agricultural cycle accounts for a good deal of this decline. Cherry harvesting extends from late April in the lowest zones of the slope until mid-July in the uppermost ones. Because of the perishable and delicate nature of the fruit, it is an urgent task which requires all the labour available, and on it depends a major part of the family's annual income. In the course of the century, specialization in this crop has given increasing importance to work during the spring and early summer, and consequently the festive calendar has tended to be moved to less busy times.

At the same time, the decline may well be part of a more extensive process of secularization whereby minor religious celebrations tend to be abandoned or reduced to their liturgical aspects. Some data point in this direction. First, some autumn devotional feasts have suffered the same fate, as have *novenas* and certain brotherhoods (*cofradías*).⁴ Secondly, when the observance of a feast conveys a strong sense of community identity, as it does in the case of Corpus in Tornavacas and neighbourhood celebrations in Cabezuela, then harvesting does not interfere with it in any decisive way.

PERSISTING CELEBRATIONS

There is a second group of celebrations that, in contrast, has recently received a revitalizing impulse after a relative decline in the years of high emigration. To this group belong the patronal feasts of the various villages (mostly summer dates that coincide with the periodic return of emigrants on holiday) and certain winter or spring celebrations (St. Sebastian in Piornal and Navaconcejo, Judas in Cabezuela, Corpus Christi in Tornavacas, the Virgin of Candelaria in Jerte). Some of these latter convey so intense a sense of local

identity that they are more significant than the patronal celebrations even though the latter (because of the presence of emigrants) involve more participants. Feasts before the summer are said to be 'unique', 'genuine', 'authentic' and for that reason are considered important. They testify, through the repetition of strictly traditional usages and rituals, to the social continuity of the community and its fidelity to custom. (Of course, part of this legitimacy comes from the attention that we foreign spectators pay them.) In contrast, the patronal festivities tend more to combine traditional elements with more recent practices which relate to the process of modernization in the area as well as to the active presence of the summer residents.

Speaking of 'summer' and 'non-summer' celebrations is, however, only a necessary reduction of a much more complex calendar.⁵ There is no unitary ordering of time for the whole valley; local festivities refer to a local rhythm. In contrast to the situation in other areas of Spain,⁶ the dates of celebrations cannot be changed; they are fixed by custom in a calendrical series that gives a sense of unity to the yearly cycle of communal social life. In this sense the socially relevant group for the ordering of time is the village, not the valley. Nevertheless, there is a general tendency throughout the area to contrast the patronal with another celebration of similar importance from the native's point of view. In Piornal, for example, St. Sebastian (19 January) is often contrasted with St. Roch (16 August); in Cabezuela, Judas (in Holy Week) may be opposed to St. James (26 July); and in Jerte, the Virgin of Candelaria (2 February) may be contrasted with Cristo del Amparo (16 July).

Such distinction reflects common processes underlying the villages' social ordering of time, and therefore the contraposition of the two sets of celebrations, if artificial in the final analysis, can be useful in the search for the reasons for their renewal. In one case we have a permanent population engaged in agricultural tasks and the day-to-day affairs of the community, in the other the summer population, rejuvenated and transformed by families coming back from the cities. The demographic dynamic of these villages is therefore seasonal; one could say that the community as a network of social relations is complete only during the summer months.⁷ Thus a new cycle, dependent on the urban holidays, has come to be added to the agricultural cycle and the liturgical and national calendars.

Who are these summer residents who appear to be such important constituents of patronal feasts? Most of them are sons and daughters of the elder generation of the village who went off during the massive emigration of the sixties to become blue-collar workers in the main

industrial centres of the country, around Barcelona, Bilbao, and Madrid; a qualified minority are schoolteachers or service workers. For these people the village is a necessary point of periodic return, as they are related to a good part of the local population. Many are having their old houses repaired to serve as secondary residences. There is no formal association for them in the village, though immigrant networks in their cities of destination appear to be of some importance. In many ways they still belong to the community, retaining their little plots of land, belongings, and nicknames. Villagers know who is the son of whom. Neither fully insiders nor outsiders, these people merge with the permanent population once or twice a year, following the patterns imposed on them but at the same time modifying those patterns by their presence.

It is not easy, from our synchronic perspective, to document the suggested connection between the emigration process and variations in the level of participation in feasts. In informants' reports the qualitative and the quantitative appear unavoidably mixed in statements such as 'Nowadays, there aren't feasts anymore, because we're "in feast" every day'. The sense of this apparently cryptic pronouncement is that, in the past, the contrast between work-time and feast-time was much stronger than it is now, and the hard conditions of life enhanced every little pleasure – in food, in entertainment, in freedom of behaviour. Most old people argue that, in comparison with the present proliferation of entertainment and leisure opportunities, the ancient feast 'was more of a feast', that is, more intense (here we have again the bread-and-cheese hypothesis in a reformulated version: because we are not poor any more, the little joys of old times have lost their charm). In other words, the urban concept of 'leisure' does not match the rural idea of 'feast' from a traditional point of view.

The fact is that, despite occasional interruptions, the major celebrations have maintained a basic continuity through the years. The reasons for such interruptions were always contingent: prevention by the parish priest, the death of a man when a crowded balcony collapsed, factional disputes, intervention by the local authorities after an accident with a bull. Nevertheless, there does seem to have been a scarcity of human resources at a certain point in the emigration process that affected precisely the younger generation essential for the feast. In Casas del Castañar, for example, the girls who sing the saint's canticles (*ramos*) for the patronal feast today have had to learn them from married women, because young ones do not know them. In Piornal and Navaconcejo, the chief roles in the pre-Lenten feast of St. Sebastian have been played by a very few people for many

years. It is obvious that, at least quantitatively, emigration must have affected the handing down of this lore from generation to generation by drastically reducing the number of individuals available for active participation.

Be that as it may, today the emigration process appears connected with the festive life of these villages in two ways. First, on a purely numerical basis, the present reduction of the outward flow of young people provides actors for the celebrations. Singles, both males and females, are extremely important in several ritual sequences, representing the community in the singing or the dancing or, in the case of males, serving as leaders of a bounded chaos. Second, the recurrent return of the emigrants has altered the rhythm of local life, imposing its imprint on many patronal feasts (and, by opposition, on the rest of the festive calendar). Throughout the summer, and more specifically during the days of the summer celebrations, there is a reconstitution of many families that is a reconstitution of the community as well.

There is yet another sort of outsider whose presence exerts subtle influence upon the persisting celebrations. The general improvement of communications in the valley, together with the spread of the 'traditional' value of the feasts, has brought curious visitors, tourists, journalists, folklorists, and anthropologists to witness them. These outsiders are few, but they are very important in the legitimation and sanctioning of certain parts of the events as opposed to others (Cowan 1988). The authoritative views of these persons are partially appropriated by residents, who reproduce them when indicating to the naive ethnographer what is worth seeing or asking about. This outward aspect is emphasized when representatives of the media are present recording the events or recreating them for a vast and anonymous public of 'others'. It is then that the imposition of legitimacy (Bourdieu 1989) may be seen in the alteration of the very ritual sequences which are being recorded. The year we witnessed the pageant of St. Sebastian in Piornal, for example, television was there. The ritual dressing of the main character, Jarramplas, was interrupted and delayed because the cameras that surrounded him impeded access to the ritual sequence for the rest of the people in the room. This delay made the protagonist increasingly nervous, for it could be misinterpreted as indicating that he was afraid to face the group of young males waiting for him outside for a ritual fight.

Thus, both patronal and other celebrations have important outward aspects. They differ, however, in the stress placed on traditional and modern practices. In the non-summer feasts, the emphasis is on the rigorous pursuit of an autochthonous tradition that must be

maintained according to pre-established norms and routines. Their playful elements are embedded in highly ritualized sequences of action and rules of performance. Jarramplas, for instance, disguised in colourful clothing made of remnants, carrying a drum, and wearing a big Carnavalesque mask, walks the snow-filled streets of Piornal under a rain of turnips thrown at him by the villagers. The emotional climate of the event ranges from the disrespect of the young males, armed with their turnips, awaiting the emergence of Jarramplas to the solemnity of the procession on the night before the feast, when he walks backwards through the dark around the village, beating his drum, while the whole congregation follows him singing. The same intense sense of ritual performance is maintained throughout. Even the most ludic episodes, such as the turnip battle, are carried out according to the prescription of the elders and the patterns inherited from the past.

Jarramplas is considered Piornal's most genuine and most emblematic ritual. Two characters lead the bulk of the pageant: Jarramplas, who gives his name to the event, and the steward (*mayordomo*), usually an acquaintance of the former with enough economic resources to take on the expenses. In order to become Jarramplas one need only sign one's name on the parish waiting list. These days the list is full enough with aspirants for several years, but until this decade there was a shortage of candidates. Traditionally, applicants were fulfilling a promise to the saint; the mothers of soldiers sent to Africa, for example, inscribed them if they came back 'without imperfection'. Nowadays, the motives are pride, prestige, and an ambition to play the risky role with mastery and skill. Nevertheless, the role is undertaken with extreme seriousness and piety: 'This is sacred', said one Jarramplas. It is often compared metaphorically with that of a bullfighter on the basis of the risk of the action, the calling to undertake the role, and its festive and participatory character. The function of Jarramplas is defined as 'taking the blows' that the village rains on him by throwing turnips. Withstanding these blows for as long as possible while beating the drum in a dancelike movement is what is called 'giving feast' to the village. The more a performer 'gives feast', the better a Jarramplas he is.

Over two or three days the sequences of the celebration combine different scenes of varying character. Some are strictly religious, such as the *alborás* (dawn), a procession with singing at midnight, the *rosca del santo*, a sung hagiography of St. Sebastian that is included in the mass and describes him as 'a brave captain', and the 'putting back of

the saint on the throne', a public auction in the church which allows the highest bidder to replace the icon. Other scenes are moments for disordered *communitas* and play, the most important being the emergence of Jarramplas from the church into the village square after having played the drum with frenetic rhythm while the girls' choir sang the end of *la rosca*:

*¡A la guerra, a la guerra,
al arma, al arma,
Sebastián valeroso
venció batallas!*

(To war,
to arms,
courageous Sebastian
won battles!)

When Jarramplas comes out, most of the village is there to throw turnips or just to see how he 'gives feast' at the climactic point of the event. This is explicitly considered a representation of the martyrdom of the saint, but not without ambiguity; it is not uncommon to hear (in agreement with some local literature and journalism) that he is a demon or a goat thief who is being punished for his crimes.⁸ There are times of commensality as well, for which the role of the steward becomes essential: after the *alborás* procession, there is a free meal of *migas* (a shepherd's dish made of bread with garlic and pork) that brings together about a hundred people, most of them youngsters who drink, eat, and eventually brawl in unstructured groups and mingle with residents and visitors. The expenses of the meal are covered partly by gifts from the community to a little group that, led by the steward, crosses the village singing and asking for food and partly by the steward himself. In recent times, an increase in public participation has led to the sharing of costs among several individuals. According to informants, these meals tended to be restricted to the steward and his acquaintances in previous times and now have become increasingly open and costly.

What has been said about the search for continuity and adjustment to tradition in St. Sebastian could well be applied to the Judas of Cabezuela, a large figure stuffed with powder and publicly burnt the night before Easter. The meticulous construction of this figure is unquestionably a part of the feast itself. We see, then, that what makes these non-summer celebrations singular is their traditional appearance, visible both in the course of action and in native talk

that tends to select for description of the feast sequences rooted in tradition and bearing a sense of social integration and distinctiveness for the community. But the motives for celebration are local and diverse, and lumping them together is justified only by this traditionality.⁹ We suggest that they have become more significant because of their position within the population cycle and because of the interest they arouse in the foreigner.

In the examples above, the revitalizing drive is traditionalist or, rather, retraditionalizing, for many of the current participants have had to recover the proper proceedings from their seniors or to learn them as adults. The character of the 'specialist' who assumes festive roles is changing radically. From the emigration epoch until recently, these roles were held by persons deeply rooted in the community and yearning to preserve something they had experienced 'since and forever'. This is the case of the two mature men who used to play the Jarramplas role when there were no younger men to do it and of the person who usually supervises the making of the Judas. In Casas del Castañar, the worship of the Virgin Mary was instituted and has been supported for years by a single rich devotee. There is a drum player from Plasencia who performs in the several hagiographic canticles that are sung in the parishes of the valley. The Tarabayo of Navaconcejo tends to be always the same person. Nowadays, however, the animating agents are beginning to be individuals whose relationship with tradition is mediated by having lived or studied outside the community or belonging to cultural, recreational, or religious associations through which tradition is interpreted and appropriated. For example, the steward of St. Sebastian in Piornal two years ago was a professional from the city of Cáceres. The year before, the stewardship of the patronal feast, St. Roch, had been assumed for the first time by a cultural association as a whole, and the canticles to the Virgin were sung by a group of school children. The choir in Casas del Castañar is composed of girls who participate in parish activities. Our best informant in Tornavacas, a member of the brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament, had studied and lived outside the village for years.

This sort of participation does not seem to imply either the explicit increase of segmentary interests or an 'activist' attitude. Rather the contrary: provided that the structure of traditional ritual stresses family and village, against any other level of identity, as the pertinent social referents of actions and performances, participants are forced to assume the public representation and set aside their particular conditions and preferences. Being an immigrant, a professional, or a member of the ruling party is a subordinate matter compared with

being a villager and a family member in the idealized view that the community tradition tends to offer. It is true, as we have said, that at the end of the 1970s some celebrations became arenas for political factionalism,¹⁰ but these events seem to be exceptions. The usual strategy of appropriation is on an individual level; it provides the symbolic benefit of belonging to the community without calling attention to other aspects of the social pertinence of the participants.

This shift in the personnel of celebrations illustrates the fact that retraditionalizing is an essentially modern phenomenon. The young approach tradition from a practice of formal learning mediated by universal institutions. In Piornal, a popular-dance teacher from the province's capital teaches dancing to the girls of the cultural associations. In Navaconcejo, children learn the songs and dances of their grandparents at school. Whereas the latter lived their local identity in an unmediated relationship with tradition, the former have to live it through the mediation of institutions that extend beyond village boundaries.

Patronal feasts are not exempt from this fact of retraditionalization, but they add several new elements to it. In them we can catch a glimpse of the influence of modernization upon prescribed ritual. Typically, the core of the celebration programme is based on actions established by custom and incorporated in the liturgy. By these means the community appears as a cohesive unit around the image of its patron saint. Besides the ceremonial mass and the associated procession, there are frequently auctions of the rights to return the icon to the church, songs about the life and miracles of the saint, and ritualized offerings, promises, and prayers. In several of these villages a *ramo* (the top of a conifer adorned with sweets, biscuits, and fruit) is carried in procession behind the saint and offered during the mass. Being present at the mass is much more than a form of worship. At the door of the church a good number of people, mainly young and male, can be seen speaking in loud voices while they wait for the offering of the *ramo* or the exit of the procession. In these acts the whole community congregates under its shared symbols, and the ritual roles enact a representation of it.

The celebration overflows, however, on to the days before and after the feast-day of the patron saint, and the activities programmed on the margins of it show a compromise between old-style and recently adopted practices. Juxtaposed with traditional *rondas* we find, eventually running simultaneously, *verbena* dancing, discothèque, and *charanga*. During a *ronda* a group of villagers, typically youngsters, walk around the streets singing and receiving invitations to



Plate 4 Patronal procession in Piornal. The ritual offering (*ramo*) is carried in front of the statue of the patron saint.

eat and drink. *Verbena* and *baile* denote a performance of small hired band which plays for several hours in the centre of the village while participants dance in a designated space. By contrast, the *charanga* moves through the streets with trumpet-and-drum music, occasionally followed by the public. Together with folk modalities of

competition and exhibition (such as the greased pole or the march of goats), sports contests, marathons and masquerade competitions take place. There are concerts of folk and modern music, talks, inaugural speeches, card championships, soccer matches, and bullfights. The result is a continuous negotiation between modernity and tradition, where interests and criteria appear that need not be shared by the community as a whole. They reveal a diversity of ways of expressing a sense of belonging to the community.

Applying the concept of negotiation to ritual means that it is not just the expression of a fixed social order but an instrument that itself contributes to the definition of social relationships. In this negotiation it is not only the performers that are relevant; the outward aspect is crucial because of the eventual presence of outsiders but especially because of an implicit awareness on the part of performers of performing for, or against, 'others' (Baumann 1990). In spite of the unchanging and repetitive nature of the ritual, room is allowed for variation in accordance with individual and group strategies and interests. In labelling the events located in and around the interstices of the religious celebration 'negotiation', we seek to underline the extraritual side of such symbolic practices. By choosing to play either a deep-rooted traditional game such as 'pulling down the cock'¹¹ or a modern one such as a cycle ride, participants (and by extension the community) are choosing how they want to be seen and how they prefer to see themselves. This is particularly clear in respect to two different sets of rules for the bullfights that are a conspicuous ingredient of every patronal celebration. Bulls may either be taken by the horns with a rope by volunteer participants (the 'traditional' way in some villages) or fought by a professional bullfighter in the fashion usual in the rest of Spain. Although nothing may be explicitly predicated about one way or the other, the choice being a 'matter of taste', the show may become a continuous alternation between the two sets of rules in which the public is called upon to decide whether to be spectators of the bullfighter's performance or participate in it 'to keep the old flavour'.

Therefore, the patronal feasts involve activities pointing towards new models of public celebration, although these are subordinated to the traditional structure of the ritual. The presence of the summer residents works in the same direction, for it promotes a diversity of 'ways of celebrating': while one person might enjoy sunbathing at the swimming pool, others compete in the soccer league or participate in the liturgical services. Both processes of change (retraditionalizing and negotiating diversity) are present in the whole festive cycle

but to different degrees, favouring either the building of a sense of historical continuity or the acknowledgement of new practices and intracultural variety.

NEW CELEBRATIONS

The last category of celebrations consists of events that involve social units other than the village at levels above or below the community. All are recent events and are linked to the activity of voluntary and interest associations as well as to the cultural policy of local and regional administrations. Some examples are a 'cultural week' preceding the patronal feast (supported economically by the regional government), an ecological bicycle ride around the valley, and a 'day of the elderly' promoted by both the young people and the council of the village. These kinds of events imply modernization in two senses. On the one hand, they celebrate levels of identity and belonging other than family and village, the main foci of traditional celebrations. By making pertinent the condition of being an 'ecologist' or a 'liberal' (*progresista*) or a member of a cultural, religious, or commercial collectivity, they prove that the changes are bringing an increasing expression of segmentary identities interposed between individuals and their community and normally extending beyond it. On the other hand, they achieve this by means of activities created *ex nihilo* or taken directly from urban leisure models. For instance, the events of the cultural week (advertised as 'Cultural and Touristic August') included a lecture on emergency services, public *verbena* dancing, fireworks, a raffle for a ham and a large cask of wine, cinema, a children's painting competition, and a *flamenco* festival.

The areawide Cherry Blossom Festival that takes place when the trees blossom, between April and May, is a similar event. It was started in the 1970s and is managed by a committee of village councils. A reception for outside authorities is central to its programme, and the impulse for this comes chiefly from the cherry-marketing co-operative. The posters and information leaflets distributed show many images of cherries and white blossoms overlapping maps or pictures of the valley. A few years ago, one such leaflet began with a long poem about 'the blossom of hopes':

For him [the farmer], the blossom is not just a blossom, but the hope of a ripe fruit, of red and fleshy cherries that come July will be worth what they weigh. . . . Jerte's valley improves. . . .

Nowadays its villages are not what they were. . . . Opposite to the empty houses [of emigrants] new ones are now built.

The leaflet contains information about the geography of the valley, its people, and above all the cherry and the touristic attractions of the area, 'where nature is born in blossom'.

The main events in the programme of activities are located in a different village every year, in an effort (not always entirely successful) to avoid the tensions produced by a customary localism.¹² In this context, celebrating area identity seems to imply, today, a transition towards a market-oriented commercial system which is intended to extend beyond the local community. In no way does this mean that consciousness of being part of a unity larger than the village is restricted to commercial interest. There are many reasons for such a feeling, from geographic borders to productive processes and common traditions. It does seem however, that the social network associated with cherry distribution has become an important vehicle of its organized expression. In this sense, commercialization is likely to be part of a broader expansion of the social horizons of each community, along with tourism, geographic mobility, and the growing presence of universal institutions in local life.

THE REASONS FOR THE CHANGES

We have indicated three trends of change in the public celebrations in the Jerte Valley that, in different ways, seem to relate to more general changes in the social life of these communities:

- 1 The decline of certain lesser religious celebrations and the customs associated with them under the direct impact of the transformation of the productive cycle and the indirect effect of the tendency towards secularization.
- 2 The persistence of traditional celebrations, and especially their ludic aspects, suggesting a 'return to tradition' by generations that have no direct experience of it. This is a modern phenomenon because it implies mediation by non-traditional institutions and learning.
- 3 The appearance of new forms of celebration on the margins or in the interstices of the traditional festive process, sometimes as a result of the activity of voluntary associations or supralocal institutions.

Thus, the evolution of public celebrations in the area is complex

and cannot easily be assigned a single cause. Certainly, feasts take place because people wish 'to do something together' and, in doing so, to increase their feelings of identity and togetherness (see Boissevain in this volume). Against the predicted death of ritual in post-industrial society, the persistence and continuous re-creation of public celebrations can be regarded as not insignificant evidence of the transcendence of ritual behaviour for man as a 'symbolic animal'. But the fact is that people choose to celebrate through behaviours that make sense to them. Some of the practices analysed above are, in Geertz's (1975) terminology, models of a traditional past, while others work as models for integration into an urban and industrialized society, pointing to the future or to an immediate present. We have seen that in general an underlying stability has been maintained in the festive life of these communities, and we think that one major reason for this lies in their function in building both an image of social continuity and an adjustment to modern developments.

In looking at negotiation between modernity and tradition, we have tried to suggest the need for the people in Jerte Valley to bring together and make coherent aspects of their identity and social life that in recent decades have been drifting apart. These are communities culturally divided by radical changes in the experiences and ways of life of some of their members and physically divided by increased emigration. The various types of celebrations described above not only create opportunities for people to meet but also serve as a bridge between the past of their grandparents and the universalist values of the urban society towards which they are being drawn. The celebrations fill a gap between segments of the community and in the feelings of its members.

Among the trends documented here there are patterns that display the growing weight of the outward aspect of the events, namely, the importance of educated, high-status visitors and the mass media, tourism, the seasonal cycle of emigrants' holidays, and the assimilation of local life in general to wider frames of reference. What we have called retraditionalizing has to do with the growing intervention of universal institutions and the broadening of the social experience of a number of people outside the community. Whether the return to traditional practices by some of them is a nostalgic reaction to industrial life or merely a strategy that provides symbolic benefits without jeopardizing an urban or modern condition remains to be seen. It is, however, essential to have a better understanding of the images of tradition and modernity that the protagonists carry with them.

NOTES

- 1 Our fieldwork belongs to a broader collective programme of research, with the support of the Instituto de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, Ministerio de Cultura, that aimed to deal not only with public celebrations but with the whole set of practices traditionally labelled 'ritual'. In the north of Spain, three adjacent areas in western Asturias were studied: José Luis García carried out fieldwork in the areas of Los Oscos and Illano, Miguel López Coira in Taramundi and Ibias, and Ana Orgaz and Arturo Alvarez in Vegadeo and Castropol. Honorio Velasco developed his research in the Corneja Valley, a Castilian area north of the Gredos Mountains, and we conducted ours south of these, in the Jerte Valley. The resulting work is in press (García, Velasco, *et al.* n.d.). Special acknowledgement is due to Maryl Wylford for her help in editing the manuscript.
- 2 In the domain of family and life-cycle celebrations, for example, there is a native perception of the tendency to celebrate outside the domestic space and a growing feeling that traditional duties, gifts, and invitations are 'meaningless' or 'mere courtesy'.
- 3 The English meaning of 'feast', strongly implying commensality, does not fully overlap with the Spanish usage. We employ it here as synonymous with 'public celebration' in order to avoid the Spanish translation *fiesta*.
- 4 The *novena* is a part of the Roman Catholic liturgy consisting in nine daily meetings for prayer and meditation. *Cofradías* are religious associations for various ritual purposes, normally being segregated by sex and conveying a strong sense of belonging.
- 5 Jerte and Cabezuela celebrate their patronal feasts in July, Piornal and Casas del Castañar in August, Valdastillas, Navaconcejo, Tornavacas, and Cabrero in September, El Torno in October, and Rebollar in November.
- 6 In western Asturias, for instance, the dates of village feasts are negotiated among villagers in order to avoid coincidences with the feasts of close settlements that would reduce participation. Rather than marking the order of the times, the stress here is put on building a common area of ritual exchange for a scattered population (García, Velasco, *et al.* n.d.).
- 7 The case of the Corneja Valley represents an extreme example of these seasonal processes because of the ageing and severe depopulation of its communities. While life in the village is distinguished by interdependence between isolated neighbours to enable them to attend to housekeeping and to work in the fields, the return of the relatives during the summer months radically transforms this picture (García, Velasco, *et al.* n.d.).
- 8 For example, the event has been described by a folklorist as the 'horrible sacrifice of the thief' and considered as reflecting the 'sheer primitiveness that informs the tribal life and customs of our celebrating people' (Sayáns 1969: 312, our translation).
- 9 St. Sebastian is a pre-Lenten feast, as is Candelaria in Jerte. Judas is part of the Holy Week celebrations. Tornavacas has maintained the religious celebration of Corpus Christi together with an important brotherhood. We have not explored the reasons for this diversity.

- 10 In one of these villages, a group of students attempted to organize bullfights 'in the old style', bringing the bull across the fields and taking it by the horns with a rope. This was an initiative in opposition to and opposed by the local authorities at a time of political transition for the country, when the 'popular' took on the meanings of 'freedom' and 'democracy' against former prohibitions. The organizers looked for advice from the elders about how 'to cement' village participation. The end of the adventure came when the council built a bullring to institutionalize the feast.
- 11 In this competition among young males, a cock is hung from a rope and the contenders must ride under it on horseback and rip off its head.
- 12 For example, the inclusion of the burning of the Judas of Cabezuela in the programme of the Cherry Blossom Festival in 1988 provoked an angry protest by the village, which held that Judas 'belongs to Cabezuela'.

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