

# Coordinates of Power and Performance Festivals as Sites of (Re)Presentation and Reclamation in Sardinia

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article analyse des festivals et des formes semblables de culture publique en Sardaigne comme événements-performances qui construisent et négocient des significations autant pour les hôtes (la culture dominée, dans le cas de la Sardaigne) que pour les invités (les touristes), servant de lieux pour la création de l'identité et de l'authenticité. Ce texte documente l'apparition de la « récupération du festival », un phénomène dans lequel les groupes subjugués récupèrent ou se réapproprient les (re)présentations d'eux-mêmes créées par la culture dominante. La récupération du festival peut supposer la réappropriation ou la recréation d'un festival séparé, qui prend la forme d'une extraordinaire célébration locale, après qu'un grand festival soit devenu une attraction touristique. Ainsi, quand un festival essentiellement local ne met plus en scène un récit identitaire auquel la population peut adhérer, la communauté peut choisir de transformer le festival par de nouvelles activités ou en désigner un nouveau, un festival séparé à l'occasion duquel mettre en scène l'identité à laquelle la communauté s'identifie. Cet article analyse ce processus qui est ici abordé comme une partie du phénomène de globalisation/localisation.

## COORDINATES OF POWER AND PERFORMANCE

### Festivals as Sites of (Re)Presentation and Reclamation in Sardinia

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A few summers ago, my Sardinian friend and collaborator, who wishes to be known to academic audiences only as “E.T.” sent me a clipping from the *Nuova Sardegna*, the island’s largest circulating newspaper: a full-page ad announcing a prominent Italian publishing house’s sponsorship of a celebration of the summer solstice and autumnal equinox, to be held on the site of two *nuraghi*, dry-stone towers from the Early Bronze Age which dot the Sardinian landscape. The ad claims the nuraghi were ancient temple-observatories whose purpose was to indicate the solstices and equinoxes by lining up with the rising sun and moon on those dates. It reads, in part: “After vast, accurate research conducted over a period of years ... the mystery of Sardinia’s thousands of megalithic monuments has been revealed! The sacred nature of the constructions; the discovery of a nuragic calculator ... erected by the ancient inhabitants to the gods of the sun and moon [has] left a stamp of extraordinary spirituality on the island.” To support this image of Sardinia as a sacred site, the promoter cites Classical authors who called it “the sacred isle” and “the kingdom of the gods.” He invites tourists to experience “the revival of the ancient traditions of the great nuragic civilizations” in a sound-and-light show featuring narration and performances by well-known Sardinian musicians, singers and folk dance ensembles on the evenings of the summer solstice and fall equinox. For those unable to attend in person, he generously offers the videotape of the show for the equivalent of about 60 U.S. dollars (*La Nuova Sardegna*, 9/10/1994: 26).

This ad may strike us as amusing or ironic, as it did E.T., who sent it to me with a post-it alluding to the fact I could also study the New Age movement,

the subject of my latest research project, in Sardinia. But it is also a recent example of what Peter Odermatt calls the “politics of (re)presentation” — a combination of presentation of self and representation by and for others (Odermatt 1996: 85) — in Sardinian year-cycle rites and festivals. Festivals are arenas where the combination of ideologies, coordinates of power and performances of identity that characterize cultural contact and conflict on the island are played out. This example contains all the elements which have historically characterized the outsider’s construction of Sardinia: a focus on the island’s remote past; a connection to Classical antiquity; an emphasis on mystery and spiritual practice; and the unproblematic linking of contemporary folk performances with an ancient past. It concerns a tourist event which purports to re-create archaic ritual practice, but which is in fact creating a new item of consumer culture. In linking Sardinia’s nuraghi with sacredness, the ad succeeds in transforming the whole island into a sacred site that could potentially be experienced by the tourist.

In this article, I explore festivals as loci of the politics of (re)presentation in Sardinia, both historically and in a contemporary global context, in order to document the emergence of a phenomenon I call “festival reclamation.” Reclamation happens when subjugated groups reclaim or re-appropriate, for the purposes of identity creation and maintenance, (re)presentations of them created by the dominant culture. Reclamation is a process evident in many areas of culture, and not limited to festivals. However, when applied to festivals, it may entail the reclamation of a separate festival as an exquisitely local celebration after a larger festival has become a tourist attraction. I am looking at festivals and related forms of public culture as performance events which construct and negotiate meanings for both hosts (the dominated culture, in the case of Sardinia) and guests (tourists) (see Smith, ed. 1989; Abrahams 1982; Bauman 1977, 1992). Following the line of Jonathan Friedman (1990) and Arjun Appadurai (1990), I will argue that in the context of the twin processes of globalization/ localization, festivals serve as sites for the construction of identity and authenticity. Thus when a town’s primary festival no longer performs an identity narrative to which the population can subscribe, the community may choose to transform the festival through new activities, or to designate a new, separate festival to perform the identity with which the community identifies.

I first became interested in the cultural interplay on the island as I was studying the effects of social transformation on traditional religious festivals in “Monteruju,” a pastoral hill town in north-central Sardinia. I discovered

that tourism influenced festivals not only economically, but also in terms of how people performed their identity for outsiders and for themselves (Magliocco 1993). This process happens whenever two or more cultures meet, whether through colonialism or immigration or other forces which bring cultures together in the global marketplace. Generally, when one of these cultures is economically and politically dominant, its construction and representation of the Other gains prominence, and may influence the way the Other's identity is subsequently experienced and expressed. However, a culture's private performance of its own identity may differ considerably from what is marketed to consumers, even when groups appropriate parts of the tourist paradigm to construct their own identity.

A number of factors may influence a community's reaction towards tourism. In his examination of the use of archeological monuments in Sardinian tourism, Peter Odermatt argues that economics alone does not explain Sardinian resistance to tourist development. Instead, he examines symbolic meanings locals attach to tourist attractions, particularly historical monuments such as nuraghi. When the tourist gaze violates or neglects important local meanings, the result may threaten the relationship between hosts and guests (Odermatt 1996). In Friedman's view, the key to understanding different reactions to tourism is the question "Who is producing what for whom?" When producers are in charge of their own (re)presentations, as in the case of the Ainu in Japan (Friedman 1990: 323), the development of a tourist industry can go hand in hand with the maintenance of a distinct cultural identity and the emergence of political consciousness. Instead, when tourism exploits, displaces and instrumentalizes its object, resistance to tourism and the creation of a contrasting selfhood is the likely result. It is in the particular local and global circumstances surrounding each individual case that reasons for the different strategies must be sought (Friedman 1990: 324).

In this article, I will show how Sardinians use both strategies in different types of festivals to produce authenticity for themselves and outsiders. Rather than representing conflict between center and periphery, or "traditionalist" and "modernist" paradigms, festival reclamation — the development of separate festivals for outsiders and locals, where different and contrasting sets of identities are performed — must be viewed as part of the twin processes of globalization and localization. These are "not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends in global reality" (Friedman 1990: 311).

## Historical (Re)Presentations

In order to understand the politics of (re)presentation and its impact on identity and the performance of Sardinian festivals, an understanding of the island's historical and cultural background is crucial. Sardinia, an island off the western coast of Italy, has in many respects the status of an Italian colony. Despite their political unity with Italy since 1860, Sardinians continue to perceive themselves as culturally distinct from mainland Italians. Sardinia is more geographically isolated from the mainland than any other Mediterranean island; 145 miles of ocean separate it from the Italian port of Civitavecchia. Its geographic isolation is accompanied by linguistic distinctiveness: three major dialects of Sardo are spoken on the island, none of them intelligible to mainland Italians. Since the postwar era, transportation and communications with the mainland have been vastly improved, but it is still relatively difficult to get to Sardinia — a hassle, by metropolitan standards, involving puddle-jumping flights or crowded ferry boats and long overland journeys by rail. Despite the increasingly homogenizing effects of public education and the mass media, many Sardinians, especially in rural areas, speak Sardo as their first language, engage in part-time pastoralism, horticulture and other traditional subsistence techniques, and practice and value other signs of regional distinctiveness.

Sardinia has a long history of being under the control of powerful outside domination: Carthage, Rome, Byzantium, the feuding republics of Pisa and Genoa, the Aragonese, Spain, Savoy, and finally in 1860 the emergent Italian nation have each dominated the island over the last 2500 years. Only for a very brief period in the Middle Ages did Sardinia develop its own government. While officially the island is an “autonomous region” with its own parliament (unlike most other Italian regions except Sicily), it remains politically and economically dependent on Italy and is one of the most economically depressed areas in the nation. Despite several failed attempts to industrialize the island in the 1970s and 80s, the economy still has a predominantly agro-pastoral base; the unemployment rate approaches 30% in some areas, and there has been a high incidence of emigration since World War II.

Like many peripheral regions, Sardinia has tended towards cultural conservatism. Many customs that may once have been widespread throughout the Mediterranean have persisted, from gender roles and marriage patterns to musical forms, calendar customs, and magico-religious practices, to ritual sheep theft. Yet Sardinians daily confront a situation in which they must conform to a dominant culture and speak a national language which pervades their worlds

of work, education, government and entertainment, and which marginalizes them economically and through negative stereotyping and not-so-subtle discrimination (cf. the case of Brittany in McDonald 1989). Mainlanders, especially Italians, have tended to view Sardinia according to a set of interlocking and complementary colonialist paradigms: the Tyloorean model of unilinear cultural evolution, and the Romantic notion of the noble savage. Under the first of these, Sardinia is perceived as an unevolved, wild, barbarous place of primitive customs and savage people in need of taming and control. Proponents of this view emphasize “the Sardinian question,” the perennial problems this economically disadvantaged colony presents to politicians back in Rome: the persistence of sheep-rustling, despite government efforts to stem it;<sup>1</sup> and the presence of bandits and outlaws, usually wanted for sheep theft or kidnapping, living concealed in the remote valleys in the highlands, aided by a population which considers them heroes in the resistance against outside control (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1963). Political proponents of this view often argue that attempts must be made to modernize and civilize Sardinia through the influences of the economy, the state and the Church.

On the other side, Romantics have long regarded the island as a repository of the most ancient, most authentic cultural traditions — an unspoiled living history museum of archaic practices, a past version of the self which exists outside of time and free from cultural change. In this paradigm, Sardinia exists to provide a spectacle for the observer (Fabian 1983: xi; Bourdieu 1977: 141) — hence the tremendous popularity of this model in the tourist industry, which each year brings tens of thousands of mainland visitors, mostly from Western Europe, to the island. We recognize this Romanticism at work in the tourist ad at the beginning of this article and in the (re)presentations many festivals construct for outsiders. All too often, both paradigms are conflated, so that backwardness and authenticity are assumed to go hand in hand. It is no accident that the traditional singers deemed most authentic often hail from the innermost regions of the island; that the folk dance groups most frequently featured on Videolina, the local public-access cable TV channel, are those of Desulo, Mamoiada, and Orgosolo, towns also renowned for their bandits and blood-feuds; that the dance styles now considered most “traditional” and diffused through local folk-dance camps are those indigenous to the Barbagia, the most isolated interior area of the island. One result of this is that indigenous

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1. Sheep rustling persists because, as Benedetto Caltagirone convincingly demonstrates, it is a strategy for forming social alliances (Caltagirone 1989; cf. Herzfeld 1985).

traditions of other, less remote areas are actually being replaced by the supposedly more “authentic” styles of other districts (Lortat-Jacob 1981).

Yet as Johannes Fabian has pointed out in *Time and the Other*, in both paradigms, “the Other’s empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence” (Fabian 1983: xi). Neither view really focuses on the reality of the Sardinian experience — if such a thing can be said to exist at all. With the mass marketing of local festivals, Sardinians are being asked to publicly celebrate and display the very traits held up by the dominant culture as examples of their backwardness and isolation. Not surprisingly, this has resulted in resentment towards tourism as an industry and towards tourists themselves as the newest wave of colonizers.

### “Travel” in Sardinia

The post-colonial critique of anthropology has called attention to the importance of early travel writers in setting the stage for the kinds of prejudices and representations which would follow in ethnographic literature. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt demonstrates how European travel writing of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries created, in the minds of its readers, the object of colonialist expansion, setting the stage for imperialism. These colonialist (re)presentations in turn influenced how the colonized chose to represent themselves in various contexts, either adopting selected aspects of the colonialist paradigm, reproducing elements of metropolitan culture, or constructing themselves in opposition to it. I would argue that travel writing has had much the same impact on Sardinia. Recently, James Clifford has made a case for divesting the word “travel” of some of its bourgeois Victorian associations and using it to compare a range of phenomena involving the movement of peoples, from religious pilgrimage to tourism to travel writing to anthropology (Clifford 1992, 1997). It is in this sense that I use the broad term “travel” here to contrast several different types of contacts Sardinia has experienced with outsiders, from early travel writers to contemporary tourists and anthropologists.

Because of their performative nature, Sardinian festivals and year-cycle rites have attracted the attention of foreigners from the days of the early European travel writers. Often, that attention has been couched in terms of forging a link with a European past now unretrievable to the urban, sophisticated travelers and commentators. Many explicitly state the connection between Sardinia’s folklore and its backwardness and primitive character.

William Henry Smyth, who in 1828 published his travel diaries, *Sketch of the Present State of the Island of Sardinia*, commented: "I was convinced that few places, by resisting assimilating polish of civilization, had retained such a large portion of primitive character" (Smyth, 1828: vii). He continues: "Sards of all ranks are devoted to festivity...." (183) and describes the feast of San Gavino in Porto Torres, during which pilgrims would shuffle on their knees to kiss the statue of the saint and each of the 28 columns in the nave of the church. Some pilgrims would actually lick the length of the nave with their tongues as a sign of devotion. Afterwards the faithful paraded around the church while engaging in self-flagellation; the rest of the night was "passed in orgies truly bacchanalian" (184).

Festivals also caught the attention of Alberto LaMarmora, whose 1839 volume *Voyage en Sardaigne* contained descriptions of many feasts and year-cycle customs. LaMarmora was one of the first to publish a description of the *Festa dell'Herme*s in Ozieri, a custom which involved the sprouting of wheat seeds in a small pot in conjunction with San Giovanni (St. John the Baptist's day, June 24, in proximity of the summer solstice). He compares this custom with the gardens of Adonis, a classical Greek solstice or equinox custom supposedly connected with the Eleusinian mysteries. In 1850, the thread was picked up by Antonio Bresciani, who compared Sardinian customs, which he often described as "barbaric" or "stomach-turning," with those of classical Greece and Rome (Bresciani, 1850).

Early 20th century anthropologists continued the pattern of concern with survivals and primitivism in Sardinian popular customs. Raffaele Petazzoni, in *La Religione Primitiva in Sardegna*, compares pre-Christian Sardinian religion, which he reconstructs on the basis of archeological excavations and (once again) the reports of writers from the Roman period of occupation, with the West African belief systems of the Yoruba, Ewe, and Bantu (Petazzoni 1912/1980: 194-195). S. Dessany, in "Origini Bizantine delle Sagre in Sardegna" (1946), sees the Sardinian religious calendar, popular festivals, dances, and oral poetry contests as survivals of pagan rites that found refuge under the auspices of the Catholic Church. He speculates about the possible Homeric origin of Sardinian feasts, and postulates the origin of the circle dance as invented by Arion and perfected by Laso during the 58th Olympiad (198). While on the one hand he connects Sardinian oral improvisational poetry to that recited during the Greek Olympics, he continues: "Needless to say, this type of improvisational poetry hasn't the slightest aesthetic value" (195).



This trend has persisted until very recent times: as late as 1962, ethnologist Francesco Alziator wrote “Tracce di Rituali Pagani nella Tradizione Popolare Sarda” [Traces of pagan rituals in Sardinian folklore]. He cited the works of classical authors Timeus and Elianus, who reported that Sardinians killed their elderly parents when they became too much of a burden for the family to support, as well as Dracontius, who reports the decapitation of prisoners of war, to support his thesis that the popular customs of publicly “executing” the dummy Carnival figure preserve traces of this “human sacrifice” (229-231). The *kumbessias* or accommodations for pilgrims at novena festivals represent, in his opinion, a survival of the primitive custom of the *couvade* (233). And in his work, contemporary ethnologist Vittorio Lanternari blends archeological interpretations with accounts of folk customs to theorize about the links between festivals and pre-Christian religious customs (Lanternari 1984).

My intention here is not to deny the historicity of traditions, but to call attention to how the travel and anthropological literature on Sardinia demonstrates a persistent pattern of linking folkloric practices with an ancient, prehistoric past. Folklore is interpreted as a “survival” of an archaic way of life; no attempts are made to understand the meaning of the practices in contemporary communities. The effect of this, I argue, is the opposite of historicizing phenomena; it results in what Johannes Fabian has termed a sense of the anthropological object as outside of time, static, timeless, and continuing practices without any trace of cultural change (Fabian 1983: xi). This projection of immutability is part of the construction of the Other — in the case of Sardinia, part of the mechanism by which the island has been transformed into a magic mirror in which tourists can see reflected an image of their own past.

Since the early 1970s and the Aga Khan’s development of the Costa Smeralda resort on the north-eastern coast of the island, Sardinia has become increasingly popular as a tourist destination. Much of the tourism is confined to the coastal areas, where seaside resorts mushroomed in the 1980s. Apart from the urban centers of Sassari, Nuoro, Cagliari and Oristano, the interior offers little in the way of infrastructure to support tourism: no hotels, few restaurants, bad public transportation and a lack of functioning gas stations along the single major highway make travel a challenge for all except adventurous tourists. Paradoxically, however, this means that the kinds of travelers that reach the interior are either very specialized — ethnographers, trekkers and agro-tourists — or of the mass variety, with busloads of tourists hauled in for festivals and other public spectacles.

Much of Sardinian tourism is what Valene Smith has termed "recreational" (V. Smith 1989: 5). The relatively undeveloped coastlines offer some of the best beaches in the Mediterranean. In some areas, such as the Costa Smeralda, only the most elite can afford to vacation. The Costa Smeralda is really its own enclave, 35 miles of coastline to the north of Olbia, and relatively isolated from the rest of Sardinia. The vacationing jet-setters have little contact with locals beyond their maids, gardeners and other service providers; even then, many prefer to bring their own laborers rather than rely on locals. This creates deep resentment among many Sardinians, and the wealthy socialites have at times been targets of kidnapping and banditry. In 1989, a large swath of land which was to be further developed was burned in a summer wildfire which was rumored to be the result of arson.

Other parts of the coast have now been developed to be accessible to middle-class tourists, and these form the bulk of the visitors who jam the island from about June 15 to mid-September every summer. Alghero, a popular destination on the west coast, swells each year from a small town of about 25,000 to a resort of 100,000 at season's peak. While Alghero's economy depends on this influx, its effect on parking, traffic and the sanitation system are detrimental in the extreme.<sup>2</sup>

Middle-class tourists who spend part of the summer at seaside resorts do more than just sun and swim. They are often interested in learning more about the island, and, as MacCannell (1976: 14) has suggested, seek an "authentic" experience that will reveal the character of local culture to them without the inconveniences of actual immersion.<sup>3</sup> They often seek out evening entertainments and educational day-trips, and are likely to be attracted to festivals and public cultural performances. In fact, it is with this type of tourist in mind that the vast majority of public tourist productions are designed. Because of the difficulties involved in traveling to the interior where "authentic" festivals take place, charter tours are increasingly an option for those who wish to have an authentic experience while avoiding the hassles of research, driving

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2. In 1992, for instance, it was discovered that because the sanitation plants were unable to process the additional waste represented by 75,000 tourists, it was simply being dumped untreated into the bay. A number of people began to show up at local hospitals with hepatitis and skin conditions caused by swimming in raw sewage.
  3. Alternatively, Hermann Bausinger (1990: 116-160) and John Urry (1990) have argued that tourists are aware they are experiencing the "inauthentic," but agree to do so as part of the tourist experience, which is construed as "play."

and finding accommodations. Tour groups often offer packages which include visits to villages in the hinterlands, local meals, wine and cheese tastings, and folkloric performances. Contact with locals is likely to be at an impersonal level, through service personnel. Taken by the busload to festivals to experience the sights, they are deeply resented by Sardinians, who for the most part control neither the access of tourists to their festivals, nor the (re)presentations of themselves marketed to tourists. Many Sardinians feel they have become yet another cultural commodity for mass tourists to consume.

Of course, Sardinians themselves participate in tourism. There is a historical tradition of pilgrimage surrounding saint's day celebrations, which have long attracted the faithful from surrounding communities. Colorful year-cycle rites such as the festivities surrounding Carnival have also historically attracted their fair share of locals. Recent years have seen an increasing touristization of local festivals and year-cycle rites; with the spread of the automobile and the resulting facilitated transportation, these events have become occasions for widespread local tourism. As a result, few small towns have preserved the full range of festivals and customs which once characterized peasant life. Instead, a kind of specialization by town has occurred: each puts on one or two festivals or year-cycle rites, which then become spectacles for people from neighboring towns to attend. People going to neighboring communities to observe these events go to be entertained; they do not participate, for example, in the costuming and parading characteristic of Carnival, but rather watch from the sidelines. This lack of active participation, and the role of tourists as spectators, clearly marks the transformation of the year-cycle rite into a consumer product. Yearly television broadcasts of such events as Oristano's *Sartiglia* (a costumed equestrian performance) and Sedilo's *ardia* (horse race) in honor of St. Constantine contribute to the transformation of these events into consumer products. It is now possible to observe these rites from the comfort of one's living room. "Why are you girls going all the way to Bonorva for Carnival, when you could stay home and watch the *Sartiglia* on television?" one informant's mother asked in an attempt to keep us at home one Carnival.

Returning émigrés constitute another important class of tourists. Each summer thousands of immigrants who left Sardinia years ago for the greener economic pastures of the mainland return to their towns and villages to visit relatives and old friends. Émigrés have special agendas when it comes to tourism; they seek to renew affective ties and re-live past experiences, especially sensory experiences (food, drink, music, dance) which powerfully link them to their

pasts. At the same time, these experiences are touched with bittersweetness; the émigrés now belong to a different culture. Often amazed at the modernization their villages have undergone since their departure, they feel nostalgia for the past and a kind of envy for those who remained behind and somehow survived. Émigrés are some of the biggest consumers of certain kinds of festival entertainments, especially musical performances and oral poetry duels. At every performance, they can be seen lining their cassette recorders on the edge of the stage (right next to the anthropologist's) to catch every measure of the music which will be taken back with them to recall memories of sights, sounds, smells, and landscapes of affection. Increasingly, then, all festivals are becoming a form of performance for a non-local audience.

### Festivals and Tourism

Festivals have always been vehicles for display, performance and ostentation (Lanternari 1981). They are among the most visible, "consumable" aspects of traditional peasant life. They are usually tied to both the agro-pastoral calendar, marking important times of the year, and to the sacred calendar, marking the feast days of Catholic saints and the Virgin. There are a number of types of festivals celebrated today in Sardinia. These include novena festivals, held over a period of nine days in isolated country chapels which often include *kumbessias*, primitive accommodations for pilgrims; *festas de komitatu*, feasts organized by a group of individuals devoted to a particular patron saint, usually a protector of their trade guild or occupational group; and *festas mannas*, large patronal festivals in honor of the patron saint of an entire community which also feature secular events such as music, dancing and fireworks (Magliocco 1993: 48). In addition, there are now new kinds of public performances especially geared to attract tourists which often feature the word "festival" in their title, but which in reality are little more than promotional events which serve exclusively commercial or political ends (Gallini 1977; Stoeltje 1983: 1). An example of this is Alghero's *Festa dell'aragosta* [Lobsterfest], a food-tasting exposition on the wharf. It is the larger patronal festivals and their permutations which attract the attention of tourists and which are the main focus of my investigation.

Sardinia is famous for its patronal festivals and year-cycle customs. Even the most basic tourist guides list some of the better-known ones, such as the *Sagra del Redentore* [Feast of the Redeemer] in Nuoro, Sant' Efisio in Cagliari, and Sassari's *Cavalcata Sarda*, a costumed parade. There are even specialized guides to all of Sardinia's festivals which take the tourist through major festivals

all over the island month by month (e.g. Spanu 1989, 1999). One reason festivals are attractive to tourists is because they contain a concentration of folkloric forms: music, dance, oral poetry, competitive horsemanship, and ritual which were once a part of peasant life. As MacCannell has shown, tradition (or the illusion thereof) is an important tourist attraction because it reminds us of our break with the past and allows us to briefly reconnect with it (MacCannell 1976: 82-83), and folkloric forms have long been indices of tradition in the popular imagination. They are icons of a past way of life which has disappeared even in the communities which are re-enacting it (Bianco 1978: 58; Gallini 1977: 133). Festive forms persist despite economic and social transformation in part because they can be channeled into the ludic plane and the world of consumer culture (Gallini 1977: 134); by attending a festival, the tourist can experience a taste of traditional peasant life without any of its inconveniences. The availability of food, music and other consumer products places the festival squarely within other types of consumable experiences familiar to the tourist.

### The Folklorization of Festivals

While festivals have traditionally been vehicles for display and ostentation, *what* gets displayed and *to whom* it gets displayed have changed radically as a result of socio-economic transformation and the introduction of tourism. Festivals have always been intimately tied to the economy. Before the introduction of consumer-capitalist, market-driven economies, they were tied to agrarian cycles of harvest and economic surplus, and one of their effects was the redistribution of a portion of the town's wealth among a greater percentage of its citizens. As in much of the Catholic Mediterranean, Sardinian festivals were organized according to the cargo system: financed by the sale of economic surplus collected by a committee (*komitatu*) of representatives (*obrieri* [workers]), whose financial contributions outweighed those of the rest of the townspeople. The *komitatu* also shouldered the organizational responsibility for putting on the festival. Usually the town's wealthier citizens were on the *komitatu*; their organization of the festival became a "gift" to the saint and the community, as well as an occasion to display their wealth, power, influence and aesthetics. In the past, surplus economic goods could be redistributed and used to pay for the festival in what anthropologist Clara Gallini has called "the consumption of the sacred" (Gallini 1979). Today, the *komitatu* collects cash donations from families; each *obriere* or *obriera* also gives a cash contribution

in what some anthropologists have called the “cost-sharing” system (Brandes 1988; W. Smith 1977).

Being on the committee was once an occasion for the display of personal wealth and influence. Today, people are seldom enthusiastic about being members of a committee, as it entails giving up free time and discretionary income. Both Brandes and Waldemar Smith have noted similar developments in the commercialization of fiestas in Latin America; individuals prefer to spend money on consumer goods such as a new car or house, or on private life-cycle rites, such as weddings and baptisms, with a single, easily identifiable sponsor (Brandes 1988; W. Smith 1977).

With the transition to a market economy, festivals become tied to national and international economic cycles. Attracting tourist income becomes a significant goal, as some towns’ economies depend on tourism for survival. Some towns have elected to reschedule their patronal festivals to coincide with long weekends and state holidays, when tourists and émigrés can more easily attend. The availability of government grants for historic preservation has been another important innovation in the economy of festivals. By designating certain festivals part of the area’s cultural heritage [*patrimonio culturale*], towns may become eligible to obtain substantial state contributions for the celebration. But the financing of the festival from outside sources of income changes the dynamics of the festival economy. Festivals are no longer under the control of locals, but part of larger regional, national and global systems. For example, accepting state contributions towards a festival which has been declared *patrimonio culturale* may then obligate communities to include only “authentic” performances of dance, music and oral poetry sanctioned by state agencies, and to make it accessible to mass tourism.

These economic changes have led to changes in the festival’s popular entertainments. In a pre-market economy, the games, sports and dances which are part of the large patronal festival were participatory events. In Monteruju, a town in northwest Sardinia where festival reclamation has taken place, Antonio<sup>4</sup>, born in 1953, remembered the way Monteruju’s patronal festival had been celebrated in his youth: “They used to do nicer things. You know, innocent, stupid games, whatever. Sack races, greased pole races, stuff like that. Well, I liked those things.”

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4. All names are pseudonyms.

Dancing was also a participatory activity. A musician described the importance of the circle dance in Monteruju:

You had to have an accordion player. Why? To play the *ballo sardo*. Because Monteruju has this tradition of the circle dance. Tiu Totoi, bless his soul, was an excellent dancer; he and his wife ... never missed an opportunity to dance. [The circle dance] was sacrosanct.

But, Leonardo Piras explains, the situation has now changed:

Since a few years ago, young people started to protest when they'd play ... the *ballo sardo*... Then little by little, we started not to give a damn about the circle dances.... In the past few years, we have eliminated our own culture, with this Coke and whiskey and rock-n-roll. Got it?

Leonardo took particular delight in rubbing in the fact that in his opinion it was American culture which had caused the demise of the circle dance and other traditional forms. From his perspective, the influx of American culture after World War II was an index of yet another colonizing power's influence on Sardinia. To the extent that American culture is everywhere considered the apotheosis of consumer culture, he is, in a sense, correct. Yet like many others, Leonardo conflates the influence of cultural homogenization with Americanization, obscuring the greater threat, for Sardinians, of "Italicization." As Appadurai suggests, "for polities of smaller scale, there is always a fear of cultural absorption by polities of a larger scale, especially those that are nearby" (Appadurai 1990: 295). Paradoxically, it is the influence of Italian discourses stigmatizing the *ballo sardo* as old-fashioned while at the same time enshrining it as part of a disappearing cultural heritage that has led to its decline. Today in Monteruju, dance takes the form of costumed folk dance performances purchased from Italian entertainment brokers for the occasion and Italian pop music bands, also booked through agencies, which play rock music and popular dance tunes. Of course, people do dance to rock music and pop tunes. But traditional circle dancing has largely been taken outside the participatory sphere, at least in the venue of the patronal festival.

The same has happened with sporting events. The contests Antonio described have now been replaced with bicycle races, soccer games and boxing matches which are contracted for by the festival organizers. These are semi-professional teams which agree to hold competitions in certain towns for public entertainment. Locals do not participate in these events, but stand on the sidelines and watch. In both cases, the events have been removed from the participatory sphere and placed in the hands of professionals or semi-

professionals brokered by entertainment agencies. The townspeople become spectators at their own festa, along with the tourists who are there for the evening.

The influx of mass culture has led to a change in the aesthetics, especially in the under-40 generation. These young people who grew up with radio and television listening to American pop artists<sup>5</sup> consider traditional Sardinian music strange and boring, and a vestige of a backwards way of life they are eager to leave behind. Traditional culture becomes an embarrassment to them — more evidence that they need to catch up with the rest of the world. This has sometimes resulted in a desertion of the festival by young people, who prefer to go to the beach and leave the crowded town behind, and by older people, who barricade themselves in their houses against the deafening noise of the rock bands that play in the town square long into the night. In Monteruju, they say about the large patronal festival, “*Eh, oe este sa festa de sos forestieri!*” [Today is the festa for foreigners.]

The desertion of the festa is particularly noticeable in the case of large events, such as the Feast of the Redeemer in Nuoro. Once the occasion for a pilgrimage to pay homage to the statue of Christ the Redeemer in a shrine overlooking the city, it has now turned into a tourist attraction which brings visitors to Nuoro from all parts of the island, as well as from the continent. A 1986 article in *La Nuova Sardegna* proclaimed:

Among the many spectators, the only ones missing are the Nuoresi.... The August festa has now become exclusively an opportunity to attract thousands of tourists. To the point that the folk groups from different towns are now beginning to desert the traditional parade. Many Nuoresi cannot hide their bitterness over the fate of their festival.... The majority in fact prefer to abandon the city, or lock themselves in the house until the end of the hoopla (*La Nuova Sardegna*, August 25, 1986: 8).

This is even more true of exhibitions created especially for tourists, such as the Cavalcata Sarda in Sassari. This event features a parade of folk revival groups from small towns all over the island, all wearing their regional costumes. While it is picturesque and attracts many visitors, it lacks any emotional or personal significance for most Sassaresi, who prefer to leave their devotions for the *Falada*, a “race” between guilds bearing huge decorated wooden pillars

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5. Until the mid-1990s, the Italian music industry was dominated exclusively by a few Italian recording artists plus American pop; very little music from anywhere else was heard on the airwaves.



which takes place on August 15 in honor of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin.

The economic and social shifts of the last 50 years have undeniably brought radical changes to the festival's structure and economic base. Anthropologist Marianne Mesnil has described these changes in terms of what she calls the "folklorization" of festival (Mesnil 1987). In the folklorized festival, phenomena such as oral poetry, dance and music, which are integral to the traditional festival, are marginalized and experienced as products for entertainment or consumption. Individual performances of dance and song replace communal participation. The emphasis shifts from collective creation and participation to individual consumption (Mesnil 1987).

To return to the example at the beginning of this paper, how are the politics of (re)presentation present in the solstice and equinox celebrations sponsored by the publishing agency in the advertisement? It should be clear by now that these are neither patronal feasts nor local events celebrated in reaction to tourist-oriented festivals, but carefully orchestrated affairs sponsored by non-local agencies and aimed at a particular tourist market. They capitalize on tourist interest in archeological and historical monuments, and on dubious interpretations of these remains as prehistoric observatories-cum-temples. References to Sardinia as "the sacred isle" and "kingdom of the gods" appeal to travelers' search for an authentic experience, a merging with an imagined past where the religious or spiritual becomes somehow closer, more accessible. Solstice and equinox celebrations bring to mind ancient pagan festivities which audiences imagine must have occurred on these nights, while folkloric performances authenticate the observance by providing yet another link with the past, eliding the distinctions between the prehistoric and the pre-modern. But to locals such as E.T., these (re)presentations are incongruous at best, disturbing at worst — at odds with the ways that they see and wish to represent themselves, even when they re-appropriate the Romantic paradigm. Mystification ultimately depersonalizes and decontextualizes its object, reducing it to an icon.

### Festivals and Localization: "the Rebellion of the Object"<sup>6</sup>

Since the late 1980s, Sardinia has begun to experience a backlash against the commodification of festivals, accompanied by the emergence of alternative

6. From the title of Michelangelo Pira's polemical critique of the anthropology of Sardinia and the emergence of Sardinian separatism, *La rivolta dell'oggetto* (1978).

forms which recast the Evolutionary-Romantic model in a positive light. These new forms are aimed at a local audience, are more participatory in nature, and often take place separately from the large patronal festivals that have become tourist attractions. For example, nature hikes and public displays of historic photographs and local artwork are now prevalent motifs in the festivals of smaller towns. These events are open to the public, but draw a mostly local crowd. The themes reflect a value on community, small-town neighborliness, and the beauty of the natural environment.

In a clever tactic, Sardinians have reclaimed the Romantic discourse of tourist brokers and turned “authenticity” into a valued quality of rural life. Yet the interpretation of these neo-Romantic values is acutely local, emphasizing local values over the primitivist images favored by tourist brochures. Everywhere I went in Sardinia, for example, I was always being offered homegrown, home-cooked delicacies: fresh cheese, crisp, thin flat bread slathered with olive oil and sprinkled with salt; garden vegetables such as succulent tomatoes and tart artichokes; wild asparagus and beet greens from the mountain; roast suckling pig, kid and lamb; and, of course, home-made moonshine, called *abbardende* [fire water] or *filuferru* [wire], after a sign used by distillers to mark the hidden location of stills), and everywhere, my hosts would urge me: “Eat, this is all *roba genuina*, authentic stuff,” meaning it had no additives or preservatives or artificial ingredients like the foods they supposed I consumed in the city. “*Genuino*,” the same word used in tourist ads to signify authenticity, becomes literally consumable: by consuming authentic food products, Sardinians construct themselves as being “authentic,” and imagine they can transform me, through consumption, into a somehow more “authentic” member of the community. After a summer of fieldwork, my informant Caterina’s mother observed my transformation: “With all this good food and fresh air, you’re practically becoming one of us!”<sup>7</sup> In this discourse, the traditional peasant value on abundant food and fresh ingredients is transformed into an icon of authenticity.

The argument of authenticity became important in the revival of Santa Maria di Runaghes in Monteruju after the town’s patronal feast had become a “festival for foreigners.” This novena festival held at a country chapel just outside the village became a way for Monteruvians to reexperience the festival as participatory, much as the patronal feast had once been. Partly for economic

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7. Of course in many important ways I remained an outsider in the pastoral community I studied by virtue of class differences and my American upbringing.

reasons, as many of the preparations as possible were kept at the local level: shepherds donated products for a feast of boiled mutton, cheese and bread; the school music teacher was hired along with his band to play traditional numbers, including music for the circle dance, which was danced by young and old without complaint. Festival organizers stressed the wholesomeness of the home-cured hams, olives, breads and other foods in the communal feast. The climax came in 1987, fifteen years after the festival's revival, when the *prima obriera*, or head of the committee, restored and reconsecrated the original wooden statue of the Virgin which had once been in the chapel, but which for years had languished in a parishioner's basement in a state of disrepair. Marta, the shrewd chairwoman of the komitatu, invited a host of dignitaries from the Christian Democratic party to the celebration. So successful was Marta's use of tropes playing up Monteruju's identity as an authentically Sardinian rural paradise that she was elected mayor the following spring.

Shepherds in Ogliastra, a central highland region, have used a similar tactical appropriation of the Romantic paradigm in the political struggle against the construction of a national park in the Gennargentu range. Under lobbying from environmentalists, the Italian government has proposed creating a national park in this mountainous and unsettled part of the central highlands to preserve the wilderness and attract tourism. Shepherds who have for generations summered their livestock on these high ridges and hunted in the canyons for wild boar, moufflon and other delicacies have heavily protested the creation of a national park which they say would deprive them of their livelihood, restrict their access to what have long been communal lands, and prevent them from pasturing sheep and hunting game. Environmentalists contend that the shepherds exploit the land by allowing sheep to graze hillsides, causing erosion, and have hunted moufflon and other game almost to the point of extinction. In the latest twist, shepherds are portraying themselves as "shepherd environmentalists" whose traditional techniques actually serve to preserve the land.

A history of colonization has led Sardinians to develop a resistance to influences perceived as coming from the dominant culture. It is no accident that Marxian theorist Antonio Gramsci grew up on the island, where he observed firsthand the peasant resistance in popular festivities, customs and narratives which influenced the development of his ideas on expressive culture as the fulcrum of peasant resistance, as well as the emblem of peasant subdominance (Byrne 1982). Yet the paradigm of resistance is too simplistic

to fully capture the complexities of globalization and localization. Both homogenization and localization/resistance are happening simultaneously; they are part of the same process. What is interesting is that through festival reclamation, Monteruvians have neatly divided them between two festivals: the patronal feast, where a global identity is performed for tourist outsiders, and the novena feast, where a local identity is performed for community members only. Yet rather than interpreting the patronal feast as "folklorized" or "touristicized" and Santa Maria di Runaghes as "genuine" or "traditional," both festivals, as well as the process of festival reclamation itself, must be seen as part of the same phenomenon of globalization. Oppositionality and resistance to objectification are only part of the impetus behind the development of local forms which perform selfhood. These developments might be interpreted as a form of tactic which, while appearing oppositional, actually incorporates key features of the dominant discourse and reshapes them to suit the ends of its creators (deCerteau 1984).

These processes are of course not unique to Sardinia. They represent common strategies among groups faced with maintaining identity in the face of a dominant culture which both essentializes them and exploits their cultural distinctiveness. We can see them at work among a number of minority groups, as coordinates of race, ethnicity, gender, and class intersect with each other in a multicultural environment (see, for example, Le Menestrel 1999; McDonald 1989). Reclamation often emerges among subjugated groups in the form of folklore and expressive culture, which both appropriate and subvert the dominant discourse's construction of the Other. At the same time, outsiders also find inspiration in these forms, which are adopted and marketed as both authentic and exotic. This removes the cultural productions from the control of the minority, which then develops new forms of tactic and resistance to the system.

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