

VINDICATIONS AND CUSTOMS: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL FESTIVE RITUALS IN SPAIN

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Abstract: This article presents an overview of studies on women's participation in festive rituals and cultural customs in Spain. Demands by women to participate in manifestations of what is today termed intangible cultural heritage began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, feminist anthropology has followed these processes of protest and demands for change. Events on the ground have prompted a revision of theoretical frameworks for understanding these phenomena, placing greater emphasis on the interrelationship between the social and symbolic order within the sex/gender system. In this sense, in Spain, and especially in the Basque Country, there has been an intersection between academic research, the actions of self-organised women and the public administration, bringing into dialogue the theoretical, political-activist, and institutional spheres. In this article, we focus on the strategies and practical ways in which equality is sought, materialised, and performed in festive rituals, plotting their evolution to more democratic, participatory, and egalitarian events. We conclude that the study of the *fiesta* from a gender perspective is crucial to rethinking the way we analyse rituals, processes of change and continuity in festive customs in relation to feminist demands. At the same time, it is a source of inspiration when plotting processes of social and symbolic transformation that question or reverse the patriarchal and hierarchical order of our societies.

Keywords: equality, feminism, festive ritual, *fiesta*, intangible cultural heritage, local institutions, strategies for change, symbolic efficacy, women's participation

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we present an overview of the processes of change in festive annual rituals in Spain,¹ in relation to the incorporation of women in the *fiesta*, the questioning of gender roles and the binary system of social and symbolic gender classifications.² We focus on initiatives undertaken by women, local governments and other social agents to adapt the androcentric organisation of local festivals to a contemporary agenda of equal rights between men and women, based on the principle of equality, modifying gender stereotypes, sexism and its violences and the hierarchies of masculine prestige (Ortner & Whitehead 1981).

The attempt to adapt festive rituals in this way is in keeping with the transformation of Spanish society in the past fifty years. It is from the 1970s onwards, with the end of Franco's dictatorship and the beginning of democracy marked by the proclamation of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, that women were able to take a more visible part in social, economic, and political life. As women joined the workforce of Spanish society, they also sought to take a more active part in leisure activities (Bullen 2003; Del Valle 1996). At that time, the feminist movement, local governments, and society as a whole influenced a change in the festive model in reference to the way festivals were organised and celebrated (Boissevain 1992) and in relation to who could participate. Some authors speak of a process of democratisation of the *fiesta* (Gilmore 1993; Villarroya & García Pilán 2006), until then controlled and manipulated as propaganda for Franco's fascist regime (Antuna Gancedo 2016; Hernández Burgos & Rina Simón 2022). As women accessed areas of social life denied them by the dictatorship in general and the gender politics of National Catholicism in particular (Morcillo 2010), they ceased to play a merely supportive role of a woman / wife-mother and entered social life in their own right (Bullen & Egido 2003). Where previously they assumed invisible domestic tasks, such as sewing costumes, cooking, and taking care of children, or took up their places on the pavements or in the squares to praise and applaud the parading, processing, or dancing men, they now began to take the lead as participants in the festive rituals.

However, as we will see, the incorporation of women did not occur homogeneously throughout Spain nor across the whole spectrum of festivities, dances and rites that constitute the ritual year and the rich festive heritage of this country (Homobono Martínez 2004). As at the end of the nineteenth century and during Franco's dictatorship, a limited number of women took part in certain *fiestas* through the creation of stereotypical female roles related to beauty, femininity, and youth: queens and ladies in waiting, majorettes, *cantineras* (canteen girls), and *abanderadas* (standard-bearers) (Antuña Gancedo 2019; Martínez Pozo 2015).³ In some places and in certain types of rituals, women have not been in-

corporated at all and men continue to be the protagonists; in other places, there is resistance to their incursion in a predominantly male space and, in some cases, major conflicts have arisen over the issue of how women should be included, sometimes to the point of violence both during the *fiesta* itself and throughout the year, causing disruption and turmoil in everyday local life (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019).

For this reason, there has been a growth of social anthropological research in Spain on the evolution of festivals from a gender perspective and latterly in relation to the concept of intangible cultural heritage. Over the past 25 years, we have accrued an increasingly wide range of case studies, permitting a comparative analysis (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromás 2021; Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Gisbert & Rius-Ulldemolins 2019; Gisbert Gracia & Rius-Ulldemolins & Hernández i Martí 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019) that has enhanced our understanding of the tension between the maintenance of folkloric or festive customs and traditions eminently carried out by men, and the demand and vindication of women to participate in them (Gisbert Gracia 2015; Montesinos & Bullen 2021). We will pay particular attention to the strategies employed by the different agents implicated in the process of boosting women's participation in local *fiestas*, underlining the interrelation between feminist demands, academic research, and institutional and legislative action.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EMERGENCES: THE RISE OF A FIELD OF STUDY

It was the eruption in 1996 of a controversy over the participation of women in the *Alardes*⁴ of Irun and Hondarribia – two neighbouring towns on the border of France and Spain – that first brought to our attention that equal rights for women were far from being achieved in the festive field and that, in fact, ritual constituted a stronghold for androcentric privilege, constructed as a sacred space beyond the reach of the Spanish Constitution and the principle of legal equality between women and men (Bullen & Egidio 2003; Bullen & Pérez Galán 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019; Montesinos & Bullen 2021). Following James Fernandez (1986), we considered the polemic to be an 'ethnographic emergence': an action or occurrence that brings to the surface an underlying reality that has been glossed over or ignored until something occurs to awaken our interest in or awareness of the situation (Díez Mintegi & Bullen 2012). The outright refusal received by the women who requested access to the *Alardes*

on equal terms with men and the violent reaction to their attempt to join the parade made visible the symbolic and structural violence reproduced in these festive rituals. This violence had been covered up by the defence of tradition and respect for historical veracity, arguing that if women had not participated in the battle that was being commemorated, they should likewise not participate in the *fiesta* that supposedly reproduced that historical event. This argument ignores the fact that the festival is more than a mere historical performance; it is the most representative and participatory cultural and festive expression of the municipality.

The case of the Bidasoa *Alardes* has received the most attention both because of the violence exercised in the two towns and because of its duration, still unresolved 25 years after its emergence.⁵ Moreover, its study over time has developed in parallel to the process of consolidation of feminist anthropology in the University of the Basque Country, permitting a more theoretical reflection on violence, androcentric culture, and the myth of the Basque matriarchy (Bullen 2003; Díez Mintegui & Bullen 2010).⁶ As well as prompting further research, this case has become referential for other localities that have acted precisely to avoid such a scandalous situation in terms of equality in their *fiestas*, as we shall see later in the article.

Many changes have taken place since the 1970s and especially in the eighties and nineties and have been recorded both in the Basque Country and in other localities in Spain: the *Maskarada* in Zuberoa (Fernández de Larrinoa 1997),⁷ the festivities of Moors and Christians in the province of Alicante (Heuzé 1999)⁸ or the *cofradías* (brotherhoods) of the Holy Week processions in Málaga (Sánchez Domínguez 2003).⁹ These studies show some reticence or stronger resistance to the inclusion of women, but also evidence of how women have devised strategies to achieve acceptance,¹⁰ effecting changes that have gradually been normalised (Domene Verdú 2015; 2018; Montesinos Llinares 2019). Ethnographies are enhanced by folklore studies¹¹ and from a local historical perspective (Pascual Gisbert 2004; Rico Navarro 2005), providing depth and dynamism to the study of the presence of women in different eras.

In the twenty-first century, there has been an increase in anthropological studies from a feminist perspective, revealing the persistence of a sex/gender system that discriminates against women and is deeply rooted in expressions of popular and festival culture in Spain. Among the festivities analysed we find: the Parade of the Three Kings of Igualada in Catalonia (Lafita Solé 2013); the *Tamborrada* (drum festival) of Donostia / San Sebastián in the Basque Country (Moral 2014); the *Fallas* of Valencia (Gisbert Gracia & Rius Ulldemolins 2018); the Carnival of Cadiz in Andalusia (Sergidou 2020); the creation of the *Dimònies* (Female Demons) of Manacor and the *Mucada* of Sineu, both in Mal-

lorca (Alemany Sureda 2016; 2022); different dances in the Basque Country (Araolaza Arrieta 2020); or *La Patum* of Berga, also in Catalonia (Gisbert Gracia & Rius-Ulldemolins & Hernández i Marti 2019). To this long list, we can add the cases analysed by Farapi S.L. (2009), Montesinos Llinares (2019) and Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro (2019).¹²

This ethnographic material, moreover, allows us to reflect on the practical application of the principle of equality and, especially, on methods of social transformation advocated by activists implicated in the struggle for gender equality from different strands of feminism (Montesinos & Bullen 2021). The symbolic sphere emerges as a fertile field for feminists' demand for equality, in which we discover strategies devised by women wishing to participate and observe their performances. We see how they break rules and change customs, how they meet with resistance from traditional groups and adverse authorities but also elicit a political response and influence legislation.

STUDYING FESTIVE RITUALS FROM A GENDERED AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Although the study of festive phenomena, community rituals, folklore and popular culture has been a constant in social and cultural anthropology, we believe that the more recent gendered or feminist perspective can make an important contribution to the development of new theories for the analysis of the growing corpus of empirical material. Above all, it is the concept of sex/gender system that we wish to bring to bear on the analysis of festive rituals, in order to explain the difficulties and the resistances to proposals for more egalitarian festivals in general and women's participation in particular.

Following Raewyn W. Connell (1987) and Teresa Del Valle (2002), we apply the notion first proposed by Gayle Rubin (1975: 159): "a sex/gender system is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" – a conceptual tool that helps us to describe how the oppression of women, sexual minorities, and certain stereotyped aspects of gender roles are built and sustained. The concept of sex/gender system describes the social as a network of daily relationships and institutions that naturalise inequalities between women and men; inequalities established by a system of power that assigns differentiated roles and functions based on the sex-gender of people, roles and meanings that are internalised and perceived as normal (Bourdieu 1998). These relationships and institutional machinery are trans-versal, that is, they affect all areas of people's daily and social life, including symbolic aspects and cultural phenomena as festive rituals.

Margaret Bullen and Beatriz Pérez Galán (2019) have argued that the notion of system (power system, cultural system, sex/gender system) complexifies the analytical dichotomy that divides the world between the ‘social order’ of everyday reality and the ‘symbolic order’ which would include festivals (Bakhtin 1968 [1965]), and also the separation between profane time and sacred time (Durkheim 1912; Eliade 1959 [1957]). The understanding of the *fiesta* as sacred, as an almost mystical emotional experience, coincides with the arguments of those who defend tradition on the grounds of inexplicable emotions and often religious sentiment. Although these dichotomies help explain how a festival is perceived as something separate from everyday reality and outside the realm of equal rights – and so provides a clue to the resistance to women’s equal participation in *fiestas* – the aforementioned studies show that in festive rituals both spheres are linked, interconnected, and in constant communication. This is why we have proposed that the vindication of women to participate in festive rituals has symbolic efficacy (Montesinos & Bullen 2021). Women’s demands have proved to be endowed with a transformative power: transformative of imaginaries, bodily practices, social and political relations, legislation, family organisation, etc. For this reason, we consider it more appropriate to analyse festive models in terms of multiple systems (gender, cultural, social, etc.) traversed by a plethora of meanings that are constructed and perceived through the senses, emotions, and cognitive processes that are inextricably linked to bodily experiences.

Accepting that *fiestas* constitute a space for the reproduction of sex/gender systems, imbricated in the social structure and cultural context, we can appreciate how the traditional model of the festive rituals reflects the systems in which the festivals are inserted. Firstly, in aspects related to the social structure: in the political realm (systems of government, legal bodies); in economic management (systems of production-reproduction and distribution), and in social organisation (kinship systems, family formation). Secondly, in areas that are often linked to ‘culture’, such as: representational systems (languages, symbolic systems); material and immaterial culture (art objects, theatrical or musical performances, traditions, rituals, and festivals); value and belief systems (Bullen & Pérez Galán 2019: 25).

The idea of the difference between women and men is an idea that permeates all areas of social, symbolic, political, economic, and legal life (Connell 1987). The meaning of being a woman or a man, and the logic and practice associated with it, cuts across these axes and is embedded in the cultural system that shapes and informs the social thinking that governs public and personal life (MacKinnon 1989).

In this article then, we propose a theoretical framework that allows the intersection of gender, cultural, and social systems, in order to analyse the significance of the exclusion of women from the festive space and the importance of the actions taken to reinvent customs and traditions from a feminist and inclusive perspective. In this sense, we acknowledge the way *fiestas* function to make – or break – communities. They not only interrupt the daily routine, the rhythm of work and rest, but also have a communicative and exhibitionary function, to represent identities and histories, bring social actors into play, evoke multiple feelings and emotions, and call up a world of cyclically transmitted information and values that are linked to the family and the local community (Roma 1996). Their social, economic, and political importance should not be underestimated, as they tend to reproduce relations of status and privilege within the community and have been analysed as an instrument for the maintenance of social stratification and power relations (Rius-Ulldemolins & Gisbert & Vera 2021, among others).

Moreover, we wish to stress the ambiguous nature of ritual, focusing on the different social groups that reproduce or question the legitimacy of the system in the ritual, complying with or resisting institutionalised or informal mandates. We are particularly interested in the social and feminist movements that call for a change in the model of society in general and of the *fiesta* in particular. Feminist practice and theory have identified and analysed the established model of the *fiesta* as outdated, traditionalist and sexist, in urgent need of renovation in favour of a feminist model that guarantees women's freedom, autonomy, and pleasure (Bullen & Pérez Galán 2019; Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Guilló Arakistain 2016; Montesinos Llinares 2019). Along the lines proposed by Turner (1966; 1975), the *procedural symbolic analysis* of ritual implies understanding ritual as a metaphor of social life, as a drama (in its sequential scheme), but also as a game (attending to the liminal phase). Feminist scholarship has emphasised the question of desire, enjoyment, and creativity in the ritual and festive spheres (Muelas de Ayala 2018), understanding it as a place open to a Butlerian performativity of bodies (Butler 1990), highlighting the liberating aspect of ritual in the face of a constricting structure that perpetrates inequality and exploitation.

In our work, we have tracked the changes taking place in festive ritual practice and argued for a dynamic concept of culture and customs that allows for Hobsbawm & Ranger's (1983) reinvention of tradition, in opposition to a popular discourse of defence of cultural heritage and the preservation of tradition in the face of attack from the ravages of time, loss of values or sacrality, or disinterest in history.¹³ We defend that these festive rituals, cyclical and representative of local communities, can be a space for the reparation of the

age-old exclusion of women in the festive realm, of their discrimination and historical undervaluation; a place of reconciliation in the face of symbolic and physical violence that has not yet found reparation (Montesinos & Bullen 2021). From this perspective, the *fiesta* – as a total social fact in the Maussian sense (Mauss 1924) – emerges as a privileged place for feminist and institutional intervention and for the performance of social transformation and composition.

IMPLICATED ANTHROPOLOGY FOR EQUALITY IN THE *FIESTA*

The awareness of the symbolic violence constituted by the exclusion of women from festivities has grown in proportion to social, academic, political, and institutional interest. Current gender equality legislation obliges public administrations to work to remove obstacles to effective equality, and the feminist movement is influencing social awareness in this sense. In the Basque Country, public institutions have valued the contribution of anthropology in advising on public policies for equal rights and in relation to *fiestas*. A first report commissioned by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (Farapi S.L. 2009) confirmed that what happened in the Bidasoa *Alardes* was not an isolated case and that festive rituals were not the only object of analysis; rather the whole organisational structure of the *fiesta* was subject to review.¹⁴ Throughout the province of Gipuzkoa, women's participation in festivities – in terms of quantity, quality, significance, and value – was found to be inferior to men's, not only in the most emblematic or cultural activities but at all levels of festival organisation. As a result, as women were barely represented or totally absent from the organisational bodies, they had no decision-making power to influence their participation in any way.

In this sense, one of the principal elements of organisation was found to be the gastronomic societies, predominantly male eating clubs that restrict the membership of women, and so also their participation in the *fiestas* themselves (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Hernando Collazos & Erro Jaurego & Sanz de Pablo 2010). In Tolosa, for example, mediation work was necessary to get some of these societies to open up to women and share the responsibility in organisation (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021). Since then, work in this town council has been constant and referential: in 2010 it was the first town to create a permanent 'festival observatory', and in 2015 the *Guide to Promote More Egalitarian Festivities* was published (Farapi Koop. 2015), based on a participatory process carried out in the town. Another exemplary case is that of Antzuola (in the province of Gipuzkoa), which between 2006 and 2009 carried out a participatory process to revitalise

its Moor's Alarde festival.¹⁵ Through participatory democracy, the figure of the Moor was dignified, his speeches were adapted, the scenery was enriched, and the participation of women and young people increased (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021).

The symbiosis between ethnographic practice, feminist activism, and public politics is worthy of note, as is the interdisciplinary nature of research in the fields of anthropology, journalism, literature, and law (Moreno Marquez & Kerexeta Erro 2006), a combination of researchers from feminist and social collectives and academia (Guilló Arakistain 2016), and the types of material produced for popular and educational purposes (Ballester 2011; Gràcia i Pérez 2018), as well as for use by local authorities and festival committees (Farapi Koop. 2015). Over the past decades, much of this research has been showcased at numerous conferences and seminars.¹⁶ We call this triangulation of the academic, political (women's movements and protest), and institutional spheres 'implicated anthropology': an anthropology for equality, with citizens, and with the support of public workers and institutions, and the political representatives.¹⁷ Finally, the recent incorporation of a gendered perspective in intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2014, 2015) has brought with it a growing interest in women's performance, production, and participation (in the framework of the Spanish National Plan for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage), as well as an interest in rethinking the patriarchal nature of heritage and the need for a paradigm shift in understanding it (Arrieta Urtizbera 2017; Jiménez-Esquinas 2016; 2020; Rostagnol 2015).

ADDRESSING THE TENSION BETWEEN VINDICATIONS AND CUSTOMS: STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

The progress made in effecting change throughout the Spanish territories, yet the persistence of the conflict in relation to the Bidaosa *Alardes*, led to a request from the Basque Parliament in 2018, channelled through the Basque Institute for Women (Emakunde) for a study on successful processes of change in order to identify strategies to promote women's participation (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021). Our report focuses on inspiring cases, examples of the positive transformation of festivals, covering a variety of processes with an impact on different types of festive rituals, as well as changes in the organisational structures and festive programmes.¹⁸

We distinguished different types of processes aimed at achieving greater equality between women and men in the festive sphere. The processes vary, depending, on the one hand, on the main elements or agents that set them in

motion and, on the other, on the social climate (more or less receptive to change, more or less conflictive). In relation to the agents of change, we found processes promoted by women, feminist collectives, festival committees or local people in general, as well as processes led by public institutions such as local councils (especially the technical staff of equality), often in collaboration or with the support of institutes for women or the ombuds-person. In almost all cases, we note the constant and courageous work of specific individuals (generally women) prepared to take the first steps.

Indeed, one of the conclusions in this regard is that the involvement of public institutions is crucial to ensure that processes do not stall or conflicts escalate. In this sense, the commitment of institutions to equality is fundamental: processes can be amiable and more or less consensual, smooth, and gradual, or more vindictive and controversial, depending on how the institutions position themselves (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019). The creation of spaces for dialogue and the search for consensus is the key to progress in any process of change.

Another result of our study (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021) is the comparison and classification of strategies that we will summarily present here (we refer to the report for details and concrete examples):

Progressive changes and consensus strategies: when citizens gradually introduce changes in their *fiestas*, which then evolve in step with changing social circumstances and values of society. These processes include more democratic planning, organisation and participation in the *fiestas*, generational changes, and changes in the perception of gender roles. Change often happens in this case because women demand to participate, learn to dance, sing, parade or play an instrument and join festive organisations.

Vindictory or demand-making strategies: where women, women's groups, collectives or associations created ad hoc undertake forms of protest or creative activities to draw attention to the problem and demand a solution. These protest or political strategies can take the form of campaigns to raise awareness (stickers, posters, banners, leaflets, badges, etc.), surveys, press conferences, the use of media and social networks, demonstrations, and all kinds of actions in the public space (rallies, performances, party disruptions, etc.). Also, conferences and meetings on the subject of equality in the *fiesta* and the creation of networks of solidarity and mutual support between women and feminist groups from different towns and cities.

Dialogue and mediation strategies: possibly as a follow-up to the previous two, where an entity (specialising in conflict resolution or equality), the town council or an expert (in folklore, history, or anthropology) intercedes to mediate between the conflicting parties.

The *legal and judicial strategies* have been analysed in detail in any article by Montesinos Llinares (2019), where we see processes that have contributed to the development of legislation in terms of cultural equality. Although important legal exceptions and limits in the practical application of the sentences persist (Montesinos & Bullen 2021), the judicial route usually supports the demands for equality.

Creative strategies stand out as an area of effervescence in the transformation of the *fiesta*, particularly in relation to the conception and representations of gender roles and the construction of gender itself. Among the most recurrent are, firstly, the creation of new female figures or costumes (that can lead the way but also cause segregation) or the suppression of sexist figures. Secondly, the creation of new activities to feature women, or when there is a refusal to incorporate them, the creation of an alternative or parallel festival (a controversial issue). In recent years, these creative strategies tend to focus directly on creating mixed spaces or challenging the binary roles assigned to women and men, in a kind of transgressive 'play'.

Strategies that seek parity, equity or equality in the entities organising the festivals, in decision-making spaces and in all types of activities in the festive programme (sports, cultural, gastronomic, main events, etc.). These include the family and work balance, distribution of tasks and making housework more visible and valued.

We have also highlighted *strategies for intervention in the communication, discourses, and images of festivals*, to avoid the reproduction of sexist stereotypes in texts, songs, and images and to promote the appearance of women in the images and coverage of festivals.

Although beyond the scope of the report, we also mention *strategies for eradicating violence against women*: awareness-raising of the need to take urgent measures so that women can enjoy the festivities in freedom and without fear of being assaulted, a fundamental step to achieve real equality in *fiestas*. There are countless initiatives in this sense in the festivals of the Basque Country and other territories of the State (Gisbert & Rius-Ulldemolins 2019).

Finally, we highlight the *institutional strategies* to value the role of public institutions and authorities to promote equality in the *fiesta*. Here we identified different kinds of actions; many of them come from popular motions mentioned above, which are later recognised and institutionalised: measures for the prevention of violence against women; staff training in equality; the promotion and funding of research (gender diagnoses); the awarding of prizes in recognition of actions in favour of equality, and all the work that has to do with local ordinances, equality plans, and legislative development.¹⁹

If we contemplate the strategies as a whole, we can identify different areas of intervention: 1) the principal characters or participants who take part in

the most visible and significant rituals of the festivities: dances, processions, parades, etc.; 2) the festive programme: sports, musical performances, competitions, dinners and lunches, open-air dances, etc.; 3) the associations or other entities that organise the festival and have decision-making power: *comparsas* (troupes), *cuadrillas* (groups of friends), societies, dance groups, etc.; 4) the images, figures, and graphic or textual representations of the festival: famous or symbolic characters, festive programmes, posters, videos, song lyrics, etc.; 5) aggression and male violence during local festivals.

The key to change in most of the cases studied has been feminist awareness among citizens (both women and men), technical and political staff and the entities organising the festivals; the mobilisation of groups of feminists or specific people in favour of equality in the festival; institutional resources and the legislative framework for equality; the collaboration of all the agents and the accompaniment of experts or people who lead participatory processes. These factors, in coordination, dialogue or discussion (without ignoring moments of conflict) have allowed progress to be made continually towards democratisation and equality in the *fiestas*. These processes of change that involve different agents and entities are ongoing; advances are made, resistance is met with, sometimes conflicts arise, but there is always a lesson to be learned.

CONCLUSIONS

We hope that this overview of studies of local festivities in Spain from a gender perspective, and the comparative analysis of the processes in place throughout the country, will contribute to making visible a relatively recent field of study of increasing interest and relevance in both theory and practice. The issue of women's participation in festive rituals and the questioning of gender roles represented and reproduced in a large part of the Spanish festive cycle is a topical issue that has re-emerged after the hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic (2020–2021).

In historical terms, we have observed the change in women's role in Spanish society from mother, wife, object, fetish or totem, to worker, student, professional and active participant in social life and festive activity. In the *fiesta*, we have plotted the diversification of roles from mere spectator, costume maker, and cook or beauty queen and cheerleader, to an active figure in different guises. These changes have not always been smooth, and there are many cases of resistance and even conflict, such as in the case of the *Alardes* of the Bidasoa area. The persistence of exclusion and violence against women raises the need to recognise and repair this historical discrimination, a reparation that can

be obtained at the symbolic and social level through full integration on equal terms in the organisation and celebration of *fiestas*.

As we have shown, events on the ground have prompted an increase in ethnographic studies and anthropological research. Feminist protest has instigated local authorities to take measures to guarantee equal participation for all and eradicate sexist practices. Again, the reluctance to do so, in some cases, reveals the persistence of a gender system that reproduces binary roles and perpetuates power and privilege for certain men and the women who support them. Adopting the sex/gender system as our theoretical framework permits a complex analysis of the interrelated elements that function to maintain a gendered social stratification both in everyday life and in the extraordinary experience of the *fiesta*: it challenges the classical division of the social and symbolic realms, revealing festive ritual to be connected to political and economic concerns and the constraints of the social structure.

Finally, festive organisations with a feminist perspective have shown, at least in the cases studied, that they are permeable to other types of social claims related to different forms of discrimination (such as LGBTI+ issues or racism, to name but two) and that also contribute to achieving equality and the democratisation of festivities, customs, and traditions. In addition, the initiative of feminist groups – with more or less support from local authorities – has proven to be both crucial and creative in the development of multiple strategies for the reworking of the outdated and sexist models of the *fiesta* in Spain and the Basque Country. We are convinced that their vindications will continue to bring about change.

NOTES

¹ Spain refers to the Spanish State, a geopolitical entity with a centralised government in Madrid and devolved governments in 17 autonomous communities, some of which demand greater – or total – independence from the state. Our research focuses mainly on the Basque Country, but we have incorporated other case studies and ongoing processes in other territories into the comparative analysis.

² We will use the term *fiesta* synonymously with ‘festival’ or ‘festivities’: local *fiestas* celebrated annually in every town, village, and neighbourhood, often in honour of a patron saint or a virgin. It is usual to find a central event, which we call ‘festive ritual’, of a ceremonial or ritualistic – and possibly Catholic – nature (parades, processions, dances, theatrical performances) with music, specific dress, and the participation of the public (Douglass 1991; Homobono Martínez 2004). Furthermore, these cultural programmes receive public funding and the logistical support of the local and regional governments. In addition to their cultural and symbolic significance, particularly in terms of the projection of local and even national identities, the economic importance of *fiestas* should not be underestimated, especially in those that have become a tourist attraction.

- ³ Called ‘woman-as-object’ or ‘woman-fetish’ by Bullen & Egido (2003) in the case of the *cantineras* of the Bidasoa *Alardes*; this concept is also used by Verónica Gisbert i Gracia (2010a, 2015) to qualify the ‘favourites’ (companions) of the captains in the parades of Moors and Christians of Alcoi. Verónica Gisbert i Gracia & Joaquim Rius-Ulldemolins (2020) qualify as ‘festive totem’ the figure of the *fallera* in the *Fallas* de Valencia. This festival, celebrated in mid-March, revolves around the creation, exhibition and burning of floats called *fallas*. A young woman is chosen to represent each float, and one is elected to be ‘queen of the *Fallas*’: she is the *fallera mayor*.
- ⁴ The *Alardes* are military-style parades that commemorate the militia bound by oath to defend the border area against attack. In the cases in hand, they celebrate the military victories won over the armies of French and Navarrese troops in the 16th and 17th centuries. These annual rituals also appear as a religious act of thanksgiving to Saint Martial (Irun) or the Virgin of Guadalupe (Hondarribia) for their help in battle.
- ⁵ This and other of the most conflictive and entrenched cases – which we will not go into here for reasons of space – have been recently analysed by Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro (2019) and Montesinos Llinares (2019). This latest report expounds the judicial processes and the jurisprudence that has been generated around them and delves into the legal debate around equality at *fiestas*, also treated in Alcaraz Ramos 2015; Burzaco Samper 2006; Lekuona 2006; Marín López 2000; Montesinos & Bullen 2021; Rey Martínez 2000; and Saborido Sánchez 2011.
- ⁶ To learn more about the development of feminist anthropology in the Basque Country see Sergidou 2019.
- ⁷ The *Maskarada* is a ritual performance and dance of the winter festive cycle, each year organised and enacted in the neighbouring villages by the youth of one of the villages of the French Basque region of Zuberoa. The troupe is divided between a raucous bunch of male players (labelled *beltzak* ‘the blacks’ for their gypsy origins and clothes) who lend comic relief to a more serious mixed group of male and female skilled, agile dancers (*gorriak* ‘the reds’). The reaction to an all-female *Maskarada*, organised in the 1990s, revealed the symbolically codified male domain of the *beltzak* as the anathema of the model of femininity prevalent in the valley.
- ⁸ The plethora of festivals of *Moros y Cristianos* has been studied both in Spain and other parts of the world (Albert-Llorca & González Alcantud 2003) and from a gendered perspective specifically in Alcoi, province of Alicante, where the longest-standing and most prestigious version of this *fiesta* has met with the greatest resistance to the inclusion of women (Gisbert i Gracia 2010a; 2010b; Gisbert i Gràcia 2011).
- ⁹ Despite its interest, there is no anthropological research from a gendered point of view about the *cofradías* and Holy Week processions in Spain, although there are gender studies of a historical and juridical nature (Saborido Sánchez 2011; Sánchez Domínguez 2003) and an account of the women members involved in the struggle for equality (Botí Espinosa 2018). Several cases have been recorded in recent reports (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019), though a more in-depth analysis is required.
- ¹⁰ In the festivals of Moors and Christians in Petrer, a group of women presented themselves for the parade in the outfits of one of the units or *esquadra* of *negros* (‘black people’, characterised as wild), hiding their female identity (Heuzé 2003); in the *Tamborrada* of Donostia / San Sebastián, the women of the cultural society Kresala invented the figure of the *aguadora* (‘water carrier’) in order to gain access to the festival (Moral 2014).

- ¹¹ Although the tradition of folklore studies in Spain has remained separate from the institutionalisation of social and cultural anthropology, in practice, both approaches are complementary and the dialogue between them could be as fruitful as in other countries and traditions (see Díaz Viana 2022; Velasco Maillo 1990).
- ¹² Farapi (2009) tackles different cases in Gipuzkoa (Basque Country): *tamborradas* ('drum festivals') and *comparsas* ('troupes') of *Caldereros* in different towns, dances, and gastronomic activities. Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro (2019) analyse the gender dimension in 30 intangible cultural manifestations declared Assets of Cultural Interest and a little more in depth nine processes of incorporation of women in different festivities around the state. Among those not yet mentioned, the following stand out: the *Festa de la Mare de Déu de la Salut* of Algemesí (Valencia), the Dances of Belinchón (Cuenca), the *Fiesta del voto* in Santa Ana la Real (Huelva), the Leonese wrestling (León), the *Misteri d'Elx* (Alicante) and the *Volantes* of Valcarlos (Navarra).
- ¹³ UNESCO itself has taken a slight conceptual turn in this regard, speaking more and more of a living and evolving intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003, 2014), although it is necessary to insist more on this idea after decades of a rather static view that has overvalued whatever is old and 'unaltered' (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019).
- ¹⁴ With this research, the applied anthropology consultancy Farapi Koop. opened a path of work and collaboration with public institutions on gender policies in which countless entities throughout the State currently participate.
- ¹⁵ It is a mix between an *Alarde* (military-style parade) and a representation of the festival of Moors and Christians. In Antzuola the supposed defeat of the Caliph Abd al-Rahman III in the year 920 is staged.
- ¹⁶ For example, Fonèvol – an association for the promotion of the participation of women in the Moors and Christians *fiestas* of Alcoi – has held a one-day conference every two years since 2004; other conferences have been held at the universities of Alicante (2005), Seville (2010) and the Basque Country (2018) or by the *Women Cofrades* and *Women Costaleras* and *Portapasos* (who carry the *pasos* with the images on their shoulders) in different cities of Spain, also since 2004 (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021: 147). Recently, the Department of Culture of the Government of Catalonia has begun to organise training sessions for the staff of municipalities and other public institutions, to promote change, avoid conflicts and also recognise the contribution of women to cultural heritage (Jiménez-Esquinas 2021).
- ¹⁷ Another piece of evidence of this is the creation in March 2019 of the Observatory for Gender Equality in Culture by the Spanish Ministry for Culture and Sport.
- ¹⁸ The nine cases analysed are: the festivities around the *Virgen Blanca* in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the *fiesta* of San Juan in Amurrio, the Carnival of Llodio, the 'Great Week' of Bilbao, the *Dantzari-dantza* of Berriz, the *Marijesiak* of Gernika, the *Tamborrada* of Donostia / San Sebastián, the Moor's *Alarde* of Antzuola and the Carnival and the *fiesta* of San Juan in Tolosa.
- ¹⁹ Noteworthy, for example, are the articles included in the Basque Equality Law, which expressly prohibit the subsidising of *fiestas* in which women are excluded or discriminated against; or that political representatives participate in them.

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