

Carnival Performance, Gender and Ritual Heterodoxy

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Lan hau irizpide estetiko aldakorrek aztertzen ditu, bai eta horien tokiko interpretazioa ere Zuberoako antzerki folklorikoan. Pirinioetako Frantziako alderdian dagoen euskal ibar horretako dantza tradizionala ikertzen du lan honek, bai eta ezagutarazten hango biztanleek beren dantzak interpretatzen duten modua ere, zeren eta dantza horiek gizonaren eta emakumearen artean gaur egun diren bereizketa sozialetariko batzuk erakusten baitituzte.

Giltz-Hitzak: Pirinioak. Jeneroa. Ihauteria. Dantza.

Este trabajo se centra en los cambiantes criterios estéticos y en la interpretación local del teatro folklórico en Zuberoa, valle vasco en la vertiente francesa de los Pirineos. En él se analiza la danza tradicional en los carnavales y se revela la forma en que la población local interpreta sus danzas ya que estas danzas contienen muestras de las distinciones sociales actuales entre hombre y mujer.

Palabras Clave: Pirineo. Género. Carnaval. Danza.

Ce travail est axé sur les critères esthétiques changeants et sur l'interprétation locale du théâtre folklorique en Soule, vallée basque sur le versant français des Pyrénées. On y analyse la danse traditionnelle dans les carnivals et on y révèle la façon dont la population locale interprète ses danses puisque que ces danses contiennent des exemples des distinctions sociales actuelles entre homme et femme.

Mots Clés: Pyrénées. Genre. Carnaval. Danse.

INTRODUCTION

From June 1991 to May 1993 I conducted research on two kinds of theatrical performance which take place in Soule (French) or Zuberoa (Basque), a Pyrenean valley on the French side of the Basque Country¹. Historical examination indicates that these two forms of folk dramaturgy have been taking place in the area for at least two centuries (Hérelle 1925; Garamendi 1991). Looking at the external aesthetic elements, as well as at the internal logic of these two types of performance, we can see that one is closely related to rural European Carnival celebrations, whereas the other can be identified as embodying a locally structured version of a geographically and culturally much wider and extended festive genre, that which presents “Moor and Christian” ritual battles. These two kinds of theatrical performance are respectively known in local speech as *Maskaradak* and *Pastoralak*.

Significantly enough, the organisation and public enactment of both Carnival and “Moor and Christian” performances unfolded in the social scene of the valley in two ways: first, as well-defined “times” and “spaces” (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1977, 1984) which were differently “framed” (Goffman 1974; Bateson 1972; Handelman 1977) from those of the routine of everyday life (Falassi 1987); and, second, within which specific social networks and cultural patterns made themselves “visible”, “audible” or “imaginable” (Anderson 1983; Cohen 1974, 1993; Cohen 1982). The entire process of cultural production, included its setting and its very last “staging” yielding the “performance” itself (Tambiah 1981; Turner 1974, 1982, 1982, ed.; Morgan & Brask 1988) were altogether presented before the audience, and understood by insiders and outsiders alike, as being the highest and most intricate display of the **Basque-Souletin performative arts, traditions and folklore**.

Before entering the main issues of this paper, however, a keynote must be emphasised: namely, a brief historical overview shows that the rural Basque Souletin society has undergone a substantial change during this century, shared with most of the rural Pyrenean and other rural European peoples, but specially with those called ‘mountain economy peasant communities’. Such a change has effected a significant crisis in several domains of local life and group identity, principally reflected in the disarticulation of household and village-oriented economic, religious, cultural and political life (Bidart 1977; López Adán 1978; Xarriton 1978). This crucial change has been the decrease in the use of the Basque language as a vehicle of communication, mainly amongst the youth (SIADKO 1978), and a notorious decrease in the performance of folk theatre (Fourquet 1987; Guilcher 1984; Lauburu 1987). These changes point to a moment of crisis within Basque cultural identity.

1. Fieldwork research was supported with grants provided by several bodies at different stages. The Central Research Fund of the University of London, as well as the Angel de Apraiz Scholarship provided by the Sociedad de Estudios Vascos – Eusko Ikaskuntza contributed to basic fieldwork expenses. A Research Fellowship, first, at the Centre des Reserches Sociologiques of the Universit de Pau et du Pays de l’Adour, and second, at the Department of Anthropology of the London School of Economics, granted by the Department of Scientific Policy of the Basque Government has allowed me to further refine early written versions of the results of my research.

Both fieldwork data and elementary historical exploration indicate that during the last two decades there has occurred, within several villages of the valley, a conscious attempt to bring back 'traditional' and 'folkloric' Carnival and "Moor and Christian" theatre plays. The aim of renewed interest in these types of performances has been a rearticulation of community and village-oriented relationships². However, along with this process of 'community-remaking', the former aesthetic conceptions and arrangements of the Souletin folk theatre have been 'reformulated'. In this sense, we must take into consideration the former picture, in order to grasp a deeper understanding of what it means to perform Maskaradak and Pastoralak in Zuberoa today. And it is against this overall background, therefore, that the ethnographic account offered in this essay must be read.

As stated in the Abstract, this essay, will reflect on the changing aesthetic criteria and local interpretation of folk theatre in Zuberoa. And in particular it will focus on one of the many meaningful aspects of the Maskarada performances: traditional dancing³. At the same time attention will be paid to how locals interpret their dancing in carnival performances as it connects with current male/female social distinctions.

On the whole, Pyrenean dances pattern a highly structured, as well as restricted, "male" domain of aesthetic achievement and social experience. This also applies to the Maskarada carnival performances of the French Basque valley of Soule, which implies, as I am going to argue throughout the following lines, that approaching contemporary Zuberoan carnival performances leads us to a number of issues which echo changing gender categories and notions. Consequently, this paper aims at describing the leading social and cultural schemes by which local audiences have come to discuss and judge a series of recent novelties which clearly reflect on the relationships between society, gender categorisations and the ritualised expression of these.

THE VALLEY OF SOULE OR ZUBEROA

The valley of Soule constitutes the easternmost Basque speaking geographic area. It represents eight-hundred and seven square kilometres which are crossed by the Uhaitza river⁴. In Zuberoa there are thirty-five villages or *communes*, out of which twenty-eight are considered to be "moun-

2. Fourquet (1987) and Fdez. de Larrinoa (1993b: 111-131) provide ethnographic and sociological backdrops for two respectively separate cases of folklore revitalisation in Soule.

3. The Pastoralak plays also involve the performance of a series of dances traditionally enacted by male dancers called *satanak* ("devils"). Much of what we are going to discuss in the following lines on the changing evaluation of the Maskarada dances similarly applies to the *satanak* of the Pastoralak dramas.

4. See *Geografía de Euskal Herria: Laburdi, Benabarra, Zuberoa*, vol. V, Editorial Luis Aranburu, 1980.

tain” villages. Around fifteen-thousand people live in this valley⁵. Forty per cent of this population make their living mostly from farming and business directly related to agriculture production. About twenty-five per cent are occupied in industrial jobs⁶. On the whole, Zuberoa represents an overall rural Pyrenean landscape.

Social organisation in this valley is characterised by a system and a net of social relationships which has been constructed upon the centrality of the *etxea*, i.e., the “household”. The peculiarities of this type of rural social organisation have been largely studied either by French scholars under the term of “*la maison pirenaïque*”, or by Spanish anthropologists and historians under the expression “*la casa pirenaica*”⁷.

Most of the anthropological and historical work produced in the Basque language tends to use the vernacular nomenclature *baserría*. The literature written about the rural Basque society does not separate from the Pyrenean mainstream: thus, Barandiaran (1972), Caro Baroja (1944, 1971), and Douglass (1969, 1975) have submitted detailed ethnographic accounts of the rural Basque society in the Spanish area; specific examination of the Basque house in the French side is provided by Veyrin (1955), Lauburu (1974); specifically within the valley of Soule proper, there is the ethnography supplied by Ott (1981), who provides an analysis of the distinctive social practices and cultural regulations which structure local life in the village of Santa Engrazi, a village in the highlands facing the Spanish Navarra border.

ON MARGINALITIES AT THE PYRENEAN PEASANT ORGANISATION

In the past, four ethnographic themes have been approached by both historians and anthropologists in studying the main sociological issues characteristic of the rural Pyrenean society. These are: (1) the valley, (2) the house, (3) the neighbourhood, and (4) the kinds of patterned relationships between neighbours. This simplification must not be understood as though scholars had studied the Pyrenean house isolated from wider processes and structures, that is to say, outside the area’s own history. In this respect, the works of Caro Baroja (1948, 1968, 1974), Arpal (1979) and Terradas (1980), for instance, are pertinent.

In terms of centre-periphery (or hegemonic-marginal) webs of social relationships, three structured spheres can be seen. First of all, over time there

5. For more detailed information see *Tableaux Demographiques du Pays Basque 1851-1990*, ADEPAB, Bayonne, France, February 1991; and the journal of the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* (INSEE), Paris, France, 1991.

6. See *Observatoire Economic de la Soule*, 1990, 1991, 1992, Maule, France.

7. To cite a couple of the many collective works edited on the Pyrenean social structure and rural organisation, see *Los Pirineos: estudios de Antropología Social e Historia*, Coloquio Hispano-Frances, Madrid 1986; and *Actas del Congreso de la Familia Pirenaica*, Andorra, 1991.

has been a great marginalization of the rural valley in terms of its economic, cultural and political agency, as a result of the dynamics of the formation of the nation-state (López Adán 1977, 1978; Xarriton 1978; Bidart 1977). Second, there is a specific positional group marginality in terms of the traditional –male– structure of authority: on the one hand, there is a marginality associated with the social status of the *segundón*, a low-esteemed social category in the labour and rank division within the household, as well as in the village-wide relations (Arpal 1979); and on the other hand, there is a marginality attached to the youth of the village as a group (Fdez. de Larrinoa 1993a, 1994a). And third, there is a specific positional and structural weakness which is also expressed in terms of gender categorisations (del Valle 1985; Lekunberri 1991; Valverde 1993; Aguergaray 1992, Fourquet 1987). It is to this type of marginality that I am going to briefly refer below.

It has been emphasised that the totality of the Pyrenean social model and nets of local relations rely on a notion of house *endurance* and its *continuity* over time, which is represented through empirical practices, as well as in symbolic and cognitive procedures. On the one hand, there is an significant inheritance strategy which consists: first, of a single heir inheriting property; and second, the immutability of the household⁸.

In rural Pyrenean peasantry, household inheritance, formal transmission of authority within the domestic group and marriage happen almost simultaneously. This implies a three-fold significant action rather than of three separate occurrences. These different simultaneous acts demarcate a rite of passage wherein the locally important notions of household *continuity* and *endurance* are dramatised. In this respect the works of Bourdieu (1962, 1972) on the peasant and linguistically Occitan Bearn, an area neighbouring Soule, are particularly representative. In these writings, he stressed that not only does the Pyrenean heir symbolise the empirical continuity of the house, but also the continuity of the local peasant community as a whole. In other words, the marriage of the heir is a main political concern in the local life of the area. The structural position of the heir, which is most often embodied by a young male of the domestic group, is an important one. This point merits further commentary.

The rules guiding the election of an heir for the continuity of the household, differ subtly according to their specific application in each valley. In some areas, it is the primogenitor, whether male or female, who is chosen as the heir; in other places, it is the oldest son who inherits; in other, preference will be given to whoever the older couple considers to be the most suitable of the possible heirs. Whatever the procedure for elections, the fact is that most heirs are male, which means that most marriages are virilocal. This circumstance means that masculinity is *structurally* privileged in rural

8. Studies on the legal institutionalisation of these practices in the Basque speaking area can be found in Adrián Celaya (1992), Labayen (1975), and Lafourcade & Etcheverry-Ainchart (1979).

Basque society, as well as in the remaining areas of the Pyrenean mountains. Two ethnographic examples studied by Valverde (1993) and Medio Cachafeiro (1986) illustrate how such a structural masculinity is still dominant even in those places and cases where female heirs are recognised, i.e., where either the norm of strict primogeniture prevails or there is no male descentance in the domestic group.

The emphasis on masculinity in the enactment of structural reproduction and continuity radically contrasts with the dramatisation of continuity within the cosmological and cognitive realms of social experience, for here women and femininity perform and personify the central roles. Several authors have addressed the latter point: thus, Ortiz-Osés (1978) has analysed from a Jungian perspective, the overall femininity inherent in Basque mythology⁹; from an understanding of myth based on the theories of Malinowski, del Valle et al. (1985) have approached the social paradoxes and consequences of such a stress on the centrality of women within the ideological realm; Barandiaran (1972), Douglass (1969), Duvert (1992) have shown the pivotal role of the women of the domestic groups in the ritualisation of the spiritual links between the defunct members of the domestic group and the household and the living persons; Aretxaga (1988) has studied the symbolic connections and parallels between the centrally important participation in funeral activity of women in both rural society and in the politically radical nationalist community.

In sum, ethnographic accounts and personal experience in the field depict women in a structurally weak position in rural Basque society, all the while being strongly located within the ideological system. The contradiction presented by these two circumstances is expressed and resisted by the protagonists themselves in several contexts and realms of social interrelation. One of these is that women tend to not marry farmers, a fact which has resulted in that a significant number of households do not have descendants, and others have become empty and abandoned (del Valle 1985; Díez, Mauleón & Goñi 1992; Lekunberri 1991; Fdez. de Larrinoa 1993c).

In this sense, a number of relevant socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances reveal that a view of rural Zuberoan society from a perspective that takes into account gender distinctions and experiences confirms the following two-fold social scene: at the same time that women have deserted the household and its traditional social organisation, their involvement in traditional –public, outdoor– forms of cultural expression, such as ritualistic theatre and drama, is one of **increasing participation**.

9. This strongly female-centred mytho-poetic has been approached in Pyrenean areas and valleys other than Basque. See, for instance, Gratacos (1987).

THE MASKARADA CARNIVAL PERFORMANCE: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ITS MORPHOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

The Souletin Mascarades imply a complex of performing arts mainly carried out by young, generally unmarried men, who mask their faces, disguise their bodies, dance, recite grotesque and coarse speeches, and chant poetry, while visiting neighbouring villages of the valley. Consequently, the study of the aesthetics involved in a Maskarada performance is not an easy enterprise, because a number of circumstances occur at once. Yet, regarding the verbal and visual imagery disclosed, two main points must be emphasised: on the one hand, images of prestige, authority and power appear “intensified” before an audience; on the other, there is a playful, grotesque and ironic exhibition of images which are usually taken from the everyday life and which are also drawn in such a way that they come to depict a rather deviant scene of the quotidian.

In the same way, regarding the morphology and inner logic disclosed with a Maskarada performance, two characteristics can be noted: (1) intensification of hierarchical, authoritative political meaning; and (2) joyful enactment of insurgent cultural images or subversive social and political meaning. In other words, both the *heightening* and the *transgression* of cultural categories and social behaviour are portrayed throughout the Zuberoan Maskarada.

Similarly, in terms of bodily expressed and patterned action, a clear distinction has to be made between the performers. On the one hand, there are the *dantza* (“dancing”) movements of the *gorriak* (“the red team”): and on the other hand, there are the *basa* (“rude”, “wild”, “never tamed”) movements of the *beltzak* (“the black team”). As several scholars have already pointed out (Heréllé 1925, Caro Baroja 1965, Fourquet 1987, Garamendi 1991), these two kinds of body utterance are to be seen as mutually opposite. Thus, on the one side, it is the members of the red team, the *gorriak*, who came to dramatise “intensification of meaning” by means of their activities, which are mainly conducted through dancing; on the other side, it is the members of the black team, the *beltzak*, who display “subversion of meaning”, primarily through their obscenities, unrefined speeches, and the enactment of uncontrolled bodily movements.

Several smaller groups compose the *gorriak*, the red assembly of the Maskarada. A glance at their positioning in the opening up of the pageantry offers us the following sequence: first, and most important of all (in terms of ritualised activity and expertise), are the *aitzindariak* or “the dancers” proper which is a team composed of five characters named *entseinaria*, *txerreroa*, *zamalzaina*, *kantiniarsa*, and *gatuzaina*; second there are the *jauna eta anderea* (“the lord and the lady”); third, the *laboraria eta laborarisa*

("the male farmer and the female farmer"); after these, in the fourth position, the marexalak ("the horseshoers") proceed; and finally, there are the kukuileroak ("the jesters")¹⁰.

Composition of the *Gorriak*, the "red team" of the mascarada

- 1) Aitzindariak (or "the dancers" proper which is a team composed of five characters)

Entseinaria
Txerreroa
Zamalzaina
Kantiniersa
Gatuzaina

- 2) Jauna eta Anderea ("the lord and the lady")
- 3) Laboraria eta Laborarisa ("the male farmer and the female farmer")
- 4) Marexalak ("the horseshoers")
- 5) Kukuileroak ("the jesters")

Women's participation in the Maskarada involved the following roles and followed a chronological sequence:

Early 1980's:

Anderea ("the lady"), *Laborarisa* ("the female farmer") and *kantiniersa*

Late 1980's:

Txerreroa and other *aitzindariak*

Early 1990's:

All the roles of the *gorriak* or "red team" and all the members of the *beltzak* or "black team"

Together with the members of the black team, these characters perform a series of well structured activities which are arranged in two main parts: one happens in the morning, and the other develops during the afternoon. During the morning, a sort of "street theatre" takes place, where a number of households, as well as the authorities of the visited village are greeted and honoured. After lunch, which is provided by the host villagers, the Maskarada players move into the *plaza* in order to enact a diversity of patterned

10. Specific studies on the meaning of the names, disguises, symbols, colours and projected images of these personages of the red team are found in Herelle (1925), Caro Baroja (1965), Garamendi (1991), Truffaut (1998).

sketches, and both in the morning and in the afternoon, the guest dancers are required to perform lengthy and intricate dances¹¹.

I mentioned above that in the past the Maskarada of Soule had been a male enterprise. I would like to describe the main social and cultural schemes by which local audiences have come to discuss and judge a series of recent modifications to the rituals. These clearly reflect on the relationships between society, gender categorisation and ritualised expression.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NEW PERFORMERS

Although some of the characters dramatised in the Maskarada are specifically female, their players, as a rule, have been male. Female enrolment into the Maskarada is a new occurrence, and it is the outcome of a gradual process. We can distinguish three stages in this incorporation which occurred in the early 1980's, the late 1980's, and the early 1990's.

First, women's involvement in ritual in the early 1980's was explicitly constrained by the three roles defined as female within the ritual. These are the following: *kantiniersa* ("the female water-bearer"), *anderea* ("the lady"), and *laborarisa* ("the female farmer"). Femaleness is designated in language use¹² and aesthetic clothing.

In terms of their ceremonial design, it is interesting to note that out of these three roles, the *kantiniersa* requires more extensive dance proficiency, as well as lengthier showings than *anderea* and *laborarisa*. Besides, the latter remain calmer, occasionally coming into the centre of the performance. Unlike "kantiniersa", "anderea" and "laborarisa" do not demand persistent training in order to achieve a qualified performance, because their role in the ritual is largely static.

Second, when women first reached the field of ritual drama as actual players in the early 1980's, they held the more passive roles of *anderea* and *laborarisa*, ritual roles which evoke (at least in terms of clothing) femaleness. It was later that women come to perform the more important dancing role of *kantiniersa*. This innovation did not come about without local resistance and debate. Controversy reached its peak in 1987, when a woman was assigned to perform the role of the *txerrero* dancer in the Maskarada organised by the youth of the village of Muskildi. The enactment of the *aitzindariak* role by women became the subject of debate. At the same time, the roles of *laborarisa* and *anderea*, also played by women, were not very much discussed.

11. Historical perspectives, as well as an analysis of the types of dances, and steps and melodies employed in each of them are given in Alford (1952) and Guilcher (1984).

12. In Basque the suffix *-sa*, or *-tsa*, indicates femaleness. For instance, *alarguna*: (male) widow; *alarguntsa*: (female) widow.

A third change in the rituals ensued in 1992 when it came to public knowledge that the village of Eskiula was ready to assemble a Maskarada performed *exclusively* by women. This meant that the movements of the two groups, the *gorriak* and the *beltzak*, were enacted by female actors. In the late 1980's, the participation of women dancers in the (respected and noble) team of the *gorriak* was widely commented upon. The Maskarada of Eskiula fuelled local debate about the correctness of women within the "black team". Thus, women acting out the (ignoble) wild movements and crude speech of the "black team", was considered "improper" and "ugly" (*itsusia*). As already stated, the analysis of the black team of the Maskarada is outside the scope of this essay. What I would like to describe here is the way local people weighed and expressed the cultural content, and meaning, of their dances, once the gender of the actors also changed.

The gender alterations which occurred within the Zuberoan ritual carnival during the 1980's and the 1990's, led locals to a series of distinct responses: on the one hand, while changes in period "1" (early 1980's) were widely accepted (or at least, not greatly opposed), those changes that happened during periods "2" (late 1980's) and "3" (early 1990's) led to open resistance. In addition, clashes ensued between the older dominant interpretation of the ritual and its practical enactment by female performers. In order to describe this debate, I will consider, first, the nature of the "dominant logic", and second, the presumptions which such a system of interpretation draw upon.

"From the native's point of view", not only was it claimed that the bodily virtuous movements of the *aitzindariak* dancers, and those violent movements of the fiery *beltzak* (the black team), were mutually antagonist, but also that quality of both kinds of movements created a set of purposes and significances that restrictively belonged to a male sphere of ritual action.

Data collected during fieldwork suggest that: firstly, women's participation in Carnival performance had become a standard feature during the 1980's and early 1990's; and secondly, that the male experts of Zuberoan dance held several degrees of acceptance or disapproval of female dancers. Thus, some men expressed the opinion that "because the times have changed and women have taken over new roles in current society, the Maskarada too should echo these facts". There also was, however, a view, which an informant argued as follows:

"that the lady and the female farmer be performed by women? OK, I accept it; that the "water-bearer" dancer be a woman? umm... um, I might agree; that the "txerrero" dancer be a woman? there is no way I can permit it; we cannot go farther away, for the Maskarada is, above all, a male event, and accordingly, it must be executed, no doubt, only by men".

It is this radical statement which I would like to further comment upon. Dancing in the valley of Soule is a social phenomenon that, in terms of both actors and audiences, observes precise cultural patterns (especially with regard to the presumption that the *aitzindariak* dancers must have an explicit

body stereotype). Consequently, the *entseinaria* dancer must be tall and energetic. The *txerrero* dancer must have an athletic, robust and very strong body. The *zamalzain* dancer must, besides having the same attributes of the *txerrero* dancer, be a good-looking person. The *gatuzaina* dancer is not required to show a specific body stereotype, distinguishable from the other dancers, although “he” must similarly be strong, and should be able to substitute any of the others, if such a situation occurred. And finally, the *kantiniersa* dancer can possess the lowest dance skills of the group and show a rather effeminate face.

Another aspect related to Carnival dances of Zuberoa is that two dancers (for example, two *zamalzain* dancers) will not interpret the *zamalzain* dance in the same way. Moreover, dancers are regarded as shaping their dances in their own peculiar way. In this sense, it is considered that, while interpreting the same dance, a dancer will express “vigorousness”, whereas another may display “quickness”. Dancers of the *aitzindariak* group will be selected according to (1) physical complexion (*zalhetaizuna*), (2) technical expertise (*zankhaldia*), and (3) quality of bodily expression (*prestantza* or *farsa*).

Because of their capability for metaphorical expression, Zuberoan dances and dancers are vehicles for social communication. But, what do they communicate? In *emic* terms, they enact a public dramatisation of a notion of “strength”: a dancer must be *azkarra* (“physically strong”). It is this argument which supported the disapproval of female dancers in Carnival celebration and festivity.

When asking older and younger, retired and active, male and female dancers about the differences in expressiveness between men and women as dancers, they all agreed that there was a key distinction:

“Through dance, men express strength, endurance; women depict refinement, charm, grace, elegance; and a Maskarada dancer must show strength. They [women] dance nicely, but it does not produce the same feeling as when a man dances”.

It was this reasoning which supported the explanations about presence or absence of women in the Maskarada performances of the 1980’s and 1990’s. *Laborarisa* and *anderea* need neither have a strong dance background nor dance much, so that their enactment by women did not affect the local view of “dramatising strength”. The role of *kantiniersa* brought about a paradox. On one hand, the dancer enacting this part had been traditionally considered as the less skilful of the group, as well having been chosen partly because of his effeminate face. On the other hand, the role was supposed to express “stamina”. Consequently, a female *kantiniersa* could be accepted because “her” lack of strength could be seen as a reflection of the lower competence required of this role, as well as its physical relatedness to femaleness. But, because of expressing refinement, “she” could also be rejected. Both arguments were expressed when the first “female” *kantiniersa* dancers appeared in the early 1980’s.

In 1987, the village of Muskildi organised a Maskarada by means of which women's presence in carnival performance graduated into the role of the *txerrero* dancer. If the arguments espoused to explain the paradox posed by women interpreting the *kantiniersa* role had seemed contradictory, arguments given to challenge the performance of the *txerrero* role by a woman, were much more radical. It was argued that the two main elements which validate the very task of a *txerrero* dancer are: on the one hand, the effect of the bodily utterance; and on the other hand, the aesthetic ornaments displayed. In other words, it was argued that the local audience would evaluate the job of the *txerrero* dancer with regard to how physical strength would come to be dramatised. Also, it was argued that several elements of the costume stood for "masculinity", particularly a set of bells hanging over the waist and the lower leg of the dancer. Consequently, "authenticity" and "accuracy" were the key notions within the criticism which arose when the Maskarada of Muskildi took place. That is to say, it was claimed that a woman performing *txerrero* dance was in itself a contradiction, i.e. illogical.

In addition to the bodily images and projections considered above, there were also provided other kinds of explanations in order to deny (or to object to) the appropriateness of women amongst the *aitzindariak* dancers. One argument said as follows:

"Women quit dancing earlier than men, because they get married younger than men, and consequently, they stay a long time inside the house looking after the house and the children, so that they exercise less, and therefore their body changes, becomes wider, not apt for ceremonial performance".

Besides these emphatic statements against the accuracy of female dancers in the Maskarada of Soule, one thing has become obvious: today, there are more female than male dancers. If we now compare this transformation in the realm of festive behaviour with the on-going changes which have taken place in the realm of everyday life, already referred to, it becomes apparent that whereas everyday circumstances can be considered as women's "desertion" from the social organisation, the former situation must be categorised as a women's "intrusion" into the field of male-defined aesthetic activities. And because the latter is a case in which women have "invaded" a field of ceremonial expression beforehand delimited as male-oriented, I will refer to it as *ritual heterodoxy*.

MALE RESISTANCE TO THE PUBLIC ENACTMENT OF NEWLY 'GENDERED' MEANINGS

In order to better measure the social context within which these significant changes and heterodoxy of the Zuberoan carnival performances have occurred, we must first consider social circumstances broader than local discourse on bodily expression or metaphorical communication. At least, two issues must be examined.

First, during the 1950's and 1960's a "semantic displacement" affected the social practice of local dance-events and other local activities understood to be "traditional". This shift reformulated the attitude of many male youth and elder toward village-oriented festive behaviour and ceremonies, including Zuberoan dances.

Many informants agreed that it was during the 1950's and 1960's when the impact of modern French urban models in local life was experienced. Leisure and sports were two domains of social intercourse where significant changes occurred. On the one hand, rugby and football teams together with their respective official training and competitions became fashionable amongst school children and the male youth. On the other hand, indoor balls and discotheques took over from the customary outdoor dancing of the village.

On a different plane, shortly before that time, World War II had left a large number of the young men dead, and as a result an important number of dancers disappeared. At this time too, a large number of people left their villages in search of jobs in urban areas, which implied that already apt or promising dancers were no longer available.

Also, the periodically returning migrants, television, radio, schools and the improvement in transport infra-structures brought about other social and cultural models. Urban, "modern" and French ideas caused traditional dancing to be considered passé.

Whether men left their villages to work somewhere else, or they quit dancing to play rugby or football, they left behind, emptied, a meaningfully festive framework. The transfer from one type of activity to another caused traditional dancing to almost become obsolete. Therefore, it is in relation to this wider social background that women took over a field of festive activity that had been previously abandoned by the male when they adopted to "modern" domains of activities (discos and rugby). As a result, the new incorporation of "femaleness" into the Maskarada performances instigated two changes in local society: (1) non-migrant youth considered it more appealing to play rugby or football than to join the dance groups of their villages, so that they abandoned the field of traditional dance; and (2) women entered traditional dance once they discovered it was open to them.

These socio-demographic changes depict the extent to which male views and understandings have been challenged by women. Three questions arise: (1) Did a new set of meanings confront the "traditional"?; Did women control the process of festive organisation?; and (3) Did they actually generate a set of new cultural meanings?

In order to contextualise these issues, I am going to comment on two other aspects of the ritual: one relates to the politics of the "distribution" of the performers according to their gender; the other reflects on the "recategorisation" of what female bodies represent and broadcast as *aitzindariak* dan-

cers. Both these reveal that a sort of male resistance to women's participation has somehow emerged.

First of all, entitling women to perform dance roles in the Maskarada was considered to be the lesser of the evils. Because of the lack of male dancers, the participation of women became a solution to keep the representations of carnival performances alive. Nonetheless, it is significant that there was a tendency to gather female dancers together within a separate, quasi-autonomous *kantiniersa* group. This suggests that, in spite of the large number of female dancers, their supremacy was not reflected in the composition of the *aitzindariak* group. Rather, it appears as though they become segregated from it. Thus, it is quite common to see an *aitzindariak* team composed by one *entseinaria* (a male dancer), one *txerroa* (a male dancer), one *zamalzaina* (a male dancer), one *gatzaina* (a male dancer), and three female *kantiniersa* dancers. Another arrangement is also possible: one *entseinaria* (a male dancer), one *txerroa* (a male dancer), one *zamalzaina* (a male dancer), one *gatzaina* (a male dancer), and one *kantiniersa* (a male dancer); and, a second group of dancers composed by five female *kantiniersa* (as was observed in the village of Altzuku in 1992).

Second, together with the proclivity to divide the performers of the dances in terms of gender, new interpretative arguments are presented when local people are asked about the persistency in public performance of some *txerrero* or *zamalzain* "female" dancers. Thus, there is a recent argument which says that these particular female dancers are *erdi-potiko* ("half-boy"), meaning that their body strongly resembles masculinity. That is to say, a sort of *restoration of (male) meaning* over the bodily expression enacted by women dancers has developed.

Both this aesthetic resistance in the arrangements of the *aitzindariak* dancers and the resistance to female-centred meaning, raise the question of whether the later Maskarada performances have become *arenas* (Turner 1974) where shifting conceptions of *hegemonic masculinities* (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1993, ed.) are at stake. Women (I briefly described above) entered the realm of public performance once men left it almost empty. Yet we can further contextualise such a transfer. When looking at the ethnography, social and cultural, of the valley of Soule, an anthropologist familiar with issues of socio-historical change will realise that a radical change in the formulation and the articulation of the social relations in the valley began to take place during the first half of the present century. This change can be phrased in terms of moving from "tradition" to "modernity": namely, from village-, valley-, peasant-, Basque- and economically self-sufficient-oriented relationships to state-, citizen-, French- and market-defined economy and relationships.

It has been argued that in traditional societies the expression of social order and the reproduction of the structures of authority is accomplished by means of ritual (illocutory) force (Block 1989). The point here is whether in traditional Zuberoan society ritual action in carnival time, and particularly the expression of the control of *indarra*, are indicating a *privileged locus* (Sahlins

1976) where specific classificatory criteria impose themselves on a whole cultural system. At the same time, do particular social agents achieve, express, reproduce and legitimise their prominent status? Also, the question arises as to what extent such a (traditional) locus has been displaced.

Within the traditional functioning of local relationships, carnival dancing express both **strength** and **authority** in a very precise period of time, these three being mutually supportive. It seems that now men have chosen to dramatise the category of strength within the realm of *urban* leisure, *week-end* and nationwide organised competitions such as rugby or football; and have abandoned the realm of *peasant* dance and local festivity. Also, it seems that the political potential of carnival enactment has substantially weakened, and stronger and much more specialised structures have taken over. That is to say, new symbolic and practical structures through which power and authority are more effectively exercised, have materialised. We do not have to see in this that carnival in Soule has lost all its political potential vis-a-vis the institutionalised, officialised "realm of politics", but that the amplitude of its efficacy has diminished significantly. And this is one of the reasons which partly explains why male resistance to the creation of female-centred meanings continues to exist, despite the fact that most men have left the area of ritual dancing. Political activity and achieving authority through participation in the traditional dimension has become rather restricted and marginal.

THE MASKARADA OF SOULE: FROM RITUAL TO PERFORMANCE (CONCLUDING WORDS)

Throughout the previous pages I have tried to show that the ethnography of traditional dancing in Zuberoa speaks of replacement and wider articulation, of a transition from a liminal context to a liminoid one (Turner 1977, 1982). Therefore, this essay favours a theoretical approach which put emphasis on the need to move *from ritual theory to performance studies*.

One of the first scholars who approached the Maskarada of Soule wrote the following about the Pyrenean dances of carnival time:

Without one shadow of doubt here is the ancient Spring rite faithfully carried out each year by the modern Carnival Community of Arles-sur-Tech. A brief account of the rite which appears in a hundred guises, all tattered and torn confused by duplication, accretions, misunderstandings, yet still very recognisable, may be useful here for we shall happen upon it along our mountain route. Founded primarily on dread of hunger it is made up of magical doings by means of which helpless man sought to control the forces of Nature. Things old and weak must be done away with, things new and strong must take their place. The well-being of everything was bound up with the kingship, and the king was but the pettiest of chiefs once. He bore hill all important burden for a space of time only. When sings of age appeared or after a cycle of years, or even after one royal year, he disappeared to give place to another younger and stronger, and therefore more magical in fertilising powers. The King is dead, long life the King, and growth,

warmth and fecundity continue as before. Often it seems –and this takes the belief into far distant ages– the real victim was a Divine being, man or animal, impersonated by the human King, which may help to explain the ineradicable seasonal doings dependent on make beast, hobby-horses, deer, bulls, goats, bears. The basic idea –get rid of last year’s weakening forces, replace them with forces renewed and fresh, that with them may increase the force of humans in the village, beasts in the corral, vegetation everywhere– is one of the foundations of primitive man’s make-up, and has lasted longer than most of his barbarous philosophy (Alford, 1937:19-20)¹³.

The influence of the dominant evolutionist paradigm of the end of the nineteenth-century is unmistakable, particularly the ideas of Frazer on homeopathic magic. Nevertheless, I would like to further argue that this extract takes us to a cardinal sequence of symbolic associations between life and death, carnival symbolism and notions of fertility and fecundity. It is also of prime interest that earth or land fecundity and fertility are usually presented as characteristically “female”.

Obsolete evolutionist approaches to European folklore are not, however, the only theories which connect land fertility and femaleness. Contemporary research concerning ritual or ritualised public behaviour carried out by symbolic anthropologists has also addressed the means by which these metaphoric correlations are expressed throughout ritual behaviour. These writings also posit a link between land and femaleness (Bloch 1985, Lan 1985, Valeri 1985, Geertz 1980).

Even though most ethnographies written on the basis of the latter argument belong to African and South Asian societies, some anthropologists have suggested a similar approach to peasant European celebrations. Pina-Cabral (1987), for instance, has made an attempt to explore how explanations of ritual grounded in non-Western ethnographic data operate within a rural European context. Pina-Cabral’s argument has applied Bloch’s analysis of ritual to what he termed “[Alto Minho] society’s view of its relationship with the earth” (Pina-Cabral 1987). Following upon Bloch’s (1985) examination of circumcision ritual practices of the Merina of Madagascar, Pina-Cabral has suggested that, just as in these rituals, Moor and Christian ritual performances of Northern Portugal too express authoritative images of the world, and construct legitimising ideologies by absorbing female positive and vigorous values, vital in the process of biological and social reproduction.

On the whole, these kinds of cognitive approaches to the study of ritual and religious ceremonials have stressed that ritual creates social order and resolves the paradoxes and contradictions manifested in the everyday life of the members of a given society (Kertzer 1988). If we now examine the Zube-roan ethnographic account given above in light of this understanding of ritual, two issues emerge. First, from the native’s current point of view, ritual dan-

13. Though rephrased, we encounter the same argument in an article entirely committed to explain the Basque Mascarade of Soule (Alford 1928).

cing at the Maskarada is not associated with the manipulation of land fertility, but instead characterises and plays with a notion of “strength” (*indarra*). And second, such stress in the creation of official statements and knowledge about the nature of the world hardly contributes to the explanation of processes of change in cultural meaning, which is the case in Soule. These statements bring us to the consideration that both centrifugal and centripetal forces are at play during the enactment of the Maskarada.

Following upon the former line of discussion, we might speculate on the extent to which the Maskarada conveys an inner process of ideological construction similar to that which happens in a significant number of non-European societies. Thus, in African society performance rituals often consist of a dramatisation and symbolic representation of the human mastering of land and nature; what makes the Basque case different is that fertility is not the notion dealt with, but *indarra*, and the control of its public characterisation. Supporting this view is the work of Ott (1992) where she states: “[...] the proper acquisition and use of *indarra* are concerned with legitimacy, control, and socialized behaviour” (Ott 1992:193). And furthermore: “in the animal and vegetable kingdoms *indarra* is what makes all species grow” (Ibidem: 194). Furthermore, as I have gathered from informants, Carnival performance in areas such as South Italy or Croatia also displays personages who are supposed to characterise “strength”. It would then be worthwhile to compare various rural European carnival celebrations and question the kind of role a notion such as strength fulfils within these festivities at carnival time.

A second aspect relevant to the notion of *indarra* stems from a theoretical perspective which takes into account the work done on “metaphor” (Fernandez 1974, 1977, 1984; Sapir & Crocker, ed., 1977). Gell (1985), Ortner (1978), Schiefflin (1976), Spencer, ed., (1989), Blacking & Kealiiohomoku, ed., (1979) and Cowan (1991) have worked on dance-events in different cultural areas within this theoretical perspective. With regard to studies on the Basque Country, we find that the notion of *indarra* has been approached from several angles. Thus, Aguirre (1971) has explored it within the rural sports, contests and exhibitions; Del Valle (1985) has illustrated its centrality to socially dominant discourse; Fdez. de Larrinoa (1989, 1992a) has showed its metaphorical capability and its social references in the context of the migrant Basque communities settled in the American West; and Ott (1992) has depicted the complexity of the concept, as it relates to the centrality of the *etxea*, the household, and the perception of its continuity over time.

These ethnographies show that whether we analyse the category of *indarra* in relation to the inner development of the rituals or in relation to external, wider social processes, we find *tension* not only in meaning, but also in conspicuous attempts to restrict any spontaneous openness to reinterpretation. Dancing in the Maskarada of Zuberoa expresses this tension in a variety of ways. One is the dramatisation of the category of *indarra*. Another is the dramatisation of Basque identity.

I started this essay by asserting that a strong revitalisation movement has occurred within Zuberoan *Maskaradak* and *Pastoralak* during the last two decades. Also, I stated that this festival revitalisation has developed in a moment of crisis within Basque cultural identity. Therefore, we might ask to what extent these two circumstances relate to one another.

First, this paper has described the socio-demographic background which caused a meaningful framework of cultural expression to be almost abandoned, and then, has described the tension between older meanings and newer meanings which ensued once women started to participate in ritual performance. But this paper, however, has not addressed *why* women decided to enter this field of cultural performance. This is an important question because performing Basque culture in public today has become as extremely political device in the process of community remaking. The research conducted by del Valle (1994), Heiberg (1989), Urla (1989) and McClancy (1989) in the Spanish Basque area describes this. To a great extent, this is also the case in Zuberoa. Nowadays *Maskaradak* are to be seen as performative acts where a public display of ethnic identity is perused.

As a result of women's newly central role in Zuberoan traditional dance, along with their increasing prominence in social life, they have become greatly responsible for the reproduction and continuity of Basque ethnic identity. When the issue of ethnic reproduction and identity requires active participation on the part of the members of the social group, it is women who take the time to do so. For example, when the local Basque language radio station and other cultural Basque associations organise performing events, it is women who prepare the food and participate in dances. Thus, within a primarily French area, the few Basque cultural spaces created are largely dominated by women. Furthermore, it has been observed that it is women who now teach ritual dancing to the new generation.

In sum, traditional dancing in Zuberoa goes beyond the physical boundaries within which the Maskarada performance takes place, for more than aesthetically produced foot steps and bodily movement are staged. It is a whole community of people with their all limitations and potentialities which is upon the stage¹⁴.

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