

MASKS, PERFORMANCE AND TRADITION: LOCAL IDENTITIES AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

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Winter mask performances are an important cultural tradition in Northeastern Portugal. In Carnival, a particular kind of mask performance – Caretos – makes quite impressive appearances in Podence, a rural parish of Trás-os-Montes. In the context of the transformation that Portugal has undergone in the last decades, the semantic fields of these performances – presently rescued from their announced decline – have been greatly enlarged. They are now strongly connected to contemporary realities and characterized by multiple interpretations, which often provide the public stage for the affirmation and negotiation of local identities in post-rural Portugal. Drawing on the specific features of Podence's Caretos, the article discusses the cultural landscapes that emerge from these post-modern entanglements and transformations within folk culture.

In October 2003, I was contacted by a cultural association called *Grupo de Caretos de Podence* in one of the communities where I had carried out fieldwork and asked to write a short text about the local carnival tradition.¹ Masked characters called *Caretos* are at the center of this carnival display.² The text was for a commemorative plaque to celebrate the inauguration of a building – the *Casa do Careto*. After some hesitation, I decided to accept the invitation.

The opening of the *Casa do Careto* took place during the 2004 carnival period and was attended by members of local and regional authorities as well as by government officials,

¹ The *Grupo de Caretos de Podence* is a non-profit cultural association that was set up on April 2002 to manage the group of *Caretos* as well as the *Casa do Careto*. It's run by António Carneiro (President), Diamantino Rodrigues (Vice-President), Vítor Ranção (Treasurer) and Joaquim Viegas (committee member). Podence is a rural parish from Trás-os-Montes, located on the border between *Terra Quente* (literally "hot land") and *Terra Fria* (literally "cold land"). In administrative terms, the parish belongs to the Macedo de Cavaleiros municipality and to the Bragança District.

² *Careto* is the regional term for a masked person. It is difficult to determine where the word comes from although it could be connected with the word "careta," which means a facial expression akin to a grimace aimed whether at frightening people or then making them laugh. "Careta" also often denotes a clown's face or a mime's antics. In Trás-os-Montes, the word is also associated with the regional "caranchona," a terrifying mask, as well as a character who plays the part of the devil in certain festivals.

media representatives, and tourist agents. The president of the association, one of the main interlocutors in my fieldwork, had asked me for a text describing the carnival performance that I had been observing for some years.³ After several exchanges of emails, I became aware that my interlocutors wanted to emphasize certain parts of the text while passing over others. The following is the final version we agreed on:

Breaking winter's long silence each year as if emerging secretly and unpredictably from the nooks and crannies of Podence come a-whistling the *Caretos* with the frenzied clattering of *chocalhos* [cow-bells, rattles] that hang from the colorful sides of their thick clothing. It's Carnival... and time is suspended by masked men just as smoked sausages are suspended by the fireplace, and a free-and-easy time of laughter and excess is proclaimed just as the inevitably recurring end is also proclaimed. The following year everything will happen randomly again with *Caretos* and their *chocalhadas* vigorously hitting the bolder young girls or then the deliberately inattentive women and laughing though nostalgic old women. Carnival is a stage for the fertile imagination of memory in Podence as well as a popular art form filled with trails to discover, as many as can be explored by those imagining them and they arise from a present-day aspiration. It was the aspiration to construct a heritage and create culture in the present that brought forth the *Casa do Careto*. May your door open onto the street... which is where the "Caretos" most certainly live.

I will return to this text later. At this point I want to mention an idea advanced by Maureen Mahon in an article entitled "The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers." She writes: "Indeed, people who historically have been marginalized from institutional power create self-representations of their groups – both idealized and accurate – to counter widely disseminated negative images, the absence of images, and images produced by outsiders (including anthropologists)" (Mahon 2000: 470). This is a doubly interesting idea when seen in the context of the theme of this special volume, "The Politics of Folk Culture".⁴ On the one hand, the history of folk culture representations is clearly the history of continuous marginalizations or, at least, a history in which folk culture is constructed according to polarized models of elite vs. popular and high vs. low culture. On the other hand, Portugueseness, whether within Portugal's territorial limits or outside them, also appears on the margins of wider cultural and geopolitical contexts.

³ I have conducted fieldwork in Podence between 1998 to 2002, in several stays amounting to a total of one year.

⁴ I would like to thank João Leal for his helpful comments and suggestions on this paper presented in the conference on "The Politics of Folk Culture" (Lisbon, 12-13 March 2004).

Maureen Mahon (2000) introduces another idea that I believe serves as a “visible evidence” of what I want to argue in this text. She says that,

Anthropologists suggest that this process of subverting and rewriting dominant images [of folk culture] is ‘an important dimension of self-production’ (...) can be ‘a key means of proclaiming cultural difference’, and may even play a ‘pivotal role in the formation and maintenance of social protest’ (...). Of course, these productions are the work of specific members of the group, and scholars must take into account which members have control over the means of cultural production and how this relates to internal power relations (id.: 470-1).

My main purpose is to reflect on the way a folk tradition – a winter mask performance called *Caretos* – has undergone a process of revival and re-semanticization, a process that can be viewed as a paradoxical anachronism. In fact, folk traditions such as the one I am interested in, despite being viewed by some as opposed to “modernity,” have become potent symbols of contemporary identity. However, it is important to investigate who is behind this kind of *folk ideology* through which specific performances are selected and recognized as official traditions.

Within the context of the changes that have taken place in Portugal in the last decades, the semantic field of folk cultural performances emerges as increasingly wide. The different audiences and types of performances resulting from the impact of globalization have widened the range of meanings inserted into these folk events. Tourists, the media and regional political disputes together with the participation of intellectual and artistic urban elites in the production of popular culture have definitively placed these “local traditions” or “little traditions” into settings of other scales – whether regional, national or global.

Portrait of a performance on a local scale: constructing a map of a tradition

One of the most important writers in twentieth-century neo-realist Portuguese literature is Miguel Torga (1907-1995). Born in Trás-os-Montes (literally “beyond the mountains”), the region where these masked performances take place, he describes his homeland in the following way:

I’m going to tell you about a Marvelous Kingdom. Although many people may say the opposite, there have always been and always will be wonderful kingdoms in this world. What you need in order to see them are eyes that have never lost their initial chasteness when faced with reality, and then the heart will not waver. Now, what I would like to show is that this Kingdom, which

belongs to me and to all those who want to deserve it, not only exists but is among the most beautiful that can be imagined. For a start, it's located at the top of Portugal just as nests are on top of trees so that the distance makes them more impossible and enticing (Torga 1950 [1986]: 23).

Trás-os-Montes is a region that is often described as the most inland and primeval of Portugal. Mainly agricultural, it's also the region in continental Portugal that has suffered the most from population loss and migratory exodus. Miguel Torga calls it a "marvelous kingdom" suspended in time. Yet his own life is an example of the *Trasmontano* migratory trend. He left for Brazil at the age of fifteen and on his return to Portugal he chose to live in the university town of Coimbra. His portrait of this "marvelous kingdom" is a depiction of rural life in rapid transformation. Northeastern Portugal is presented as a place open to the world and in one of Torga's most famous aphorisms one can precisely find that singular vision of those high and rugged lands: "The universal is the local without walls."

The village in this story, Podence, is located in the "marvelous kingdom" of Trás-os-Montes. Apart from having inspired major Portuguese writers, Trás-os-Montes has also been an "anthropological field" par excellence. Some aspects of its cultural life, such as agrarian collectivism, rural archaism or folk religion, have thus become the topic of several ethnographic investigations.

The universe of *Caretos* and other winter mask performances has earned a privileged place amongst these ethnographic accounts.⁵ Ethnographers, from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1970s, have described these winter mask performances as an old tradition involving young, mainly single, men getting together in colorful ragged clothes, hiding their faces behind leather, metal, wooden or tin masks, "harassing" the women, mainly the unmarried ones, and running and shouting through the village streets. The *Caretos*, occurring throughout many areas of Northeastern Portugal, were also linked in these ethnographies to a wider group of folk festivals that took place between Christmas and New Year to Carnival. *Caretos* and other similar characters were often interpreted as central figures in rituals of male initiation and seasonal celebrations of sexuality and fertility associated with agricultural rituals of regeneration. Finally, they were connected to figures such as the Devil or Death. Protected by the obscure forces emanating from their masks and costumes, the *Caretos* were given the leeway to behave in the strangest of ways.

Viewed as important cultural traditions of the recent past, these winter masked performances were thus the object of focused ethnographic attention. They were always viewed within an interpretive framework that transformed them into survivals and ruins of a remote and prestigious past. This emphasis on the past was structurally linked to the more or less generalized prediction of their disappearance as a result of modernization. Let us look at a few examples of this interpretive framework.⁶

Sebastião Pessanha, an ethnographer from the 1940s and the first scholar ever to collect masks from Trás-os-Montes (which he later donated to the National Museum of Ethnology in Lisbon), wondered about the supposed origin of these masks in the following terms:

Some authors say that [their origin] should be attributed to the fact that the Devil often appeared among the key figures of religious drama in the Middle Ages. Others attribute it to the centuries-old survival of some terrifying characters who, at winter's solstice, used to run through the villages and fields to expel the spirits who didn't want the sun to rise, or who opposed the triumph of light and of earth's fertility. (...) A *Careto* is always the Devil, even if he hides his face behind a mask that is not at all demonic (Pessanha 1960: 552-52).

According to the folklorist Azinhal Abelho, who wrote in an ethnographic journal published by an *Estado Novo* government department,

These masks and masked figures belong to joyful festivities in which young people participate (...) [These festivities] are like euphoric fairs with feigned parodies and fake fights between boys and girls who take advantage of the situation to come into physical contact. (...). Another important aspect is the agrarian nature of these festivities. Among the *Transmontanos*, a rural people by definition, ancient customs are preserved and will continue until worn away by the influence of urban life (Abelho, 1970, s/p).

In the 1960s, a team of ethnographers led by Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira traveled again to Trás-os-Montes in order to collect more masks for the National Museum of Ethnology. In the aftermath of these investigations one of the members of the team, Benjamin Pereira, wrote in his important book on the topic that these masked characters were magical figures “to whom

⁵ These ethnographies include: Francisco Manuel Alves (1934), Sebastião Pessanha (1960), Azinhal Abelho (1970), Benjamin Pereira (1973).

⁶ Besides the examples given in the paper, several other intellectuals and artists have investigated the *Caretos* tradition: in 1976 Noémia Delgado directed a documentary film on the topic; between 1980 and 1990 groups of Anthropology students from Universidade Nova de Lisboa have also researched the ritual; the ethnomusicology of the the ritual has been studied by the *Grupo de Etnografia e Folclore da Academia de Coimbra* (GEFAC) and the folk music group *Brigada Vitor Jara*; finally, the *Caretos* masks have also been researched by the professional theatre group *Meia Preta*, directed by André Gago and Filipe Crawford.

the greatest wildernesses and eccentricities were allowed” (Pereira 1973: 136). Given the importance of the work of Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, the members of the *Caretos de Podence* cultural association decided to quote one of his texts in a booklet whose main purpose was to authenticate and promote these performances:

Among cyclical festivals originating in the agrarian world, Carnival is the one which is both more complex and richer in aspects and meanings. Carnival possibly derives from the Roman saturnalias and for centuries has assimilated practices of very diversified origins. The celebration is basically one of authorized excess and, in some cases, it is also characterized by the presence of masks and masked figures.⁷

These ethnographic texts were essential to what, following Richard Handler (1988), can be termed the objectification of the *Caretos* ritual, that is, the transformation of a ritual strongly connected to a local cultural and social context into a specimen of rural cultural heritage as defined by urban scholars. In so doing, Portuguese ethnographers fascinated by the *Caretos* “have transformed [it] into [a] discrete thing [...] to be studied, catalogued, and displayed” (id.: 77) in an intellectual context completely different from the original one.

In her book, *In Search of Authenticity* (1997), Regina Bendix developed a comparative analysis of the role of authenticity within the folklore studies, arguing that the search for the authenticity of tradition has always been linked with feelings of loss inherent to modernization. The new intellectual context in which the *Caretos* ritual has been recreated by ethnographers is strongly dependent on ideas of authenticity. In the case of *Caretos*, as in other cases, folk traditions are viewed as tokens of an unaltered, stable and longed-for “lost world,” part of a body of knowledge and system of values handed down from generation to generation, often orally, in language, art, customs and, above all, in rituals and festivals.

What is at stake in the folkloristic study of this ancient and unique heritage is the desire to “preserve” its integrity and authenticity which are seen as threatened by modernization. In this “disappearing world” paradigm, the ethnographer sees himself as the last guardian of “folklore,” which implicitly means that the folk groups under observation are unable of carrying out the memory of their own traditions. For this reason, ethnographers are eventually transformed into the most qualified experts on the authenticity of folk culture.

⁷ “E.V. de Oliveira, Carnaval” quoted in the brochure of the *Associação de Melhoramentos, Festas e Feiras de Podence – Caretos de Podence* (The Association for Improvements, Festivals and Fairs of Podence – Caretos de Podence).

The task that these ethnographers strove to do, especially from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, was to reconstruct the authentic cultural past embodied in these folk traditions, either threatened by extinction or already lost, through a fragmented selection of cultural performances (or other aspects of the life of social groups). For this reason as well, the ability to establish criteria for authenticity has been increasingly ascribed to ethnographers, who emphasize ideas of continuity, replication and repetition and emphatically reject any innovation that could threaten “tradition.” Phenomena such as the commodification of the past and cultural heritage, tourism and the media coverage are thus thought to be causes of disruption and degradation of cultural authenticity.

Identity refraction: processes of re-semantization of tradition and cultural reimagining

The perspective developed by contemporary anthropology on these processes of revitalization and changes of cultural tradition is strongly distinct from this “disappearing world” paradigm. The notion of culture as a construction and a dynamic process (e.g. MacDonald 1997) demands a new interpretation of the facts and a new theoretical context for the analysis of folk tradition is required. Both Nestor García Canclini (1998 [1997]) and David Guss (2000) analyze recent movements that involve the “de-folklorization of traditional culture” by local activists who are seeking to regain control of the cultural means of production at a local and regional level, a process Canclini (1998 [1997]) calls the “participation paradigm.”

My research in Podence (1998-2002) is situated within these anthropological perspectives. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I suspected that I was witnessing another instance of the decline of a Portuguese rural tradition, destroyed by the inexorable advances of modernity. I also supposed that the revitalization of local traditions were anachronistic processes of folklorization, insufficiently grounded in the local social structure. In Portugal, the 1960s and 1970s were indeed characterized by a general process of decline in rural festivities caused, among other factors, by extensive emigration from the countryside, the decline and crisis of agriculture, and the colonial wars in Africa. However, in the context of the changes that have developed in the following decades, especially after the democratic revolution of 1974 and Portugal’s formal entrance into the European Union, the semantic field of these cultural performances has again been transformed. The text that I was asked to write on the *Caretos* tradition can best be understood within this context of revitalization and re-imagination of that cultural performance.

These processes of revitalization of rural festivals are the consequence of a number of more general changes. New economic conditions and changing value systems require new functional and semantic frameworks for rituals and festivals. In a classic essay written in the 1970s (*Trois Essais sur la Fête*, 1974), Marianne Mesnil suggests that declining rural festivals are often formally retrieved and transformed into displays, thus becoming objects for passive contemplation and visual consumption. The final result of such a process, as far as the general meaning of these festivals is concerned, is a “de-semanticization” (“désémantisation”) of such rituals. According to Mesnil, the text of the festival is turned into a story whose original meanings have either been forgotten or reinvented by the spectators and, in some case, even by the protagonists. These folklorized events are presented to new audiences, no longer confined to the local level, as celebrations of a mythical past of local, regional or ethnic groups. In the process these groups are transformed into mythical entities, as stable and safe collectives based on the allegedly ancient bonds of blood, history or territory. These re-invented festivals thus reflect an imagined “golden age” of community and social solidarity.

A revitalization of the *Caretos* tradition took place in Podence between 1981 and 1985 within the framework of the new cultural association, *Associação de Melhoramentos, Festas e Feiras* (“Association for Improvements, Festivals and Fairs of Podence”). The ritual had almost disappeared in the 1960s and 1970s. The first push towards its revitalization came from the documentary film, *Máscaras* (1976), directed by Noémia Delgado, a Portuguese director who worked for the state-owned television network RTP and filmed the few *Caretos* still remaining in Podence in the aftermath of the 1974 April Revolution. The film sought to portray a relatively unknown and isolated rural world and, through a highly politicized discourse, affirmed the genuineness of “folk culture.” Representative of the new documentary film movement that developed in Portugal after the revolution, the movie encouraged the local retrieval of the *Caretos* tradition. A ritual that seemed to be doomed by the conjoined impact of emigration, the colonial war and the crisis of agriculture was thus brought back to life.

The second push towards the recovery of the ritual came in 1985 through the creation of the Association. The realization that the *Caretos* festival and its associated auto-representation of local identity could translate into a set of material and symbolic gains for the local community has ironically led to the crystallization of tradition, to its transformation into a folkloristic product, and, obviously, to disputes for its control. The person who has proved

essential to the whole process is A. Carneiro, an educated member of the local landed elite. He worked as a bank manager in a nearby town and was member of an established family with long-standing connections to the local center-right *Partido Social Democrata*. His efforts and ability to bring people together, obviously due to his high profile in the community, have contributed to the growing importance of the *Grupo de Caretos de Podence*. In 1981, he founded the first association, whose board of directors included his uncle and father, then president of the *Junta de Freguesia* (parish council). In 1985, he suggested that a group of *Caretos* should be formed inside the association, and finally, in 2001, he launched the new association he now heads, the *Gupo de Caretos de Podence*.

Well-versed in the ways of local and regional politics, Carneiro raised funds and subsidies from different tourist organizations and from local, regional and national state departments. Having a ready access to new technologies and being fully aware of the importance of the media, he was able to launch the *Caretos* image in the press, magazines, schools, tourist agents and even on the Internet. Carneiro's adeptness in negotiating contracts, managing promotions and actively promoting the group underscores that anthropologists should pay attention to "which members [of the community] have control over cultural production means and how this relates to internal power relations" (Mahon 2000: 470-1).

What was once a festival with significant local meaning was turned into a cultural commodity, a local memory directed towards outsiders. The final result is a kind of *pastiche* that plays out within two different but overlapping arenas. One of the arenas of the *Caretos* festival is local and the group places a strong emphasis on the more "traditional" aspects of the ritual. The second arena is national and international as the group participates actively in various cultural events outside the village, both in Portugal and abroad. At the local level, the festival centers on what is (re)imagined as the ritual past of the performance. Besides the local population, its audience extends now to tourists, scholars, media and emigrants. Outside the village, the group, which adapts the details of its performance to its variously situated audiences, has become a valued folkloristic commodity. Through the revitalization of local culture, Carneiro has contributed to a reconfiguration of local identities and, paradoxically enough, also produced a re-semanticization and commodification of the ritual in arenas outside the village. The media and regional tourist institutions have contributed to this change in how the village represents itself. Instead of signs of cultural backwardness, "traditions" are now viewed as positive emblems of highly valued archaism and antiquity. Since 1985, Carneiro's

group function as “local cultural producers” (cf. Mahon 2000) and since the 1990s, a decade characterized by a significant move away from rural life, the *Caretos* ritual has dramatically changed in meaning, the contexts of its performance, and nature of its audiences.

The group's promotion material provides a chronology of this recent reframing of the festival and offers a justification for its transformation:

because these figures [the *Caretos*] are mysterious and fantastical, they have started to arouse a great deal of interest in their original cultural habitat, the village of Podence, and from there this popular tradition is beginning to spread to the outside world in large part due to television, radio and the written press, which have made the *Caretos* so popular today. [The *Caretos*] have also become known for their street performances and participation in other cultural displays and festivals all over Portugal, [as well as] abroad.⁸

On the *Caretos* web site created by the group's managers, the singularity of the performance is described in an English version for foreigners in the following terms:

Masked in fancy dress, the *Caretos* are the most enigmatic and seductive figures in Portugal. Although their natural habitat is the village of Podence, which is situated in Macedo de Cavaleiros, district of Bragança, they are in fact the main attraction in cultural festivities throughout the country and abroad. The *Caretos* are diabolic and mysterious figures ever since. They participate in festivities organized by farmers and seem to be an amalgam of profane, magical and religious elements, quite difficult to define. The masked men show strength and vitality and have become mythical and sacred symbols, which are quite out of control because they come from nowhere in large noisy groups, spreading terror, excitement and laughter. Most of their fascination is due to their curious garments and ornaments. The *Caretos* are undoubtedly a unique and fascinating experience not to be missed.

The way in which the *Caretos* describe themselves to both insiders and outsiders is extremely interesting. The expressions they use – “diabolic and mysterious figures”, “the most enigmatic and seductive figures in Portugal”, “an amalgam of profane, magical and religious elements, quite difficult to define”, “mythical and sacred symbols” – revisit the imagined rural primitive society. This magical and profane world fused with religious and sacred elements asserts the cultural legitimacy and authenticity of a traditional performance that brings to life the memory of the distant past of a community. We are again back to the

⁸ Text published in the brochure of the *Associação de Melhoramentos, Festas e Feiras de Podence – Caretos de Podence* (The Association for Improvements, Festivals and Fairs of Podence – Caretos de Podence), which its president, António Carneiro, gave me in 1998, when I was carrying out fieldwork there.

“marvelous world” that Torga talked about as well as witnessing the effects and echoes of successive ethnographic discourses on Trás-os-Montes and the *Caretos*.

Reimagining tradition on the World Wide Web

The *Caretos* tradition has a well-established virtual presence.⁹ The nature of the visitors coming to this supra-local arena reflect the transformations the ritual has undergone, both in its reimagining of the local community and the commodified resemanticization of tradition to the outside world.¹⁰

Two kinds of visitors visit the site: those without any ties to the community, both Portuguese or foreigners; and those who have or have had some connection with Podence, because they live nearby or because, despite living abroad or in other parts of the country, they still cherish their home-village.

Within the first category of visitors, people express an enjoyment of tradition as an ethical and identifying principle of all and every “true” community. As one visitor noted:

I would like to congratulate the person or people responsible for this excellent “Caretos de Podence”! It is really very successfully organized! Carry on this tradition and don’t let it disappear again!

Then there are the interesting cases of primary and secondary school teachers, or university students seeking information for their school work, thus reflecting the increasingly complex relationships between elite and folk culture, between countryside and the city, or between the center and the periphery:

We are preparing a paper for a Master’s degree on Curriculum and Culture in which we have focused on the “Caretos de Podence” tradition within the scope of the project we are involved in – MASCARARTE.

I am Transmontana and I really liked this site when I visited it. Because of a project I am currently doing for my fashion design course based on costumes from Bragança district, I would

⁹ The *Caretos* web page was conceived of by the president of the *Grupo de Caretos de Podence*, Carneiro, together with a friend, also from Podence. The page is called *Site Oficial dos Caretos de Podence* and is divided into several parts: “Origin” “Costume” “Rituals”, “Carnival”, “The Group”, “Short History of the Tradition”, “*Careto* House” “*Careto* Statues”, “2003 Carnival Photos”, “2003 Carnival Videos”, “Bibliographical References”, “Tours”, “Planned Performances”, “Abstract *in english [sic]*”, “Contacts” and “Visitors Book.” This page is linked up with another one in Podence village also organized by Carneiro and his friend.

¹⁰ There were two pages in fact. The first one no longer exists, and the current *Caretos* site is located at <<http://caretosdepodence.no.sapo.pt/>>. A list of *Caretos* tours can be found at the end of the text.

be grateful if you could tell me how I can have a copy of the [Careto] costume. You have done an excellent job with your site.

In the group of visitors connected to Podence, nostalgia for the past and the desire to strengthen cultural roots and links with the village of origin or with the Trás-os-Montes region blend with the acknowledgment of the importance of the revitalization of traditions. This nostalgia comes through in comments of many of these visitors:

Congratulations on the pages devoted to that ancient village of Podence and to the revitalization of the *Caretos* tradition. Reading those pages allowed me to return to my childhood and to the memories of my maternal roots in a humble and delightful place called Azibeiro that belongs to the Podence parish.

As a *Trasmontano* who has lived for many years outside the Marvellous Kingdom, I travel back whenever I can to my native land; I use to promenade there and speak to people I come across on my path; I listen to the cow-bells, breathe in the scent of heather, admire the rocks and cliffs, and, if it is Easter time, I even taste some Easter bread; I then return, intoxicated with a desire to go back. As I looked at this website, which I found by chance, I yearned for the carnivals of Podence, which I discovered on one of my trips seven years ago!

This site of the *Caretos* takes us to a magical, festive, mischievous, medieval and popular Trás-os-Montes.

A really remarkable case is that of an emigrant in Brazil who wrote:

This is an excellent site. I'm Brazilian and my father was a Podence *Careto*. I live in Brazil and some time ago my father and I we were able to look at this site together. I saw tears streaming down my father's cheeks with homesickness. Although I've never been to Portugal, my father used to tell me, laughing, of the devilish tricks of the *Caretos* and, thus, I was able to see in your site what the *Caretos* were all about. Unfortunately, God called my father to heaven in August 2002 and I never had the time to go with him to Portugal, but I thank the person who made this site because I was able to experience it with my father. My father was called A. de J. Morais, but he was known in Podence as Toninho Caixeiro, brother of H. S. Morais (who still lives in Podence) son of A. M. Morais and A. J. Morais.

Finally, there is a last group of visitors composed of the *Caretos* themselves who also write messages asserting their sense of belonging:

This site is very successful and I'm proud to be from Podence and a Careto!

Being a Careto is fantastic!!!...!!! Give it a try...

Some feminine voices can also be heard in the *Careto* web page:

I stumbled across your web page and it was a good surprise. I am *Transmontana*, of course, and I have been scared of the Podence *Caretos* ever since I can remember, but I do miss those days. Congratulations and carry on the work and never let this tradition come to an end.

Hello, I'm unmarried but I wouldn't like to be shaken up by *Caretos*!

Well done! The site depicts this ancient tradition very well! It is certainly something that should be seen at least once in a lifetime... But if you are a young single women ... see it from a distance! Love

The importance of this feminine presence must be emphasized. Not only is the word “careto” masculine, but the *Caretos* performance was also traditionally reserved for men and often interpreted in the ethnographic literature as a masculine rite of passage. However, as a result of recent changes in Portuguese society in gender identities and roles, the ritual is now more open to young girls and some even take part at the local performance of the ritual. However, the participation of young girls is never allowed outside the village where the traditional masculine image of the ritual continues to be strongly emphasized.

The *Caretos* web page with its diverse list of visitors projects the ritual to a far-flung audience. Ironically, it also illustrates the notion that tradition is better preserved if it is commodified. As in other cases, the search for roots ends up in the production of a virtual image, a simulacrum, a pastiche and the sales of replicas of the original costumes as well as other forms of merchandising connected to the *Caretos* have been increasing. The *Caretos* web page reflects this new trend: I would like to get a *Careto* and a carnival poster. What must I do?

By inventing and staging authenticity, “culture” has become one of the greatest assets of the tourist industry and of the media, as can be seen in magazines, publications and tourist brochures as well as in expensive illustrated books on local “festivals and traditions.” As Boissevain noted, “[local] communities have discovered themselves through the interest of tourists. This has encouraged reflection about their own traditions and culture and stimulated the preservation of moribund crafts and rituals” (Boissevain 1996: 7). This view of tradition is expressed on the *Caretos* web page:

Tradition and Origins

(...) Being a centuries-old tradition of Podence and a curious Carnival ritual, *Careto* (...) is the guarantee of a fantastic experience, unique for its charm and mystery. The *Caretos* of Podence display a centuries-old tradition from Trás-os-Montes that combines the profane, the magical and the religious, and whose origin is lost in time immemorial. In short, nobody knows when the *Caretos* first appeared but it's a fact that they will never disappear!!!

The control over tradition – the choice of facts, mode of performance, cultural sentiments – are informed by the discourse promoted by a specific component of the community in which Carneiro, his family and the Association obviously play a decisive role. It is important to emphasize both the temporal crystallization and the essentialization of culture that are prevalent in this discourse.

The ideology of folklore

If nation states are fundamental to modern territorial systems, that does not mean that every space has been “nationalized.” Similarly, the importance of current processes of globalization does not mean that everything has become “transnational.” In fact, just as in the past the nation was interpreted in terms of regional, ethnic and local sentiments, contemporary localities also create, and are created through new synergies that appeal to local understandings of globalization. The transformation of the Portuguese rural world in the last few decades is thus linked to efforts to situate “traditional” cultural performances within changing and much larger semantic fields. In this paper I have tried to analyze the trajectory of a cultural performance and the effects of the symbolic re-organization of its meanings and to propose ideas about the current reproduction and circulation of these “anthropological” symbols and rituals. One central strand of the argument concerns the way in which representations of folk culture produced by scholars, particularly anthropologists, and by local élites, isolate fragments of local popular culture and thereby pave the way both to the eventual emergence of identity politics at the local level and to the development of a burgeoning market centered upon the trade of “cultural authenticity.” The other focus is on the relevance of particular social movements of folklorization, composed of specific networks and agents, for the processes of reinterpretation and reinvention of “traditional” cultural practices.

Following David Guss (2000), I consider cultural performances to be cultural arenas where all the different forces within a given group face each other and bring together unity and singularity as well as diversity and controversy. Culture is thus viewed not only as a point

of collective social convergence but also as an area for confrontation that is always in progress.

There are, I think, several stages in this process of objectifying popular culture. The first phase was one of cultural rescue. Anthropologists and folklorists had the archaeological and somewhat necrophilic mission of finding the traces and vestiges, the survivals and the ruins of what had been declared a corpse – folk culture. Discourses of cultural essentialization and crystallization, coupled with ideas about the inevitable decline and final disappearance of folk culture were clearly dominant.

In the second phase, one can witness a revitalization of folk culture at the local level. Supported by the ethnographic texts produced in the first phase, which were abundantly used and quoted, this process re-imagined and re-invented what was once perceived as the dying body of traditional folk culture.

Finally, one can speak of a third phase, characterized by the national and global marketing of the ritual, in which the anthropologist is again asked to participate. It is in this context that I can understand the negotiation over my text for the inauguration of *Casa do Careto*. In that negotiation, the selection of interpretative content is already more in the hands of local agents and mediators than in those of specialists. Maybe that is why part of my text – vital in my opinion to explain the transformation processes experienced by the festival – was not accepted by my interlocutors. All I can do is to at least evoke that part of my text right here:

Continuities and transformations are the rhythms of the temporal context [in which the festival is embedded]. The Carnival tradition is a stage for the fertile and imaginative memory of the group, where its past can be revisited, both the past of oral tradition and local stories and the past located outside the village's realm, in books or images, or, finally, in frequently disputed collective aspirations.

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Máscaras, 1976, documentary film directed by Noémia Delgado.

Website *Grupo de Caretos de Podence* at <http://caretosdepodence.no.sapo.pt/>

MÁSCARAS, PERFORMANCE E TRADIÇÃO: IDENTIDADES LOCAIS E CONTEXTOS GLOBAIS

No Nordeste português, as performances de mascarados de Inverno são uma importante tradição cultural. Durante o Carnaval, um tipo específico de performance de máscaras – os caretos – faz espectaculares aparições em Podence, uma aldeia rural em Trás-os-Montes. No contexto das transformações que tiveram lugar em Portugal nas últimas décadas, os campos semânticos destas performances – que são agora resgatadas de uma anunciada decadência – tornaram-se muito mais abrangentes. Estão hoje relacionados com realidades contemporâneas e caracterizam-se por múltiplas interpretações que são muitas vezes o palco para a afirmação e negociação de identidades locais num Portugal pós-rural. Este artigo tem por objectivo discutir, com base nas particularidades dos caretos de Podence, as paisagens culturais que surgem no seio da cultura popular a partir destas misturas e transformações pós-modernas.

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