

Article

Internal Secularisation at the Festival of Saint Rosalia

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Abstract: The dynamic relationship that exists between a religious rite and its territory is interpreted and analysed by religious anthropology as a form of protection, offered by the sacred to the place in which it resides. According to this interpretation, passage through the territory of what is reputed to be sacred or even its very presence as a sanctuary, drives evil away and is believed to perform a generally stable protective function. Within such a dynamic, the rite that actually creates this sacred passage, i.e., the procession of relics, lays the foundations for an analysis of the two specific variables that are, in actual fact, intertwined: on the one side is the rite, and on the other, the territory. Such a relationship appears all the more problematic due to the progressive *rationalisation* of the religious dimension, extensively dealt with by Max Weber (Weber 1920) and accepted by contemporary sociology on religion, as it is now a supernatural phenomenon that is only considered to have a representational dimension. The internal secularization at the festival of Saint Rosalia happened in 2023, with the landing of the triumphal cart in New York. The rite moves to another new territory and transforms it. The cart of Saint Rosalia, preserved in the Columbus Citizens Foundation in New York, represents the identity of Sicilian immigrants but also a new form of ritualization on a new territory through an “ancient” ritual. When the sacred is located within the institutional dimension of a salvation religion presided over by an institution, it appears separate from any purely mechanical (and therefore magical) dimension, while the territory becomes a variable in which a multiplicity of factors are contained. These factors not only give importance to the very aspects of the ritual itself, boosting its civil and secular parts, but also to the religious programme, which undergoes unexpected transformations introduced by the presiding institution. The main object of this analysis is, therefore, to establish an interactive path whereby, on the one hand, the territory, through its various cultural components (both secular and religious), shapes the religious rite and how it places restrictions on those protective functions, while on the other, how the rite places its own constraints on the cultural transformations that take place in the fabric of society.

Keywords: internal secularisation; religion; ritual; territory; adaptation; devotion; marketing



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1. Introduction

Analysis of an extremely well-known religious rite that the Church of Palermo performs every summer, which enjoys a high level of popular participation and an explicit institutional presence, means entering into the central area of the sociology of religions.

The importance attributed to religious festivals in this discipline has resulted in important studies not only from Emile Durkheim, the main author of reference, but also contemporary sociologists such as Shiner and Casanova.

The reasons for such an interest are apparent from the outset. The religious festival reproduces, through its reference to the sacred, the deepest values of the moral community that participates in it. The local community recognises itself in a religious festival, finding within it cohesion and a sense of belonging.

This type of observation opens the door to several questions, the first of which—and perhaps the most crucial—consists of asking what remains of the transcendent once, in the final analysis, the community simply ends up glorifying itself? Such a question is followed

by others. How can the religious institution that presides over the rite preserve the sacred in its transcendence, preventing it from being consumed by the sole function of reaffirming the identity of the community that celebrates it? How can it guide the festival towards the doctrine of salvation that precedes it, recreating it as an expression of a community of believers that pre-dates the festival itself and must be recognised as part of a wider ecclesial community? Put more explicitly: how can the religious institution retrieve a universal doctrine of salvation within a dimension that, in order to reaffirm an identity, ends up being particular? To what extent can Christian identity be retrieved from within a local community identity that seems to be self-sufficient?

If we move from the religious festivity to the civil festivity, other questions arise that could be even more challenging. Why has the civil programme not overtaken the religious programme, pushing it to one side, reducing it to the sole function of legitimatising the religious aspect? How, within the civil programme, do the various institutions carve out a role of approval and legitimacy? How do the various cultural and religious associations seek and obtain visibility for their work and their very identity? How do the commercial activities, for whom the festival is their main source of income and livelihood, and the various popular events that precede or follow it, influence the organisational choices made? Are there any new social actors who are only activated by the specific dimension of the religious festival? If so, what activities do they perform and what role do they end up playing?

These and many other questions can only be answered through empirical case studies, i.e., through the targeted and methodologically correct observation of religious festivals. At this point a study of specific cases will give us the only way of answering the questions raised so far.

Obviously, such a study is all the more difficult and articulated, the more quantitatively and qualitatively extensive the religious festival becomes.

The festival of Saint Rosalia, the patron saint of the city of Palermo, is first and foremost—and unquestionably—an expression of a popular devotion recognised by the ecclesiastical institution, sedimented over centuries and enriched by a consistent and highly visible popular participation. As such, its solemnity falls within the scope of studies on religious festivals, which are of interest in the historical as well as ethnological and anthropological spheres. With this perspective, any study of this festival must necessarily include the foundation of the rite, with observations of the various social actors that have contributed to it, an examination of how it has been consolidated, and the transformations it has undergone that have characterised its history over the centuries, right up to its current form.

Yet the festival of the patron saint of the city of Palermo is also, and has been since its origins, a cultural and religious expression—two aspects that have always, in many ways, overlapped—of a city that must be understood both in its political and community sense. Through the festival of Saint Rosalia, Palermo society presents itself to itself in a manner that is both chosen and normative: it represents itself as it wants to appear and as it wants to be represented.

In both the religious rite, and the civil festivity, Palermo becomes a spatial-temporal place in which both the social hierarchies in search of confirmation and the new local identities in search of recognition are displayed: each of these comes with symbolic and expressive characteristics that allow them to be identified.

The festival is thus a place that confirms associative hierarchies that have already been institutionalised, just as it becomes a place that gives visibility to all those associations that have been established but do not yet enjoy social recognition.

Alongside this dimension of institutional confirmation, the festival of Saint Rosalia is also the chosen place to display the ideals of a reunified and renewed collective life. Through the Palermo festival, the local community expresses its normative principles, its hierarchy of ideals.

The festival of Saint Rosalia thus becomes the place and the moment in which the ordering principles that regulate the life of the city in its relational forms are reaffirmed. From the family and the couple with children, to kinship and neighbourly relationships, from those within the confraternities to the municipal administration; all the different forms of union seek confirmation of the truthfulness and authenticity of their bonds in their participation in the same rite, and in the consecration of the bond that unites them. The days of the festival therefore mark the rightfulness, and above all, the consecration of both the ideals and the bonds that they bring, once placed under the symbolic aura of the saint's protection.

These overlapping objectives produce, therefore, a festival structure in which the strictly ritual dimension, introduced and contained in the official rites, must coexist with the expressive dimensions belonging to the classes and institutions that are in search of confirmation. But the structure of the festival must also reconcile itself with the devotional expressions conveyed by individual communities in the territory, associations and groups of all kinds in search of legitimacy and visibility.

Such a coexistence obviously cannot remain unchanged, and it has experienced quite a few changes over the centuries. This is why the history of the festival of Saint Rosalia records changes in its ritual structure, which, in theory and by definition, should remain unchanged. The first of these changes—and also the most visible—is the joining of the festival days over the summer period, as shown by the transformation of the procession route. But the ritual dimension has also multiplied, as seen in the festivals in the parish communities, inspiring alley communities who display their own devotional expressions.

In contemporary society, which is marked by the entry of modernity as a cultural process, all the above dynamics have changed. A society of leisure makes religious festivals a precious occasion to be exploited and thus expanded. Thanks to media coverage, the festivity becomes an attraction for hundreds of thousands of visitors: a critical mass that is all the more significant the more the civil programme, run alongside the religious programme and full of attractions and shows of various kinds, is expanded year after year.

Hence local institutions are in agreement that enhancing the civil programme gives clear confirmation of their promotional abilities and thus results in an increase in their credibility. Such a dynamic inevitably implies both a greater unscrupulousness on the part of secular institutional actors and a proliferation of associations of all kinds in search of explicit visibility and implicit legitimacy.

This meant that the festival of Saint Rosalia has, over several decades, become a container in which a plurality of social actors operate on both the religious and civil fronts. The diocesan curia, parish communities, confraternities, associations and alley communities, on the one hand, and local administrations, trade associations, and cultural groups on the other, all contribute to filling a time-space container in which, alongside the religious rites and precisely because of the large numbers of people that they attract, cultural events, economic initiatives and political manifestations converge.

The festival of Saint Rosalia constitutes an opportunity for visibility that is too attractive not to be the object of interest of any association seeking to promote itself.

It is therefore a question not only of retracing the historical path that lies at its origin but also of recording the institutional, associative, and community dynamics that are activated around the preparation, organisation and implementation of the various activities connected to the celebrations in honour of the patron saint of Palermo. In this way, it is possible to go beyond the undoubtedly spectacular framework of the festivities, in order to find not only the network of activities, but also of associative ties and relationships that lie behind it and which, in the final analysis, constitute the real human structure that makes the festival possible and restores its allure, as well as revealing its social, economic, cultural and political functions.

2. Before the Festival, a Preliminary Interpretation

This type of analysis, which is developed both through the study of documents, and through the observation of festivals relating to a saint—and in the case of Saint Rosalia, analysed in the territorial context of Palermo—has significant and symbolic elements, which make it possible to infer both the importance of the passage of the sacred in the different areas of the city, and the transformations in its organisation that have characterised this festival from one generation to the next.

Indeed, the festival of Saint Rosalia constitutes a veritable container in which a secular institutional dimension, a playful and popular dimension, an ecclesial institutional dimension, and finally a devotional form, converge. These different dimensions take a dynamic form and are displayed through the processions, the altars in the alleyways of the historic centre, and the pilgrimage on 4 September.

The institutional dimension (secular and ecclesial), on the one hand, and the popular recreational dimension (also secular and ecclesial), on the other, are mutually dependent on each other and are forced into an, always partial and provisional, continual rearrangement. A variation in institutional languages, which is expressed through a constant change in the conceptual frames within which the event is reinterpreted, is counterbalanced by a similar transformation of playful and devotional languages.

The latter opens up new dimensions and constantly redesigns new aspects for the festival. Its relationship with the territory is not only limited to a confrontational and continual interaction between an institutional and a popular interpretation of the event. It acquires its physical dimension through the pilgrimage, where the rationale is reversed: from the sacred that crosses the city, to a city that goes to the sacred and crosses its space, which acts as a counterbalance and almost as a 'restitution'. The pilgrimage sets in motion a different dynamic, that of the 'immovable sacred', where the subject, 'the devotee' moves according to a specific ritual expression (for example: praying or singing, barefoot or kneeling, in silence or reciting the rosary).

Thus, one observes the use of specific symbols, such as the lit torch during the route of the (nocturnal) pilgrimage to Monte Pellegrino, the rosary chaplet used for prayer, and the symbolic presence of the 'flag' of Saint Rosalia (not only of symbolic but also of spiritual value, since it depicts the devotional images of the saint on one side and of the Madonna on the other—the movement and use of the flag also take on an apotropaic form).

Although these traditional forms were the first to emerge from a cursory analysis of the relationship between ritual and territory, it does not necessarily mean that they are the only ones. Principally, these forms are linked to a process of secularisation that has led the traditional forms of protection of the sacred in the territory to wane, reducing the syncretic principle that operates behind religious festivals: no ecclesial institution aspires to justify the celebration of a patron saint with reference to the qualities of protection from evil.

The case of Saint Rosalia in Palermo presents several peculiarities, which place it at the forefront of the subject under examination. The festival brings together different expressions and proves to be a veritable container in which religious devotion, redemption rites, local identity, ecclesial commitment, and institutional presence converge. The festival is also the stage crossed by institutions and civil society, a privileged terrace from which Palermo society admires itself. As it is part of a centuries-old tradition it raises important questions about its transformation: this is how the festival of Saint Rosalia also functions as yet another detector of the processes of cultural change that run through Palermo society and culture.

The sacred is linked to the place both through the procession on 15 July and the pilgrimage on 4 September. These two expressions function as containers in which, in addition to widespread devotion, we can find the need for associations and informal groups, confraternities and administrative authorities to increase their visibility and be placed on the hierarchical scale of social presentation, onto which all, in the end, are called upon to place themselves. Alongside this need for visibility from groups and institutions, the economic needs introduced by small traders linked to the tourist industry, and by the

operators of cultural events, are also clearly perceptible: the festival of Saint Rosalia brings public funding and private resources into circulation.

The Case of Saint Rosalia

This type of analysis has been developed around an extremely well-known festival, as much for its folkloric and spectacular dimensions as for its social implications: the festival of Saint Rosalia, held in Palermo on separate days between July and September each year. The desire to go beyond the famous '*Festino*' on the 14 July, and to look at all three of the main official celebrations dedicated to the saint—including both the procession of the reliquary urn on 15 July and the pilgrimage on 4 September—constitutes one of the main results of the exploratory investigations developed in previous studies. Such an interpretation, of course, has a purely exploratory value and is only valid on a methodological level. It can only be reasonably applied to the extent that it allows for a deeper reading of the relationship between the sacred (through the rite that is created) and the territory, which is understood not only as a socially inhabited space, but also as a set of cultural and social instances that reside there.

The reasons that make a unitary reading of what is a true festive cycle plausible comprise at least two orders. The first is purely structural. In the traditional religious festivals of patron saints, the religious programme precedes the civil one. The saint's festival begins at the crack of dawn and only once the rituals are over does the evening light entertain the civil festivities. All the anticipatory events that occur over the preceding days (from the market to popular festivals, to the liturgical tridua) have a merely preparatory value: they pave the way for the big day, when the majesty of the saint is celebrated. Here the programme is largely consolidated: first the religious, liturgical and celebratory festival and then, at its conclusion, the profane festival (Isambert 1976).

This makes it possible to understand the peculiarity—but also the importance on an analytical level—of the festival of St. Rosalia, where the famous festival of 14 July has progressively gone beyond its original preparatory purpose and now summarises the whole of the festival of St. Rosalia, or at least in the media. Such peculiarity is not without its consequences. On the ritual level, this produces a singular mixture of the sacred and the profane on the evening of 14 July itself, where the saint's 'ship' guides the rhythms of a festival that is completely for the masses, even if it has been blessed by the highest religious authorities. This produces the second—no less important aspect—an expansion of the religious dimension of 15 July, where the procession of the urn with the saint's relics receives a prominence that is reproduced in neighbourhoods and alleyways through festivities called the '*festinello*' (little feast), as happens for example in the Monte di Pietà district.

There is thus a dimension of a real restitution of a religious solemnity despite the civil and popular festival that, the day before, had largely defined the image of the city of Palermo. In this respect, this seems to be a type of atonement, for the more spectacular the climax of the festival on the evening of 14 July, the more the solemn procession on 15 July must restore places and people, and times and forms of consolidated devotion. The pilgrimage to Monte Pellegrino on the night of 4 September should also be placed in this context. In the representative aspect of the religious dimension, it constitutes the 'return' visit to the one made by the saint's relics to the city on the evening of 15 July and is thus completed in connection to it.

In practice, the festival of 14 July, the civil festivity best known to tourists and observers that attracts entertainment professionals and mobilises huge resources, is the basis from which grows an enormous devotional redemptive movement that mobilises the volunteers of the confraternities on the evening of 15 July and the night of 4 September.

Such a sociological reconstruction is certainly a stretch, but it nevertheless has the advantage of drawing attention to a cycle of festivities that is not limited to the festival of 14 July alone, but take place over twenty-one days (approximately) and mobilises the entire urban community of Palermo, albeit in different ways and not always at the same

time (those who organise the altars in the alleyways or accompany the saint's urn but who often have nothing to do with those who organise the artistic performances in the square in front of the Cathedral). It also has the advantage of explaining the connection of the presence of both civil and religious institutions that preside over the various rites, thus representing that civic and social unity which, as is well known—at least within Emile Durkheim's interpretation—constitutes its essential synthesis and most important function.

3. Methodology: Ethnographic Research

The techniques of qualitative analysis are not particularly distinguishable from each other in terms of a conceptual and terminological point of view: “for example, the terms ethnographic research, field research, community studies, participant observation, and naturalistic research are all more or less synonymous; just as in-depth interviews, free interviews, unstructured interviews, clinical interviews, oral history, life stories, and a biographical approach, indicate survey techniques that sometimes differ from each other only slightly” (Corbetta 1999, p. 365).

The detection techniques of qualitative research can be grouped into four main categories: direct observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis and computer-assisted content analysis.

The actions related to the first three categories are those of observing, questioning and reading.

The action of the participant observer is rather selective: “they cannot observe everything. Participant observation cannot be an all-encompassing snapshot of the whole of reality; on the contrary, some social objects must be brought into focus, others remain in the background, and still others remain completely excluded from the researcher's lens” (Corbetta 1999, p. 380).

In particular, the use of documents means analysing a certain social reality starting from material, in written form, from individuals in that society, such as in autobiographical accounts, letters and documents kept at institutions, for example, in the form of minutes and records.

Community studies are those most affected by the ethnographic model. They constitute research conducted on small social units that involve the physical transfer of the researcher to within the social context analysed, in a specific territory, in which they live for a certain period of time.

The social context is of substantial importance as the researcher is engaged in giving a detailed account of their investigations, observing and reporting in an adequate and structured manner the essential elements of the social actions examined.

An analysis of the social context is not to be given with evaluative descriptions. Instead, it is a question of describing the human environment, i.e., the people who frequent the analysed area, the way they dress, the purpose of their movements, their customs and habits.

The possibility of studying the dynamics of a specific public meeting is given in the first place by a description of the physical and human environment, for example the size of the place, the number of visible characteristics of the people present and their typology. It is also possible to identify the social classes involved by observing the clothing of the religious communities present.

The study of a formal organisation can be carried out through specific choices, i.e., deciding, for example, whether to observe a religion, particularly in our case the Tamil religion in relation to the Catholic context of reception. We can therefore examine the interaction of all the social and institutional actors within a process of shared solidarity, cultural socialisation, peaceful coexistence, and mutual aid.

The communication channels used also have characteristics that should not be underestimated, namely formal and official interactions. Informal interaction involves a myriad of different cases, so it is not easy to provide specific operational rules. For instance, in the beginning, one may notice a large influx of institutional and non-institutional social

actors, with hundreds of acts that seem to be devotional but in fact are not. Moreover, the main feature is the traditional use of clothing worn on a public holiday (bright colours), as opposed to the usual pilgrimage attire (muted and dark). These actions seem to be regulated by time, almost as if it were a dance or simply a ritual.

Observation means detecting an ordinary behaviour by distinguishing it from a non-ordinary one, within a time frame that seems to be constructed by a series of mechanical acts of which the social actor is largely unaware. In fact, capturing people's interactions is not easy because the very choice of the place from which to observe them is an important process, in order to focus on meaningful relationships and interactions.

The characteristics of social actors have specific parameters that can be focused on within the analysed phenomenon. The interpretation of other social actors is not immediate: the organisation of the environment, clothes and gestures in general help to provide an overall view of the analysed phenomenon.

Participating and observing also implies asking oneself what the motivation is for choosing a certain social actor to observe, a certain moment, a certain place rather than another. Basically, the questions are those typical of qualitative methodology, according to the following specifications.

1. When: as close as possible to the phenomenon under observation; for example, finding oneself inside the Archbishop's palace and waiting for the civil and religious institutional actors to make their entrance. Or waiting and observing the ordinary movements during statements made by representatives of other religions. Observation is always complicated, but it can be resumed and reviewed not only through written impressions, but also through recorded photos and videos. Being close means being unfailingly present, trying to capture the behaviour, the gesture, the word, the symbolic act that will perhaps be the main key to interpretation.
2. What: especially the description of events that are divided into specific and detailed moments. The interpretation is not only given by an emotional reaction, but also by a theoretical reflection, to be associated with the observed phenomenon. In this case, the sharing of messages of "hope", "solidarity" and "the sharing of bread" is the focus of a whole series of observations made at a specific time and not in an ordinary place. The analysis is also the reconstruction of the dynamics that took place during the observation of the phenomenon.
3. How: the advantages brought by audio-visual recording tools offer more support than traditional ones. For example, through a video camera it is possible to observe, even in slow motion, the gestures and postures of social actors, i.e., the devotees during the celebrations. The description of participant observation takes on the character of a scientific product, on the basis of the account of what is seen and heard. Above all, it is a description enriched with meanings and interpretations in a precise cultural and historical *frame*. With the *NVivo software* (v. 12, 2021) it is possible to manage ethnographic observations through the use of photos and videos, and to insert qualitative data such as, in our case, the documentation of all the sermons.

The methodology adopted concerns a long textual analysis of documents starting from 1890 with the newspaper "l'ora" and other newspapers that have dealt with Saint Rosalia and the festive cycle. The newspaper "l'ora" all the documentation concerning the "Palermo Senate" that deals with Saint Rosalia, was examined and not reported in this article for a precise methodological choice because it would have become too long-winded. In addition, the research methodology made use of participant observation, in fact, I participated in the festival and pilgrimage thirteen times.

During the nocturnal pilgrimage, I stayed seven times to observe the devotees who "climbed" to the sanctuary until three in the morning. I tried to give value to both the theoretical and the practical aspect. The secularization within the feast of Saint Rosalia makes use of three specific moments during my participation: the link with the territory, with other religions and with identity.

The participation of Palermitans, or tourists, or the curious, concerns the festival in July. Unlike in September, the participation of devout pilgrims varies both by gender but also by age, from the youngest to the elderly. In addition, in Palermo, a large delegation of Tamils is always present for the pilgrimage not only in September, every Sunday they go up to the shrine. The “banniricchia” (little flag) of Saint Rosalia, the flag, represents an object that was widely used in the last century as a protective pennant. Nowadays, the flag is used for souvenirs. Secularization also concerns an economic and tourist aspect deeply linked more to an aspect of public religiosity.

In previous years the means used was that of printing and billboards of the religious or secular program on the streets of the city: from the centre to the suburbs (little districts). The participation of Palermitans or tourists or the curious concerns the festival in July. Unlike in September, the participation of devout pilgrims varies both by gender but also by age, from the youngest to the elderly.

The dichotomy of the sacred and profane located within the cycle of the feast leads us to reflect on the words “émigrés vs. immigrants”. The presence of the “devoted emigrated” and “devoted migrants”. So, in both cases, but from different territories, the devotion that unites them is that to the little saint.

The central focus is that people emigrate to the other side of the world but inside they keep only faith. In fact, not only people who emigrate, also religions, rituals and identities. Therefore, the phenomenon of multiculturalism and/or hybridization on American territory is important: the presence of Sicilian émigrés and their devotion.

So, does the sacred restore a balance on the territory? Does the territory transform the sacred through multiculturalism? The territory represents a variable which contains a plurality of factors which, in turn, insist on the very dimensions of the rite, amplifying its civil and secular part, but also insisting on the same religious programme, introducing unexpected transformations on the part of the American institution.

The main object of this analysis is, therefore, at least in the first place, the presence of devout émigrés who continue to re-purpose the feast of Santa Rosalia in a territory different and largely secularized society.

4. The Feast of the “Little Saint” to New York

The internal secularization of the feast of Saint Rosalia makes it clear that the change of the territory does not exclude the rite, but strengthens it. The ritual of the “feast” of Saint Rosalia, in fact, in 2006, moved overseas: to New York (Brooklyn).

The feast has always been celebrated in Brooklyn but it originally took place in the parish of the Sacred Hearts and St. Stephen’s Church in Carroll Gardens, which was Brooklyn’s first Italian parish. The procession originally involved followers walking barefoot through the streets of the neighbourhood to show their devotion to the saint. Since then, the festival has been moved to the Bensonhurst area where it has existed for seventy years.

The transformation of the territory takes place, informally, also in the New York area. In fact, the ritual transforms the territory through its presence.

The statue (inside the cart) donated to Sicilian-American devotees, was blessed and consecrated. The aim being to protect and support the community of devotees far from their homeland.

Therefore, this decision was taken by the municipality so that brings together in “faith in Saint Rosalia” the Palermitan immigrants who in the last century moved overseas, to America.

The triumphal cart of Saint Rosalia, icon of the “Festino” (little feast/festival) during the night of 14 July, landed at pier 85, on the Hudson River as a “gift” to Sicilian immigrants from municipality of Palermo. The chariot of the “little saint” represents the symbol of cultural identity but also of union between the two territories through the “ritual” of the festival.

The cart of Saint Rosalia, preserved in the Columbus Citizens Foundation in New York, represents not only an identity bond for immigrants but also a new form of ritualization on a new territory through an “ancient” ritual.

In the New York area and outside of Palermo, the mayor of Palermo pronounces the customary phrase “Long live Palermo and Saint Rosalia” on Columbus Day¹. It is no coincidence that this links the landing of Christopher Columbus, an Italian, on American territory. The landing of the triumphal chariot of Saint Rosalia binds the “little saint” to the place where she is venerated.

The chariot emphasizes not only the spiritual bond but also that of identity and solidarity between the two communities. In fact, for more than forty years, the Eighteenth Street in Bensonhurst is transformed to celebrate Saint Rosalia like the long Cassaro street in Palermo (via Vittorio Emanuele). Today, every year, the festival is very important for the Sicilian community of Brooklin. The devotees remember the connection with their territory, the “little cart of little saint” comes to a halt and the procession dissolves into an immense popular festival illuminated by an endless display of fireworks.

Over the years of research, I have been given various explanations for these questions. One of them interprets the devotion to the saint as a request for the protection of the city and its children. In another culture, the Saint Rosalia is sung in Italian, Shiva is sung in Hindi. Moreover, the sanctuary of Palermo’s patron saint has become a temple in which, for the Tamils, or for Sicilians who emigrated to America, Rosalia represents their divinity, their saint, the saint for all émigrés. In fact, for example, in the culture of the Tamil’s who emigrated—inside the cave, in the sanctuary on Mount Pellegrino, the central altar is dedicated to the “Virgin Mother of God”, the “Conception”: the Tamils find the “Great Mother” in her who protects marriage and children. In fact, *Durga*, in the Hindu religion, identified as Shiva’s wife, represents feminine energy, the “archetypal woman”, the dynamic element in the creation of the world. But for the Sicilian, she is “the” little saint—“santuzza” because this is the affectionate name for her. For all emigrants she is a sacred point of reference but also especially for women.

I connected those deep, embedded feelings, Americans, Hindus, Sicilians. Because as each migrant or refugee trying to reach Europe, or America in the last century, showing how one person’s dreams and ambitions are just as valid as the next person’s. Because we are all migrants on this Earth.

4.1. *The Secularisation within the Festival: The Archiepiscopal Curia and the Municipality*

The abundance of values, accompanied by the inescapable presence of emotional, exuberant and aggregative aspects inherent in the execution of a common action, and with it, of a participatory symbolic practice, confers a strong political undertone on every social activity that is publicly ritualised. This fact has been noted by a certain amount of historical-symbolic research, which has shown how the ritual has been used in politics in ways that have transformed the very principles on which its own ‘raison d’être’ was based, into mechanisms capable of performing the symbolic practices of legitimisation (Cipriani 1986).

4.2. *The Institutional-Religious Dimension: The Archiepiscopal Curia*

The centrality of the archiepiscopal curia, rooted in the historical, political, and social context of the city of Palermo—the church in the territory—represents the first ‘institutional-religious’ dimension, which prevails during the festival through the diffusion of the religious programme prepared directly by the archiepiscopal curia’s press office. The organisation of the official programme in 1950 emphasised the arrangement of the liturgies and organisational details within a celebratory religious context, and shows its functionality during the days of the festival:

“... THE “FESTINO” Religious celebrations in honour of St. Rosalia; (Giornale di Sicilia 8 July 1950)²

The provisions issued in the press were an indispensable means of communication, all the more necessary since the new organisation of the festival was now entirely directed by

the Church as an institution: in fact, the only one acceptable to the secular administration that, therefore, no longer had the qualifications to produce the festival on its own.

Moreover, in addition to the programme reported in the newspaper article, the route was also communicated by the ecclesiastical institution:

“... the procession will start at 6 p.m. on the same 15th day, moving from the Cathedral along Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Piazza Marina, and will proceed to the Church of the Gancia, where the clergy will lay down their sacred garments. The urn of the glorious relics of St. Rosalia will then proceed along the following streets: Via 4 Aprile (Church of the Gancia), Via Alloro, Piazza Pietravecchia, Via Divisi, Via Maqueda, Via Pergole, Piazza Carmine, Piazza Ballarò, Via Rimpetto, Piazza Casa Professa, Via Rua Formaggi, Via Castro, Via del Bastione, Piazza Vittoria, the Cathedral, accompanied by the parish clergy, local congregations, Associations of A.C. and Pious Sodalities of each parish through whose territory the procession will pass...” (Giornale di Sicilia 13 July 1950)

This document amply reveals how the ecclesiastical institution shapes the festival of Saint Rosalia according to its own dynamic. In actual fact, the 19th century tradition of stopping in front of palaces was forbidden, as was the fear of the ‘viva!’ (the faithful shouted viva Saint Rosalia, meaning ‘long live Saint Rosalia!’) that characterised it.

Something decisive, however, did happen. With secularisation, which began in 1860, the festival of Saint Rosalia had to reinvent itself in a completely new dimension. The curia’s command over the organisation of the festival was also followed by a new rule, of ‘secondary sacralisation’, where any heterodox behaviour was unacceptable, and any move of the procession that focussed attention on anything other than God, was looked upon with suspicion and banned.

Thus, a particular way of accepting what has come to be known as the ‘institutional–popular’ dimension rooted in the cultural context of the city itself emerges, in which the people are the main actors and creators of the analysed phenomenon and who focus their attention on a playful folkloric and allegorical aspect that certainly does not reflect the canons of the religious rite and its institutional image. This calls for a certain type of behaviour from the faithful, with particular attention paid to the organisational aspect of the city, the organisation of the route of both the *Festino* (the big feast) and the religious rite, i.e., the route of the Argentea Urna. Moreover, the route chosen for the day of the *Festino* (the big feast) also created an almost hierarchical separation shown through the organisation of traffic. Here, we can distinguish some important characteristics that enable us to identify the differences inside the territory. It is the festivities committee and the provincial federation of merchants who publish, through the *Giornale di Sicilia* (Newspapers Sicily), the regulations concerning the route during the days of the festivities, the illumination of shops and streets, the road network and urban traffic regulations.

The festival in 1950 was characterised by the overpowering presence of the institutional–religious dimension, which spoke in the first person and spread its information through the press; it used the main means of communication, namely the *Giornale di Sicilia* (Newspapers Sicily), to spread its doctrine and induce the faithful to respect the religious ritual. First and foremost we should identify the three actors that made up the *Festino* (the big feast), who directed it and who changed it over the following years: the archiepiscopal curia, the institutional–religious dimension, representing the church in the territory; the municipality, the institutional–state dimension which represented the state; and the people, a central actor in both of the previous two dimensions, who made both the celebration of the religious rite, and the grandiosity and splendour of the *Festino* (the big feast), possible.

The presence of the two separate institutions, the municipality on the one hand and the archiepiscopal curia on the other, gave a greater value to the festivities, which had risked becoming exclusively popular and folkloristic without their direction.

As the triumphal procession with its chariot had long since disappeared, the only feature of the festivity that remained unchanged was the procession of the silver urn, which was no longer carried on the shoulders of the confraternity but pushed by hand, resting on a wooden box with wheels. It seemed that the procession had taken on a different image,

compared to previous centuries, that of a popular walk, as the atmosphere of devotion seemed to be limited exclusively to the 15th, and the fact that the urn containing the relics was not carried on the shoulders almost made a mockery the image of the devotees themselves.

Rodo Santoro writes about the history of the festival during the 1950's, from the post-war period onwards, claiming that:

"... Having lost any historical significance in the identity of Palermo, dulled if not outright mocked by those of the religious cult of the Santuzza, openly criticised by progressive culture, it seemed illogical, in the eyes of the general public, to propose once again such a script of démodé values. ... the new bourgeoisie, the true heirs of the boorish primordialism of the early 20th century, viewed this festival with ill-concealed hostility and ostentatious forbearance. ... all this in the fervent belief that it was run by priests for the benefit of the dominant political party, i.e., the Christian Democrats. ...". (Santoro 2003, p. 132)

The decision to abandon the parade with the chariot, and its connection to the religious rite, did not seem to concern the people, who, devoted to tradition as well as to their saint, continued to be present on the festival days dedicated to her. In a newspaper article dated 14 July 1950 (although there is a printing error, in that it refers to the 15 July 1950), there is almost a 'justification' for the absence of the triumphal parade of the chariot, which had been so famous and the most important subject and object alongside the silver urn. It does not seem to be missed at all by the people, rather it was missing from the traditions during the festival days devoted to the patron saint. That the religious procession in those years completely replaced the parade and tried to force people to abandon a custom that for centuries had coexisted with the religious tradition of devotion to the saint.

The article gives us details of the ongoing conflict. On the one hand, the church institution, at the head of the organisational pyramid and with total responsibility, could not oversee components of the civil event that, in principle and tradition, did not belong to them. On the other hand, the civil institution, by now completely separated from a devotion that it learned to experience as external and superfluous to its conventional duties, no longer threw itself into the organisation of the chariot. This popular dimension then seems to explode and spread in the "Triunfi": real altars of more modest dimensions, built within neighbourhoods.

With regard to the journey—the pilgrimage of devotion to Monte Pellegrino, which takes place in September—in 1950, we can find only one article testifying to its continuation:

"... journey to Monte Pellegrino: Every year, at this time, the people take the road to its mount, according to the ancient itinerary and with the same unchanging faith. The Santuzza awaits her day, in the serenity of her mountain; it is like an exchange. ...".

During the years between 1958 and 1962, Italy enjoyed an economic miracle and, as a result, the entire population saw an increase in their purchasing power. In 1960, Sicily and at noon participated in the explosion of mass consumption, which marked not only the end of poverty, but a real leap in quality of life and changes to ways of living, with consequences on the organisation of social and family life and on the dominant cultural models.

The *Festino (the big feast)* of the second quarter of the 20th century appeared as a sort of remnant, an offshoot of the social customs of the population, and in the period between 1924 and 1973, this festival seemed to be a tradition to which only the people were devoted, but slowly a new awareness of the historical and cultural legitimacy of those values, which had been abandoned, grew.

In the 1960's, the festivities held in the city of Palermo to honour the patron saint, Saint Rosalia, took on a devotional image that was concentrated above all on the day when her relics were carried through the city's main streets:

"... Friday 15 July 1960: 11 a.m. Solemn Pontifical in the Greek Latin rite in the Cathedral officiated by Cardinal Ruffini and with the participation of the Municipality and city authorities. ...".

The tone of such a document is quite clear and emphasises not only the presence of all the authorities at their highest levels, but also in naming (and thus investing with authority) various associations and, last but not least, in naming and emphasising the symbolically significant road network.

In the preceding days before the festivities, newspaper headlines reported a number of “crimes” that took place in the city of Palermo, which, however, did not hinder the organisation of the festival, and stopped once the Palermo police headquarters had intervened. The only change that took place concerned the illumination of the shops, which, during the previous festival, had not participated in the illumination of the streets through which the silver urn had passed. There is no clear explanation of the attitude adopted by the shopkeepers, and some news reports do not give a clear account of the reason for the change made to the days of festivity. However, these had not been reduced, as was the case in previous years, when they were cut to five days: from the 11th to the 15th. After all, the ceremony, having reached its full institutional dimension, had now assumed such importance that it was partially immune to news events.

4.3. The Institutional–State Dimension: The Municipality

The second dimension concerns the civil authority in 1960, which appears to have been reintegrated into the religious event. This obviously had an effect on the civil festivity, which was once again developed, according, however, to the tastes and forms of that decade.

During the festival days, concerts and attractions were held for the citizens, in addition to the illumination of the monuments and main villas. The first day of the festivities was held as part of the city’s thanksgiving to its saint, with a gift—a floral gesture—as well as official masses in the presence of church and political institutions, representing the city authorities. The last day of the *Festino* was seen as the finale of the previous day’s events, with a manifestation of faith and devotion on the part of the population that had been missing in previous years, as reported:

“... the Festino 1960 has concluded—grandiose manifestation of popular faith in the return of the urn with the relics of Saint Rosalia ... it would be better if the Festino kept a lower financial profile in the future ...”.

The days of festivity had for years been marked by the disappearance of the ‘triumphal chariot’, which in the past had played its part in the organisation of the festival. The fear that devotion to the saint might be expressed during a moment characterised by folklore was the main argument for its disappearance. Concern on the part of the ecclesiastical institutions was compounded by concern on the part of the civil authorities about the cost of building a new chariot that needed to be changed every year. Hence the definitive elimination of the festivity that included pageantry and the triumphal chariot.

If previously the disappearance of the triumphal chariot had required no justification other than bad taste, now in the 1960s it was not bad taste that ruled the day, the detested ‘démodé’, as it was called in the 1950’s, but the lack of funds for its construction:

‘... The programme of the previous years was maintained as far as possible along the lines that the townspeople had shown they liked, and if it was necessary to sacrifice something important—and here we mean to refer to the Triumphal Chariot—this was due exclusively to those financial reasons which we have dealt with extensively during the presentation of the event and which can easily be identified in the lack of action from the Region, which has evidently decided to consider the “Festino” a tourist attraction to be staged in alternate years. ...’.

Unlike in previous years, the pilgrimage to Monte Pellegrino, which takes place annually in September, was mentioned several times in newspaper articles beginning on 2 September 1960 with the publication of the timetables and bus services to the mountain and those that arrived at its slopes; the organisation mentioned was the S.A.I.A.

In the days that followed, the pilgrimage wound its way up the mountain during the night of 3 September and, on 4 September, celebrations in honour of the patron saint's were held in the presence of church authorities and city institutions:

"...is the festival of the Patron Saint—began the Archbishop—who continues through the centuries to be admired for her courage and the fortitude of spirit she showed. She wanted to abandon everything to do penance for sins she did not commit, to become her own mistress in a dominion governed by free will. . .".

Historically, after 1963, signs of economic and social instability began to appear in Italy. However, the 1960s and early 1970s were characterised by a growth in mass consumption and the expansion of public spending on education, pensions, and insurance. The whole of Italy, including Sicily, was swept up in the famous *hot autumn*, in which students occupied universities in order to obtain an extension of the right to study and a more modern and critical approach to university teaching. In fact, this cultural temperament resulted in the institutions being criticised and the legacies of religious traditions being questioned, especially those coming from the devotional sphere.

However, the phenomenon that had the greatest impact on the Sicilian economy, and which condemned it to both bad politics and bad economics for decades, was the quantum leap made by the Sicilian mafia in the 1960s and 1970s.

The seventies were the years in which an attempt was made to restore the traditional image of the *Festino*, which had been neglected over the previous centuries, and which had brought many foreign travellers to the city, not only to admire the event, but also to broaden their knowledge of Palermo's traditions. Moreover, interest in the historical recovery and tradition of the *Festino*, including the re-introduction of the triumphal chariot dedicated to the saint during the festival days, was not opposed by local or ecclesiastical institutions. The latter saw the introduction of the chariot as a sense of belonging to the place and not a threat to what was seen as the real religious procession.

The 1971, only carried a few articles concerning the festival: on 13 July 1970, in which an article reports on the festivities going back to 1871, one hundred years earlier, narrating the traditions and history of the beginning of the festivities in honour of the saint; on 14 July, in which the folkloristic and tourist aspect of the festivity was highlighted, as was the disappointment of the people of Palermo at the non-participation of the 'Majorette de Lyon' dance troupe and who witnessed a disappointing festival, at least according to the article's author, because of a second-rate solution adopted by the organisers. In September of the same year, only one article in the Newspapers of Sicily (*Giornale di Sicilia*) reported on the pilgrimage to Monte Pellegrino, introducing on this date, in addition to the *dies natalis* of the saint, distractions such as folkloristic games, fireworks and a theatre show.

The July festivities in 1971, which had been described by the people of Palermo as disappointing and lacking in excitement, sought to revive the festival by implementing a new type of celebration on Monte Pellegrino, which for centuries had been a place of pilgrimage, prayer and devotion far away from the chaos of the city.

An interest in history and one's own region, and the search for the city's historical identity, were the predominant research elements of the early 1970s. Rodo Santoro was commissioned by the local administration to study the history of ancient festivals and to identify the basic characteristics of this centuries-old celebration. He wrote:

"...a special commission was set up by the municipal administration to study the possibility of reinstating the ancient ceremonials of the Festino but no one realised what it really meant to revive this festival that for more than a century has been emptied of meaning and had suffered great ethical-symbolic impoverishment. That commission drew up an outline of the civil celebration that was to be developed in conjunction with the religious one. . .". (Santoro 2003, p. 132)

The elements that had gradually disappeared over the decades were easily identifiable: on the one hand, the triumphal chariot, with its senatorial chariot, and on the other, the

presence and participation of the confraternities with their *vara* (singular: vara, plural: vares—triumphal chariot in Sicilian dialect) of saints during the religious procession.

The participation of both secular and religious institutions was fundamental to the restoration of the festival tradition; not only the local political institutions, representing the city authorities, but also the archiepiscopal curia, which sought to specifically control the tradition of Catholic culture by reintroducing all the city's confraternities with their traditional garments and their *vares*.

What appears is more than just a 'comatose state', it was the difficulty encountered by the church in guiding a symbolic and expressive patrimony in an era that was by now profoundly disenchanted and rationalised with the full knowledge that from an anthropological analysis it was a simple cultural symbol, while religious representation constituted a structuring element on the level of shared emotions.

The year 1974 was the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the saint's remains, and on this occasion the festivities were organised differently from previous years; the most important element being the reawakening of the historical culture of the people of Palermo. It was in this year that the *deus machina*, a characteristic symbol of the festivities between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was reintroduced, and hence the design of the triumphal chariot was altered.

From a religious point of view, the most important event remains that on 15 July when the relics contained in the *argentea urna* are transported, but with the reintroduction of the *deus machina* chariot in the 1970s, it appears that these two forms of celebration in honour of the patron saint had come together at a certain point, since:

“...the last float, with a swarm of the Santuzza's faithful behind it, who were literally clinging to the float, having mistaken it for a devotional vara...”. (Santoro 2003, pp. 137–38)

The nineteen eighties were characterised by a period when particular attention was paid by municipal administrations to the celebrations of the *Festino* in July. The changes that characterised that decade included participation of acrobatic tightrope walkers from the equestrian circus and other types of entertainment, which were added to the traditional display of the triumphal chariot. Alongside these changes that marked the profane procession, the religious procession was impoverished by the pomp of the preceding days; but the religious institution of the archiepiscopal curia did not oppose the choices made by the council for the days preceding 15 of July, peacefully dividing the territorial and temporal space.

The 1980 *Festino* (the big feast) was characterised by the inclusion of more theatrical and folkloristic elements than in previous years, which through the theatrical performances usually held at Monte di Pietà, tell the story of the popular tradition which embodies the life of the patron saint.

The restoration of the traditions, customs and costumes that characterised that year's festivity was met with much controversy, and was not accepted by the entire population. Strange, given the fact that it had always been created by the people, for the people and for their saint.

Moreover, the controversies and disagreements that occurred that year involved various sectors of the social, economic and cultural spheres: there were economic and social problems, especially in terms of the organisation of the festival, which had involved only a part of the citizenry.

The article published in the *Cronaca di Palermo*, dated 12 July 1980, describes tensions between the religious sphere and the secular-popular sphere:

“... if only in 1974 they hadn't attempted, with some success, to transform the *Festino* into a major event ...”.

The poor turnout at the 1980 *Festino*, despite the folkloristic and theatrical attractions that were supposed to have the opposite effect, prompted Cardinal Pappalardo's request to the municipal and regional administrators to intervene:

“... For Cardinal Pappalardo the Festino was an opportunity for a political warning to the city’s administrators...”.

The archiepiscopal curia’s message to the administrative and local politicians on the problems faced by the citizens during the days of the festivities in honour of Saint Rosalia, highlighted the importance of supervision by both civil and religious institutions on the subject of the *Festino*.

The Eucharistic celebration that takes place at the Palace of the Eagles, which sees the presence and performance of a religious function–ritual within a civic palace, the seat of a political institution, endorses within a festive context the union of the religious and civil spheres that have a single centre: Saint Rosalia.

Cardinal Pappalardo’s sermon during the Eucharistic celebration at the Palazzo delle Aquile is highlighted in an article dated 14 July 1980, the day on which the ‘pagan’ festival closes:

‘... in highlighting, first and foremost, the place that Saint Rosalia occupies in the religious sentiment of the people of Palermo, he said that the festival in honour of the patron saint must be an ‘occasion’ to encourage a search for the true values of life and a meditation on Christian virtues...’.

The religious significance of the festival in honour of Saint Rosalia, on 15 July 1980, is highlighted in the sermon given by Cardinal Pappalardo during mass, a Eucharistic celebration held in the cathedral, in front of both civil and political institutions, and citizens. In the speech made by the Cardinal, multiple themes were touched upon in a context that encompassed the celebration of the patron saint alongside the indifference on the part of the bourgeoisie towards the problems that had struck the ‘old’ city, the historic centre: the religious value that 15 July had assumed, despite the controversy that had followed the festival organisers in the preceding days and the absence of people from the *Festino*, seems to have disappeared into a silence created by respect and devotion in front of the procession of the silver urn containing the relics of the patron saint that was attended by fifty thousand people.

Cardinal Pappalardo, who took to the stage, which was built every year in Piazza Marina, urged the people to extol their patron saint as a spiritual value, imitating her in her strength of will and discerning her from all other endeavours because:

“... Rosalia is not interested in tourists or foreigners attracted by this or that folkloristic performance of the festival, this may be of interest to the Tourist Board or the Department of Tourism, or it may be an aid to the city’s economy...”.

The anniversary of the *dies natalis* of the patron saint of Palermo, on the 4 September each year, and the religious festival the day after on the 15 July, was experienced by the people in a more secular way in 1980 than in previous decades. The pilgrimage was experienced differently, it varied spiritually for each individual, it was accomplished in different ways: by bus, by car and, more traditionally, on foot.

A comparison made between today and the past, of the different means used to ascend to the top of Monte Pellegrino, highlights clear differences for, in the past, the religious devotion shown by the faithful was stronger. They climbed barefoot to the sanctuary and miracles and devotions were more frequent. Today the religious value of the festival has waned over the centuries, with traces of faith and tradition mixed with a form of secularism that touches on the sacred, uniting the meaning of the pilgrimage with the air of a picnic; as if the faithful were less devoted than in previous pilgrimages.

At the end of the 1980s, profound political transformations were taking place. Italy, which for fifty years had had the strongest communist party in the West, now had to deal with a Soviet communism that had been defeated. The traditional restrictions used in the Italian political system, which had prevented changes in government, were thrown into crisis; they were no longer necessary. The electorate, which had always voted for the same parties, had shown itself resistant to corruption, and the Mafia’s involvement in politics that had emerged from somewhere was now liberated.

The presence of organised crime, which has marked the Sicilian territory for centuries, involving every social and economic aspect, was strongly reflected in the organisation of the *Festino* in honour of Saint Rosalia, patron saint of the city of Palermo, at the end of the 20th century. For the city, 1990 marked a period in which inequality was present in various sectors: society, the economy, which was affected by organised crime, and the culture of the *Festino* itself.

The organisation of the *Festino* was no different compared to the previous decade, as the same triumphal chariot was used with the musicians playing inside the great vessel and, as every year, the celebration of the procession saw the participation of political institutions marked by the holding of a Eucharistic celebration at the Palace of the Eagles, together with representatives of the city administration and the archbishop's curia. In addition, Cardinal Pappalardo's stance towards the local political institutions marked a form of involvement by the religious institutions in the city's civic administration. It was an intervention that did not preclude any side, but which nonetheless uncovered the problem of a necessary connection between religious and civic values.

The religious procession of 15 July 1990 was reported on in an article in the *Giornale di Sicilia*, "The procession of the Urn of the *Santuzza* (little saint) will close the *Festino*", which describes the final route of the silver urn that traditionally passes through: ... via Vittorio Emanuele, Via Butera, Via Lincoln, Corso Tukory, Via Cadorna, Via Castro, Piazza Indipendenza, Porta Nuova to return to its starting point in front of the cathedral. ...".

On 16 July 1990, the *Giornale di Sicilia* carried a report entitled: 'What does the *Festino* taste like now?—Palermo. Saint Rosalia: those who criticise, those who regret, those who enjoy themselves, but everyone eats'. The controversy over traditional food customs, or those that characterised the tradition of the *Festino*, and the behaviour of the people in the days leading up to the religious festival, designated as devotional and spiritual, became more and more explicit.

In the month of September 1990, the customary pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Monte Pellegrino, which takes place on the night of the 3rd to the 4th, was marked not only by a spiritual and devotional message on the *dies natalis* of the patron saint but, alongside this and on the same days, a social and political message was given through the organisation of a torchlight procession against the Mafia's killing of general prefect Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, his wife Emanuela Setti Carraro, and police protection officer Domenico Russo, that had taken place in Palermo eight years earlier.

The official moment on 4 September, was when a mass in honour of Saint Rosalia was celebrated in the square in front of the sanctuary was attended by political and military institutions as well as a crowd of the faithful. The pilgrimage to the sanctuary began the night before via the old road, and from the first light of dawn masses were celebrated, welcoming the arrival of the faithful who gave thanks through the pilgrimage by bringing ex-votos, which were offered to the saint.

The cooperation of the municipality was very important. It arranged for the closing and opening of certain roads, needed to reach Monte Pellegrino, together with bus services provided by AMAT, which also offered integrated bus and metro services. The organisation of the city, roads and means of communication to reach the slopes of Monte Pellegrino were of primary importance to facilitate the smooth flow of traffic involving cars and citizens.

Devotion to the patron saint, therefore, requires close cooperation between political-civil and religious institutions, as the pilgrimage is a phenomenon that attracts more and more devotees every year. The pilgrimage on foot that takes place during the night of 3 September, along the old road leading to the sanctuary of Saint Rosalia, gathers many stories of faith and 'hope' from pilgrims who bring prayers and ex-votos.

In Palermo, the decade from 1990 to 2000 was marked by crimes that shocked both the entire population of the city and the entire nation. In 1992, the Mafia's terrorist assault on the balance of power between politics and the institutions reached a tragic climax. The 'black' period in Sicilian society began in 1990 with the murder of judge Rosario Livatino and continued in March 1992, when the honourable Salvo Lima, a member of the Sicilian

Christian Democratic Party, was killed. In 1986, the Maxi Trial had begun against dozens of Mafia defendants, leading to a series of convictions. It is believed that the hon. Salvo Lima had promised to ‘settle’ the trial, and his death has an enormous symbolic significance:

“... the mafia kills the man who is indicated by numerous testimonies as the mediator between the mafia itself and the political system of government [...] as if the system of mediation between the mafia and politics had been compromised in its reliability and how it functions...”

In 1992, the clash between the Mafia and the state had reached its limit: in the spring of ‘92, the Cosa Nostra decided to kill the two high profile magistrates who most publicly had fought to eliminate mafia crime in the city of Palermo.

The two judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, were commemorated in the *Festino* of 1992 through a torchlight procession that replaced the traditional fireworks that have always marked the closing of the festivities in honour of Saint Rosalia; and again in the *Festino* of 2007, which was entirely dedicated to the massacres carried out by the Mafia. On 18 July 1993, the Newspapers of Sicily (*Giornale di Sicilia*) dedicated its *Italian Chronicles* to all the crimes committed by mafia organisations against the state and against Italian justice:

“... 19 July 1992: almost two months after the motorway massacre, Palermo is a theatre of war. The Mafia kills a troublesome Judge in front of his mother’s house: a car bomb rips apart the magistrate and five protection officers. A terrible roar and all hell breaks loose in Via D’Amelio, as it did in Capaci...”

This is the headline that starts the article entirely dedicated to massacres by the Mafia, precisely a year after the event, and published after the 1993 *Festino* celebrations. This deeply rooted evil in Sicilian society was also recalled on that occasion.

I feel it is my duty to mention 1992, a year in which the celebrations of the patron saint took on multiple values: devotional, spiritual, and under the banner of justice, and the dignity of the human being. An article in the *Giornale di Sicilia* dated July 1993 reports on the two sad events that shook the whole of society, to ensure they are not forgotten:

“... the echo of the massacre that took place along the Capaci motorway on the afternoon of 23 May 1992 was still in the air, reverberating. And while in their offices the investigators in Palermo continue to try to make sense of the massacre, which cost the lives of the Judge Giovanni Falcone, his wife (Francesca Morvillo) and the three police protection officers, on 19 July another tremendous explosion rips through the Sicilian capital. The explosion takes place in Via Mariano D’Amelio, shortly before 5 p.m. On that accursed Sunday, six members of the anti-Mafia die: judge Paolo Borsellino, deputy prosecutor of the court of Palermo, and five police protection officers”.

At the 1992 *Festino*, the importance of putting on a public show of visibility and cohesion between the religious institution, Cardinal Pappalardo, and the political institution, represented by first citizen Aldo Rizzo before of the city was fundamental:

“... Palermo cannot be abandoned to its fate. Solidarity built only on words is not enough: what is at stake is the destiny of a city, which does not want to live with an enemy, the Mafia, which day after day massacres our freedoms, destroys our lives, and takes any hope of redemption...”

Saint Rosalia represented, both on the festival days from 10 to 15 July 1992 and on the days of the pilgrimage, 3 and 4 September 1992, a container of hope, of faith, of protection for the city from the crimes that took place that year; as well as a ‘vessel’ on which to place, even if only symbolically, under the statue representing the saint on the triumphal chariot: expectations, desires, regrets, bitterness, to drive away human cruelty and the scourge that, like the plague centuries before, hung over the city. And it is precisely at the 2007 *Festino*, which sees the mafia massacres and organised crime as a plague, remembered and symbolically carried along the route taken by the triumphal chariot, that the latter becomes a symbol.

In the aftermath of the 1992 massacres, Palermo's political and social climate changed: an image was presented to the public of internal cohesion and determination to eradicate the organised crime that had characterised the area for centuries. Two major channels of youth socialisation were mobilised: schools of all levels and parishes in the diocese of Palermo. Teachers took young people to anti-Mafia demonstrations, to show that the desire to change society must start from the young, from the new generations. In the church, contrary to a long tradition, voices of dissent from Mafia dominance were being voiced. Alongside the oratory of a section of the clergy, however, the silent example of priest from one of the neighbourhoods where the Mafia was most deeply rooted, who was murdered by those who did not like his commitment towards eradicating the Mafia, remains: Father Pino Puglisi.

In an environment almost devoid of civic tradition, an anti-Mafia movement was born, organising and involving individuals and entire families in demonstrations.

The symbolism and evocation of Saint Rosalia's life, (the miracles, the courage, the constant propensity to seek a righteous path towards one's faith), characterise the total devotion of the people of Palermo towards their 'Santuzza', as she is called by all. The future must be thought of in terms of economic development and cultural and civil growth together, in which expressions such as culture, tradition, customs, the fight against organised crime and the "*Festino*" are intertwined and trace a path. The rite—religious, secular, and profane myths of the festivities in honour of Saint Rosalia—brings together a multifaceted vision of Palermo society in an area that is constantly changing.

5. Conclusions

A calendar includes festivities and annual recurrences, scheduling preparations and production, hence the preliminary and other implementation phases, which are followed by reflective, analytical and critical moments, in view of the next enterprise, usually to be carried out a year later.

The calendar cycle of the festivity of Saint Rosalia in Palermo has a trend that does not respect the constant of celebrations spaced twelve months apart, but is characterised by repeated performances a few weeks apart in the summer season. This temporal conciliation makes allowances for enterprises that are currently in progress in order to adequately adjust times, modes and contents according to the needs of the moment and intervening and impromptu events. From this point of view, not only official speeches and other ritual pronouncements, but also posters and programmes, become precious and illuminating clues and indicators in the understanding of ongoing dynamics and changes.

At the Roman observatory, the sociologist Roberto Cipriani highlighted the importance of the concept of secularization, precisely of the date of the birth of the terminology, and the sociologist wrote that the word "secularization" was reborn in 1700, but just only after the French revolution, in a printed text.

Also, in the thoughts of the sociologist, Cipriani describes that:

"religions have never ceased to operate and guide the attitudes and behaviors of many individuals and groups, on which they exercise their historical, cultural and organizational weight". And... "the argument of secularization has been a sociological puzzle that has accompanied several generations of sociologists of religion and other social scientists".
(Cipriani 2023)

The performativity of the festival fully reflects the typical flow identified and theorised by Victor Turner through a threefold perspective that goes from structure to borderline and from the latter to anti-structure. Put another way: if, for example, a communitarian, institutional, consolidated, traditional, and tendentially self-referential organisation preordains and manages a festival, the latter, in the duration of its realisation, represents the liminality, that is, the limen, the threshold, the crossing that leads to a post-borderline situation, one that always has the character of an anti-structure. In fact, everything after the celebration is never as it was before, because new components and new elements have taken over and interfere with existing ones, the previous data, the pre-existing structure. In short,

despite appearances, a festive ritual is never the same in the time and space that it uses and occupies almost exclusively, and produces performative and transformative effects, which the trained and scientifically oriented gaze of the social researcher generally manages to grasp and understand with methodological tools that are tried and tested but still open to being verified.

If, then, we have at our disposal diachronic documentation and testimonies that transcend the centuries and make it possible to compare more or less different experiences, the researcher's work is made easier, especially when intellectuals of the calibre of Goethe (in 1787) and Alexandre Dumas Senior (in 1835) describe the celebrations for Saint Rosalia, '*L'amour est l'affaire principale de Palerme*' and then speak of Saint Rosalia's 'Night parade'. Guy de Maupassant (in 1885) too is an excellent witness of an exuberant Sicily made prosperous by its orange groves, but also of a 'wild' Palermo, probably in relation to the Monte Pellegrino that dominates it, and of a 'quiet' Sicily, despite the rumours about its bandits.

Obviously, a predominant part of this study is occupied by the existence of symbolic dimensions and their relationship with sacred images, but also institutional roles, both religious and political, i.e., the sacred and the profane. Some values are in the public domain, but other more complex and less obvious ones are the subject of a study by the author, whose work abounds with details, historical references, attributions and bibliographical evidence to support her point of view.

The result is a sort of plethora of motivated and duly documented approaches, which help us to understand the connections between and allusions to a series of celebrations that indeed constitute the most solid of platforms onto which the people of Palermo anchor their identity.

There is a common thread that underpins almost the entire discussion, a Jamesian matrix between institutional and individual religiosity. Here, however, put forward in the guise of a widespread popular religiosity, imbued with meanings that are sometimes hidden, sometimes explicit, but almost always connected to a daily experience that is peculiarly Palermitan, specifically, and Sicilian as a whole. An extraordinary metaphor for this is the triumphal chariot of Saint Rosalia, hailed and worshipped with fireworks that fully corroborate the sociological logic of Thorstein Veblen's 'conspicuous waste'.

It should be noted, however, that research focuses above all on change, on the continuous transformations of the festival, and also on its socio-political values, which see cardinals and mayors side by side always and in any case outside their cultural and ideological relevance: another 'miracle' from the 'Santuzza'. And, although certainly not the one from Verga and Mascagnana's *Cavalleria rusticana*, it is an excellent symbol of a changing and mutated Palermo, that changes and mutates without ever breaking the umbilical cord that binds it to its 'mother' Rosalia.

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Notes

- ¹ Columbus Day is a national holiday in many countries of the Americas and elsewhere, and a federal holiday in the United States, which officially celebrates the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas.
- ² GIORNALE DI SICILIA: Cronaca di Palermo: giovedì 10 luglio 1930; giovedì 11 luglio 1930; sabato 13 luglio 1930; domenica 14 luglio 1930; martedì 16 luglio 1930; venerdì 5 settembre 1930; 8 luglio 1950; prima pagina; 13 luglio 1950; 14 luglio 1950; 5 settembre 1950; 10 luglio 1960; seconda pagina della Cronaca di Palermo; sabato 16 luglio 1960; 5 settembre 1960; mercoledì 14 luglio 1971; Cronaca di Palermo pag.; sabato 12 luglio 1980; Cronaca di Palermo pag.; domenica 13 luglio 1980; Cronaca di Palermo p. 4; lunedì 14 luglio 1980; mercoledì 16 luglio 1980; giovedì 4 settembre 1980; sabato 14 luglio 1990; domenica 15 luglio 1990; lunedì 16 luglio 1990; mercoledì 5 settembre 1990; domenica 15 luglio 1992; domenica 18 luglio 1993; domenica 16 luglio 2000; martedì 10 luglio 2001; martedì 10 luglio 2001; mercoledì 11 luglio 2001; lunedì 16 luglio 2001; sabato 1 settembre 2001; lunedì 3 settembre 2001; mercoledì 3 luglio 2002; venerdì 5 luglio 2002; sabato 6 luglio 2002; domenica 7 luglio 2002; giovedì 5 settembre 2002; mercoledì 2 luglio 2003; mercoledì 9 luglio 2003; sabato 5 luglio 2003; sabato 12 luglio 2003; mercoledì 16 luglio 2003; martedì 2 settembre 2003; martedì 2 settembre 2003; giovedì 4 settembre 2003; venerdì 5 settembre 2003; martedì 13 luglio

2004; venerdì 3 settembre 2004; sabato 4 settembre 2004; sabato 2 luglio 2005; mercoledì 6 luglio 2005; giovedì 7 luglio 2005 sabato 9 luglio 2005; lunedì 11 luglio 2005; martedì 12 luglio 2005; giovedì 14 luglio 2005; sabato 16 luglio 2005; lunedì 5 settembre 2005. Giornale di Sicilia; Speciale 381° Festino in Onore di Santa Rosalia; anno 145. Giornale di Sicilia; venerdì 7 luglio 2006; sabato 8 luglio 2006; giovedì 13 luglio 2006; lunedì 16 luglio 2006; mercoledì 6 settembre 2006; Giornale di Sicilia Speciale 382° Festino in Onore di Santa Rosalia; p. VII, anno 146. Giornale di Sicilia; Speciale 383° Festino in Onore di Santa Rosalia; p. VII, anno 147, n. 191. Giornale di Sicilia; sabato 14 luglio 2007; domenica 15 luglio 2007; lunedì 16 luglio 2007; mercoledì 5 settembre 2007; giovedì 10 luglio 2008; venerdì 11 luglio 2008; lunedì 14 luglio 2008; martedì 15 luglio 2008; mercoledì 16 luglio 2008; martedì 2 settembre 2008; mercoledì 3 settembre 2008; sabato 4 settembre 2008; domenica 5 settembre 2008; lunedì 13 luglio 2009; martedì 14 luglio 2009; mercoledì 15 luglio 2009; giovedì 16 luglio 2009; giovedì 3 settembre 2009; venerdì 4 settembre 2009; sabato 5 settembre 2009; martedì 13 luglio 2010; mercoledì 13 luglio 2010; giovedì 14 luglio 2010; venerdì 15 luglio 2010; sabato 16 luglio 2010; venerdì 3 settembre 2010; sabato 4 settembre 2010; domenica 5 settembre 2010; martedì 12 luglio 2011; mercoledì 13 luglio 2011; giovedì 14 luglio 2011; venerdì 15 luglio 2011; sabato 16 luglio 2011; venerdì 2 settembre 2011; sabato 3 settembre 2011; domenica 4 settembre 2011; venerdì 13 luglio 2012; sabato 14 luglio 2012; domenica 15 luglio 2012; lunedì 16 luglio 2012; lunedì 3 settembre 2012; martedì 4 settembre 2012; mercoledì 5 settembre 2012; lunedì 1 luglio 2013; martedì 9 luglio 2013; mercoledì 10 luglio 2013; giovedì 11 luglio 2013; sabato 13 luglio 2013; domenica 14 luglio 2013; lunedì 15 luglio 2013; martedì 16 luglio 2013; martedì 3 settembre 2013; mercoledì 4 settembre 2013; giovedì 5 settembre 2013.

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