

# OF GRAPE, FEAST AND COMMUNITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON THE MAKING OF THE GRAPE HARVEST FESTIVAL IN AN ITALIAN TOWN IN PIEDMONT

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the phenomenon of grape harvest festivals in Italy. By exploring ethnographically the grape harvest festival of Lu (Alessandria province, Piedmont region), the paper points out the economic and social roles played by the festivals in modern Italy. The historic analysis of the case study helps to focus on the history of these festivals in the country and the role played by television and localism in defining the present forms of the rite.

KEYWORDS: Italy • grape harvest festivals • Fascist celebrations • invented traditions

## INTRODUCTION

As early as 1955, Claude Lévi-Strauss reflected on how local cultural traditions – a favourite topic within Cultural Anthropology – were disappearing with the advancement of the modern world (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 36–37). This transformation, however, did not concern only the native communities of Brazil. The two World Wars, growth in trade, new means of transportation, and therefore new travel opportunities, made remote places more accessible. A process of profound change could also be seen in the communities of those remote areas, who, for the previous generation of anthropologists, were considered ‘untouched’ or ‘wild’, and as such repositories of ancient, distant and pristine traditions. The social processes that were threatening the integrity of exotic cultures, were, at the same time, modifying European culture, particularly the ‘traditional’ cultures of rural areas. Notably in Italy, the transformation from autonomous and self-governing agricultural communities into suburbs of large industrialised urban centres (Bravo 2013; Grimaldi 1993; 2012) triggered a process of reinvention of local tradition that was based on a reworking of traditional rituality according to the needs of the new society and the invention of new customs.

This article will focus on the creation of a new custom, *la Sagra dell’Uva*, the Grape Harvest Festival, in the small Italian town of Lu, near Alessandria in the Piedmont region. While Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983: 6) pointed out that the making of a festival, the creation of a tradition, is substantially linked with the making of a new collective identity, the festival, still celebrated today and first introduced in the late 1960s, represents an important moment in defining local identity following the

economic transformations of the area that saw Lu change from an isolated rural community into a commuter town in the hinterland of the provincial capital, Alessandria. Thus, the festival was intended to revitalise tourism in the small town by creating an event that could bring together and involve the entire population of Lu. To create this new custom, the community enhanced its traditional knowledge of festivals with elements of customs seen on television. What resulted was a form of custom that echoed the model Grape Harvest Festival invented and promoted by Fascism elsewhere in Italy, despite the fact that no Grape Harvest Festival had ever been organised in Lu and that no members of the organising committee in Lu remembered any such festival.

Using the role that the Festival has acquired for the population of Lu as a point of departure, this article will aim to gain deeper insights into the cultural premises that led to the creation of this event and to the construction of its customs. What is more, by reviewing the process of its creation (or invention), a connection will be posited between the festival in Lu and the antecedent Italian Fascist festivals.

#### METHODOLOGY

This article is based on research undertaken by the author beginning in 2003, with a study on the changes over the 20th century in the calendar of festivities of Lu. The initial findings were presented as a monographic work on the evolution of the cult of the patron saint of Lu, Saint Valerio (see Fontefrancesco 2006). From 2005, research has focussed on the Grape Harvest Festival, the main event of the community's current festival calendar. Research in Lu has been conducted by combining three different methodologies: archival research, principally the archives of the local newspaper *Al país d'Lu*; in-depth interviews with the organisers of the early festivals; participant observation conducted in the village from 2004 to 2006 and then later on from 2010. Particularly important for this essay has been the ethnographic experience of the preparations of the 37th Grape harvest festival in 2005 and of the creation of one of the festival floats. Since that year the structure of the festival has not substantially changed, thus the ethnographic gaze focuses on that particular festival as an example and expression of an on-going tradition celebrated by the local community.<sup>1</sup>

#### LU

Lu is an Italian town situated in a part of the province of Alessandria known as Montferrato Casalese. The town is about twenty kilometres from the towns of Alessandria, Casale Monferrato, and Valenza. Since most of the local residents work in the three above-mentioned cities or in the large metropolitan areas of Genoa, Milan and Turin, Lu is today mainly a residential centre: few families still run farms, businesses specialising in arts and crafts, or shops in the Lu area.

Despite population decline (Popolazione Lu 1861–2012) registered during the twentieth century, the town's economy only underwent a significant change in the post-Second World War period. Agriculture flourished in Lu until the Second World War. After the war, in less than a decade, Lu became economically dependent on Alessandria and

Casale Monferrato. Indeed, during the Fascist period, the only way to escape shortages in the agricultural economic system was to move to the main cities in northern Italy or to move abroad, mainly to France, Argentina, the USA and Australia. Subsequently, with the abolition of the Fascist law which controlled the movement of citizens across the Italian territory,<sup>2</sup> and the improvement of both general transportation infrastructure, as well as local public transport, an increasing number of people were able find a job in the huge industrial centres of Turin, Milan and Genoa, and in the cities of Alessandria and Casale Monferrato. The post-Second World War period proved to be an era full of new possibilities and, in a decade, the hill town of Lu changed radically. Lu had not suffered mass emigration at the beginning of the twentieth century (Guaschino, Martinotti 1984), and did not sustain major damage during the Second World War. Therefore, people's lives continued to be influenced by the agricultural seasons and the liturgical calendar. As Gigi Busto, the first president of the Pro Loco<sup>3</sup> association of Lu that sought to promote Lu for tourists, and member of the organising committee for the Grape Harvest Festival, stated:

Every day many young people commuted from Lu to the nearby cities, or came to Lu only on the weekends or for their holidays. Only the elderly stayed in Lu and thanks to the growing number of cars and motorcycles, the young people no longer sought to spend their free time here and even less their holidays. The town had changed and needed to be re-launched (revitalised). For this reason, we came up with an idea for a new festival.<sup>4</sup>

#### LU'S TWO FESTIVALS

As Gigi Busto highlights, the economic change in Lu led to a clear transformation in the town's social fabric that created repercussions at the local cultural level.

Today the calendar of festivities appears to be almost detached from the world of agriculture, and is instead heavily influenced by the rhythm of liturgical holidays, with its most important celebrations being Christmas and Easter. The calendar divides up the year, depending on both industry and school requirements, into a long production period, lasting from September to June, and a period of either partial or complete suspension of production in July and August, the time when people traditionally take their holiday.

Within the annual festival cycle, the two main local festivals are those of the patron saint Valerio, held in January, and the Grape Harvest Festival, which takes place in September. Both events are considered crucial in defining local identity by Lu people, so that from both tourist materials published since 2005 by the municipality of Lu, and television documentaries broadcast as part of the *In famiglia*<sup>5</sup> programme by the national Italian Raidue network between 2006 and 2007, it is clear that both the local town council and the Pro Loco wanted to locate the identity of Lu within these two festivals. As Ferruccio Mazzoglio, mayor of Lu from 1999 to 2009, explained, "the Luese identity emerges through our traditional festivals: the patron saint of Valerio and the Grape Harvest Festival".<sup>6</sup>

The Festival of Saint Valerio and the Grape Harvest Festival are two very different events with different roots. The tradition surrounding the Festival of Saint Valerio is of

medieval origin and can be traced back to the 15th century. Today, this celebration is the only remaining legacy in the calendar of festivities of Lu that represents the exigencies of the agrarian culture that disintegrated after the radical economic changes of the 1950s. Giancarlo Ribaldone, now retired, recalled:

The increase of motorbikes and cars, the mechanisation of agriculture and the rise of large food retailers had already changed the town after the Second World War. Then, many inhabitants of Lu emigrated and abandoned their land holdings. In the fifties, an increasing number of people found employment in the cities and agriculture became for many a part time activity and did not represent the main income of a family anymore.<sup>7</sup>

As agriculture lost its economic and cultural centrality for the people of Lu, a rapid decline can be seen in acts of worship and festivals linked to agriculture – both practices that were strongly present and still observed not many years before in the 1940s. Leone Rota, businessman and chairman of the historical and cultural association of Saint Giacomo recounted:

Until around the post-War period, one of the town's most important events was the Saint Bovo festival in May. Families from the countryside around Lu gathered at the church of Saint Giacomo to have their cattle blessed: after the War the small land-holdings with cattle disappeared and inevitably so did this festival.<sup>8</sup>

In the early 1960s, the festival of the patron saint of Lu seemed destined to have the same fate as the festival of Saint Bovo. The festival of Saint Valerio, celebrated on the 22nd of January, had been neglected by most of the population who were working elsewhere and therefore were unable to attend the celebrations. In order to guarantee its survival, it was necessary to readapt and repurpose the festival to the new needs of the population, by postponing the festival to the closest Sunday to the canonical date. With the inhabitants of Lu having become commuters, and agriculture ceasing to have cultural centrality, modifying the customs of the festival allowed for a new articulation of the festival for the community. Piergiorgio Verri, the current parish priest, recalled:

In the seventies, I studied in Turin. I remember that even by then the festival of Saint Valerio had become the celebration to welcome back home those like me who had emigrated.<sup>9</sup>

Today, only a few of the oldest inhabitants of the town can detect the extent to which the symbols and the rites of the festival are linked to the religious and agricultural cycle: today the festival dedicated to the patron saint is commonly considered, as Verri highlighted, a festival for emigrants who return to Lu to visit their families and their birthplace.

While the veneration of Saint Valerio goes back to ancient times, the Grape Harvest Festival was born forty years ago and its birth was linked to the decline of another rural festival, one dedicated to Our Lady of August, celebrated on the 15th of August (*Ferragosto*). This festival took place during the pause in the agricultural year after threshing and before the grape harvest. For that occasion the young people used to organise a public ball called *ballo a palchetto* in Piazza Gherzi, the main square of Lu. Gino Garlando, a musician who played for many town festivals during the 1940s, recounted:

It was the festival the young people loved the most. The most anticipated event of the summer. Everybody looked forward to the festival and, especially, to the *ballo a palchetto*, the most important [event] of the year. All the *peisa* [Piedmontese dialect term for 'weight station'], Piazza Gherzi, was decorated and in the middle of the square a wooden stage was built. Everybody in town waited for the ball. It was the most important event for the people of this community, people who had never been even as far as Alessandria in their lives. It was the event in which the young people made their debut into society, people sought company, and marriages were arranged or destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

The slow decline of the festival began in the 1950s and lasted for more than fifteen years.<sup>11</sup> In May 1977, in an article published in the local paper, Federico Scarsoglio, then secretary of the local municipality, clearly explained the social function of that festival and the cultural reasons for its decline:

The increasing number of cars has solved the problem of the lack of places to socialise: many young people flock to social venues springing up in numerous places, not to mention the cinemas in the towns. Furthermore, everybody, especially young people, long to spend the days of mid-August resting in a place by the sea or in the mountains. Only the old people and those who have work there stay in town.

The traditional Mid-August Festival [*sagra di Ferragosto*], once long-awaited, is now neglected; sometimes it causes arguments between parents who want to celebrate this event with all the family, and the children, who want to enjoy their summer holidays by the sea.

It was so different and so beautiful before, when the young girls still used to show off the new dresses they wore to go dancing, while the town gossips, who did not take part in the big dance, looked them up and down! And the proud mums observed their elegant and perfumed daughters, while the young men gazed at them, hoping to dance or win the heart of one of the girls.

Now those beautiful and lively girls are on a beach, basking in sunshine, or wandering around, clumsily dressed with blue-jeans patched like quilts.

This being the case, over the last few years, the Pro Loco has wondered if this festival, which is no longer loved by young people, should be organised at all. [...] So, why should we organise a festival that young people do not love anymore? Is it not better to couple it with the Grape Harvest Festival that, starting from this year, will take place on the second Sunday of September, when people come back home from their holidays? The Pro Loco cannot afford two festivals close together – as the town councillors can confirm – because they wear out both the people and the enthusiasm. [...] If, in the immediate future, there will not be a town committee that can take on the responsibility of continuing to organise the festival, I think we should cancel it and organise a wonderful Grape Harvest Festival. (Scarsoglio 1977)

The mass motorisation among younger residents of Lu irreparably shattered the microcosm of society in Lu. As a result, cultural consumption evolved leading to the real cause of the decline of the Mid-August Festival. This celebration died out as it had lost its social function, substituted by holidays by the sea and the Grape Harvest Fes-

tival, born almost a decade before the last celebration of the *Ferragosto*, as a conscious response to its decline.

Gigi Busto, originally from Casale Monferrato, remembered what it was like arriving in Lu in the post-War period:

When I arrived in Lu, at the end of the 1950s, the Mid-August Festival was becoming progressively less popular among the younger residents of Lu. The custom of spending the holiday at the seaside and of leaving Lu during the month of August began to spread, and the only people who remained in Lu at this time were the old people. The Mid-August Festival celebration was, however, organised by young people for young people and therefore could not survive without them.

But then, those young people who would leave for the holidays and would return to Lu in September still felt the need to have a celebration just for themselves. That is how the idea came to us of organising a celebration in September. Furthermore, between the 1950s and 1960s Lu's population was decreasing. Faced with this worrisome fact, the question of how it would be possible to revitalise Lu and attract new people to live there naturally followed. A celebration that would attract tourists seemed like a good idea to us and so that is how the Grape Harvest Festival was born.<sup>12</sup>

There were, therefore, two reasons behind the Grape Harvest Festival: to offer a celebration capable of involving the young people in Lu again and to relaunch the town from a tourism point of view. The definition of this new celebration as an event to promote the production of wine in Lu is linked to an incident that occurred in the summer of 1967. This was reported in the local newspaper:

I remember how one night, after playing the Mariana card game for a long time, we moved out of the bar in search of a bit of fresh air and to find Aldo Capra, then mayor, who had been that day in Milan to deliver some wine. On his return he saw two posters advertising two different festivals, one was for peppers and the other for asparagus, and he said: "Why don't we also do something like that to promote the fruit of our land?" The idea was talked about until the early hours and that same night it took shape and was passed. Grapes as an illustrious product of Lu and its surrounding area became the main focus of our discussions every evening and for many evenings thereafter. The Grape Harvest Festival was the first of a long and continual series of celebrations. (Busto 1992)

Indeed, in the past there had never been any organised celebrations for the grape harvest (*vendemmia*), outside those held on farms for the grape harvesters and organised by the owners that were widespread in the lower Monferrato area.<sup>13</sup> What is more, no member of the organising committee had any memories of earlier grape harvest festivals in the vicinity of Lu.<sup>14</sup>

In order to create a festival that attracted tourists, something unique had to be created, something that would intrigue and appeal to people from all over the province. For this very reason, we sought ideas from television and were inspired by the Grape Harvest Festival of Lugano (Switzerland). Back then, we could still see the Swiss television in Lu and became acquainted with this festival.

It was a very important festival with crowds of people. The lakeside parade of festival floats, dedicated to the grape and the vine was the highlight: no other provincial festival offered a float parade outside the carnival period.<sup>15</sup>

The Grape Harvest Festival of Lugano was first organised in 1933 and since the very first event, festival floats have been its main attraction. Virgilio Chiesa, in his book *L'Opera della Pro Lugano*, offers the following description of the first parade:

In the afternoon, the grape harvest floats would parade past, each time different and always distinctive. The floats depicted typical images that reflected our identity: a chalet, a mill, a winepress, a little porch decorated with cobs of corn and on the bench an old spinning wheel, the inside of a kitchen with a young mother, sitting next to the fireplace, rocking her baby and knitting; a votive chapel where a young girl confides her deepest feelings to the Virgin Mary: a grape arbour in a tavern courtyard and cheerful regular customers sitting at the tables; a picture of two fishermen busy with drift nets; a fountain and next to it two stout peasants scouring copperware; and floats representing the Malcantone landscape, the hatter of the village of Onsernone, the weaver of the Verzasca valley, the locksmith of the Val Colla valley and other craftsmen, who for this special occasion worked on a holiday; and well-designed symbolic floats, groups file past on foot, wearing period costumes, singing happy songs that used to resonate in the vineyards during the grape harvest; bands play joyful marches, accordionists and four explorers who hold the four corners of a large national flag in which people put their offerings for the Red Cross. (Chiesa 1949: 56–57)

Over time, whilst remaining anchored in the traditional theme of the grape harvest, the floats in the Lugano festival began to explore new combinations of themes, linking the agricultural ideal with elements drawn from cinema, fashion, and current affairs. Giampiero Rinaldi, one of the youngest members of the organising committee of the first Grape Harvest Festival in Lu, affirmed that the floats in the 1960s

[...] looked like carnival floats, but with one difference: instead of Harlequin and Pulcinella, there were bunches of grapes and bottles of wine. Everybody liked the idea of building floats like those for our festival. A parade of floats in September was something completely new, but at that time in Lu there were already people – including some of us [the members of the first organising committee] – who built the carnival floats in Alessandria and Casale every year.<sup>16</sup>

The float parade was introduced into the traditional program of the Festival. The parade managed to adapt a custom that was already known to the town, the procession of symbolic floats, and the proven ability of at least some of the organising committee to design and build the floats. These elements combined to create a Festival that was wholly unique to the Alessandria region of the 1970s. In addition to the float parade, the *ballo a palchetto* was reintroduced, so that the new festival included the same kind of festivity as the Festival of Our Lady of August that was waning in popularity. Finally, to allow tourists to sample the local wine and grape products, the organising committee decided to give tourists a bottle of wine as a gift and organise stands to sell local grapes and wine.



Photo 1. The streets of Lu during the parade of the Grape Harvest Festival. 11 September 2005. Photo by Davide Capra.



Photo 2: The float named "The Addams Winery" during the parade of the Grape Harvest Festival in Lu. 11 September 2005. Photo by Davide Capra.



The first Grape Harvest Festival that took place in 1969 successfully attracted much public interest that pushed the organising committee to continue with the event and add to the programme over the following years.<sup>17</sup> Year after year the float parade continued to be the core of the Festival and as Gianni Boccalatte, the later president of the Pro Loco, had reiterated many times over the years from the 1970s to the 1990s, “the floats are the Grape Harvest Festival”.<sup>18</sup>

The 2005 parade was an example of the way in which the floats could combine grapes and wine with themes linked to local tradition, current affairs or sport:

Here comes the primary school’s float “The Fountain of Youth” with a wonderful bubbling fountain (just a few little passengers on it, but full of enthusiasm); then “Herbie, the tipsy Beetle” powered by the wine of Lu and built by a group called “The Fools”; also the group of “The Saints” is competing with the “Fred Barbera and Ginger Cortese” float: a couple of bottles next to a gramophone covered with grapes.

Then comes the float named “The Addams Winery” built by the hamlet of Martini: the big white hand stands out against the gloomy family (it seems a dark day for them too!).

Finally there are the two groups of the oratory and the Sablot that do not participate in the competition for the title of best float. The group of the oratory, named “Waiting for Valentino Rossi”, is dressed in yellow and blue, with helmets and bicycles disguised as motorcycles, while the group “Paisò” of the Sablot recalls the old ways of the grape harvest. (Bo 2005)



Photo 3. The “Herbie, the tipsy Beetle” float during the parade of the Grape Harvest Festival in Lu. 11 September 2005. Photo by Davide Capra.



Photo 4. The “Fred Barbera and Ginger Cortese” float during the parade of the Grape Harvest Festival in Lu. 11 September 2005. Photo by Davide Capra.

#### A FASCIST CELEBRATION

In the course of its forty-year history, the Lu Grape Harvest Festival has managed to take centre stage in the region, becoming one of the main events in September.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the elements that have characterised the Grape Harvest Festival have been the float parade, the *ballo a palchetto*, and the organisation of stands to promote and sell local wine.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst the ball is a legacy of an agricultural festival, namely the Festival of Our Lady held on 15th August, the combination of a float parade and the promotion and sale of local wine can be traced back to a more recent festive model, which became widespread in Italy in the 1930s under the Fascist regime, namely the Grape Harvest Festival.

The “first national day of the Grape Harvest Festival” was celebrated on 28th September 1930 (Cavazza 1997: 122–125), turning this initiative of Arturo Marescalchi, the then under-secretary of agriculture, into a reality. In fact, he wanted to find an effective way to boost grape and wine sales nationwide through an extensive schedule of festivals centred on grapes and wine.

Before this celebration was made official, Fascism had already promoted and advertised single-themed festivals, centred on specific crop production, such as strawberries, wheat and grapes. These proved to be effective tools to re-launch tourism and the local economy (ibid.: 122). From 1930 onwards, based on these first experiences, the

Regime enforced a vast national programme of grape harvest festivals in order to revive the wine growing and producing sector that suffered from the recession of the entire national viniculture market. These festivals had to be organised by local committees and had to conform to certain criteria: provide a contest for “the best offer of grape sales” and set up a parade with people dressed up as traditional peasants and decorated grape harvest festival floats, which represented themes linked to wine growing and agricultural life (ibid.: 122–123). The archive of the Luce Institute owns several video accounts of some of the first grape harvest festivals.<sup>21</sup> Particularly representative is the video of the second festival in Rome, where people paraded in clothes of the style worn in Rome in the mid-19th century, men in Greek *peplos* whose hats were trimmed with garlands of vine, a float representing a still life made out of a big bunch of black grapes in a wicker basket, decorated with vines, a float representing a steam boat with men and women on its deck dressed as sailors giving out bunches of grapes to the crowds, and, finally, a float representing a tavern where men and women dressed in traditional costumes sang and played songs in dialect. This parade, with its festival floats and its groups in costumes, appears artistically very similar to the ones seen in Lu.

Indeed, it is not by chance that it is possible to retrace a path connecting the processions in Lugano, the Festival in Lu and the floats of the Fascist Grape Harvest Festivals. As Stefano Cavazza highlights in his work on Fascist festivals, the model of the Grape Harvest Festival became very popular and widespread across the whole of Italy (ibid.: 122–125). The success of this festival can be seen in its adoption and continuation throughout Italy after the Second World War and after the fall of Fascism in the post-War period and beyond to the present day.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, after almost eighty years, some of the Grape Harvest Festivals created during the Fascist period continue to take place every year, such as those of Poggio Sannita (Isernia Province) and Impruneta (Florence Province), as well as those that were sponsored and promoted on a national level, such as the Grape Harvest Festival of Marino (Rome Province) (ibid.).

The popularity of this model even crossed national borders. Indeed, festivals dedicated to grape and wine were organised in the Swiss border region of Canton Ticino, for example, from the beginning of the 1930s. In addition to the aforementioned festival of Lugano, the festival of Balerna and Mendrisino (Prima Festa dell’Uva 1957) adopted the fundamental elements of the Fascist festivals: a market to promote local wine and, above all, the float parade. These festivals were acclaimed locally and became so popular that they continued to be organised over the years. In particular, the festival of Lugano became one of the most important events of the whole canton Ticino, and many television programmes were dedicated to it during the 1960s. These programmes, which were broadcast by Swiss television also in Lu, aroused curiosity among its inhabitants.

When, in 1967, a group of residents of Lu chose the festival of Lugano as a model for their new festival, and when, in particular, they decided to take the idea of a float parade as the central element of the Lu’s new festival, a bizarre cultural triangulation was completed. Indeed, the residents of Lu, convinced that they were introducing a completely new kind of celebration in the province of Alessandria – since the idea was taken from abroad – in fact successfully re-introduced the same pattern of festival that had previously been widespread in the Fascist period, at least in the main towns, and that had disappeared during the war and the industrial boom of the post-War period.

## CONCLUSION

The Grape Harvest Festival of Lu is an example of how social dynamism in a community can strongly stimulate the development of local traditions; furthermore, analysing the features of this festival, television emerges as a powerful cultural vector that has been able to convey a model for a festival on an international scale.

Studying the evolution of celebrations in the Jerte Valley in Spain, the anthropologists Francesco Cruces and Angel Díaz de Rada (1992: 72) established the evolutionary process of celebration rituality in a community:

The decline of certain lesser religious celebrations and the customs associated with them under the direct impact of the transformation of the productive cycle and the indirect effect of the tendency towards secularisation.

The persistence of traditional celebrations, and especially their ludic aspects, suggesting a “return to tradition” by generations that have no direct experience of it. This is a modern phenomenon because it implies mediation by non-traditional institutions and learning.

The appearance of new forms of celebration on the margins or in the interstices of the traditional festive process, sometimes as a result of the activity of voluntary associations or supralocal institutions.

In the case of Lu, these trends can be found in the evolution of the festival of Our Lady of August and the organisation of the Grape Harvest Festival. With the cultural crisis in the agricultural world there were fewer social assumptions on which the mid-August celebration was based. Since it was not at all suitable to the new social context, this festival underwent a crisis and was ultimately abandoned as it was no longer capable of meeting both the cultural and recreational demands of the younger generation in Lu, who should have been the festival’s target audience. To respond to such a demand, a new celebration was created from scratch, the Grape Harvest Festival, which took some of the celebrations associated with the Festival of Our Lady of August, the entertainment of the ball, and introduced them into the new framework of the Festival. In order to complete and give more weight to this new celebration, the ball was accompanied by a float parade, an innovative element compared to the local cultural context in which it was introduced, and one that had taken its cue from the media.

It has already been pointed out that, since the 1960s, television has been a crucial element in the cultural unification of Italy,<sup>23</sup> but the example of Lu shows how this communication tool was already able to create an international network from which a single rural area could acquire information and cultural models which were then adapted to its own region. Television, therefore, was already a cultural and globalising vector capable of spreading cultural models, going beyond geographical and political barriers. Without wishing to paint a picture of Lu as a town in which the transformation from a traditional society to a globalised information society has been achieved, this undoubtedly shows that forty years ago, television had already become one of the tools the “*bricoleur* of tradition” used in the creation of customs (Grimaldi 1993: 34). This can be seen in modern society’s ability to take inspiration from television, to acquire new cultural practices, and to apply them to its world.

This was not an innocent change. The making of a new festival represents an attempt of a community that is facing its disaggregation to counter the social effects of this trend. In so doing, the passage from a religious feast to a mundane one is not just a matter of opposition between sacred and profane. Rather, at stake is the very strategy adopted by a community to maintain its social integrity. While the Feast of Our Lady of August shows a social group that protects its integrity by closing up, almost interdicting foreigners from participating in the rituals, the new festival instead chases the preservation of the community by opening it up to tourists and other strangers, hoping that this move would attract new financial and human resources. This strategy shift is implicitly linked and shows the growing sense of marginality present in the community of Lu after the Second World War.

Thus, the Lu Grape Harvest Festival is an example of how a complex society creates its own customs, trying to fill the void left by the death of previous celebrations, which were in crisis following social and economic transformations within the local community. The operation of cultural *bricolage*, that is necessary for the creation of a festival, uses all the tools that a society has (previous experience of each of its members, local tradition, and mass media), often looking for inspiration in external models, sometimes from afar. In this process the elements of this creative game lose their original meaning and find new ones. The result that is obtained is something new for the community, even if, unintentionally, it can represent a form of celebration now forgotten, that existed locally just a few years earlier.

#### NOTES

1 The photographs accompanying this article were taken at the 2005 festival by Davide Capra, whose contribution I would like to formally acknowledge here.

2 The effects of Fascist law on the world of agriculture in northern Italy are well documented by Anna Cento Bull and Paul Corner (1993).

3 Pro Loco associations are organised in the Unione Italiana Pro Loco league. Those institutions were created after the Second World War as non-governmental players in the tourist development of the municipalities in which they are located and with which they are related. For further information on the national history of the Pro Loco associations, see Il Portale Delle Pro Loco.

4 Interview with Gigi Busto, 29 January 2007, in Casale Monferrato.

5 In autumn 2006, the municipality of Lu and its Pro Loco decided to participate in the television *In famiglia* programme broadcast by Raidue. That year the programme, which was broadcast on Saturday and Sunday mornings, introduced a competition for villages and small towns across Italy: a team from all the towns and villages that decided to pay the deposit was to take part in a tournament that lasted the entire season for which the show ran, and to take part in a series of challenges, quizzes and agility games against teams from other Italian towns. The prize was a school bus as well as the chance to make your own region and its history known across Italy during the course of the broadcasts. At their debut, each team was guaranteed a micro-documentary lasting three minutes, during which they would showcase footage of their local area and present historical information about their town or village. This micro-documentary was the only time dedicated entirely to tourist publicity for the towns. On the 2nd of December 2006, the team from Lu made their debut introduced by their micro-documentary. While the documentary largely focused on one of the village's two main festivals, namely the festival of the patron saint Valerio, in addition to shots of Lu taken by the Rai film team, the footage also showed images of the float parade, characteristic of Lu's other festival, the Grape Harvest Festival.

6 Interview with Ferruccio Mazzoglio, 23 March 2008, in Lu.

7 Interview with Giancarlo Ribaldone, 3 March 2007, in Lu.

8 Interview with Leone Rota, 20 May 2007, in Lu.

9 Interview with Piergiorgio Verri, 18 December 2007, in Lu.

10 Interview with Gino Garlando, 29 May 2006, in Lu.

11 The last *ballo a palchetto* was organised in 1975. In 1976, what remained of the festival was “one lonely stand of a nougat seller”, as Mauro Bisoglio (1976) wrote in the local magazine. In 1977 the Festival of Our Lady of August officially ceased to exist.

12 Interview with Gigi Busto, 29 January 2007, in Casale Monferrato.

13 The atmosphere of these festivals is described in the last verse of the poem “La vandümmia’d na vota” of G. Parmiani in 1997 (Botto et al. 2003: 104), written and performed for the annual lunch for the members of the wine cooperative of Saint Giorgio Monferrato: *A vandümmia finija as fava la curmà / e a ca dal pardon iera da senna e da disnà. / Pö i sunadur cun l’armoni? e la ghitara, as biitavu sunà / e al divertiment? la comensipiava cun in bel balà.* (Once the grape harvest is over the feasting began / and at the master’s house there was dinner and supper. / Then the musicians with the harmonica and the guitar began to play / and the festivities began with a wonderful dance.)

14 As this article will later demonstrate, despite the Fascist regime promoting the annual organisation of a Grape Harvest Festival throughout Italy through the Ente Nazionale Dopolavoro (National Recreation Organisation), it remains impossible even today to reconstruct how widespread this festival became in the province of Alessandria. The reason for this is that the regional archives of the Ente Nazionale Dopolavoro were destroyed in 1944 and local newspapers of the time, in particular *Il Piccolo* and *La Stampa*, do not provide details on events promoted by this organisation. The only Grape Harvest Festival in the area that certainly took place was at Ovada, and has been documented in Pestarino 2007.

15 Interview with Gigi Busto, 29 January 2007, in Casale Monferrato.

16 Interview with Giampiero Rinaldi, 21 January 2007, in Lu.

17 Initially, the Festival events were limited to the second weekend of September: the main event of the Saturday night was the *ballo a palchetto*, while the parade took place on the Sunday evening.

From the 9th year, the celebration also included the Friday before, as can be seen in the programme of the 10th Grape Harvest Festival (Programma della 10a Sagra dell’Uva 1977). Additional events were planned prior to the Festival that could extend the celebrations to the weekend before that of the float parade, for example in 1976 the Exhibition of Wine and Silverware was inaugurated on the 12th of September, the Saturday preceding the float parade (Programma della 9a Sagra dell’Uva 1976).

With the progressive improvements in catering organised by the Pro Loco, the festivals began to extend to the weekend preceding the float parade. The first two-week event took place in 1989, as the programme of that year shows (Programma della 22a Sagra dell’Uva 1989).

The first festivals to take place over two weekends, however, offered a very limited programme on the first weekend, organised mainly around the dual themes of Food and Dance, and accompanied with the openings of art exhibitions and/or events featuring local products.

The 2004 event represented a considerably more tourist-oriented festival: the first weekend remained less extravagant than the second and contained fewer events, but, at the same time, it was characterised by very popular events for a niche market with merchants who come from all over the northwest of Italy, for example, the *Vesparaduno* that took place in 2005. From that point, the Festival organisers began to offer a product that attracted tourists not just from the town itself but also from outside the local area. From the 2005 Festival onwards, there have not been further substantial alterations to the programme of events.

18 Interview with Gianni Boccalatte, 4 August 2006, in Lu.

19 As highlighted by local journalist Luigi Deambrosis in his presentation of the 2005 Grape harvest festival (Deambrosis 2005: 14).

20 The catering must be mentioned in addition to these three elements. Catering was introduced for the first time in 1972, during the 5th Grape Harvest Festival, and for this event the Pro Loco hired the 'Famous chefs of Ponti' who were invited to return in 1978 to prepare their polenta and frittata with cod, as Gigi Busto explained in his interview (29 January 2007). Catering services were properly introduced with the 10th Festival, and were located in the Papà Francesco restaurant, in via Colli. The menu was characterised by local dishes from Piedmontese tradition, as shown in the programme of the Festival (Programma della 10a Sagra dell'Uva 1977).

From the 11th to the 14th Grape Harvest Festivals, the catering service was provided intermittently. Only with the 15th Grape harvest festival did the restaurant take on a definitive role as Mario Dealassi explains in his article (Dealassi 1982). Having bought field kitchens, which are still in use today, the Pro Loco organised catering in the *Cantina Sociale* in Via Roma, and the catering remained there until 1998. The 33th Festival saw the catering moved to its current location, the courtyard of the town hall, as the programme of this event shows (Programma della 33a Sagra dell'Uva 2000).

21 A vast amount of visual documentation on the Grape Harvest Festivals in Italy is made available on the Institute's web site (see Archivio Storico Istituto Luce).

22 The Grape Harvest Festival of Vagliagli, a village in the area of Castelnuovo Berardenga (Siena Province), serves as a good example. The demise of this festival was not due to a political factor (the fall of Fascism) but to a socio-economic factor. The festival was abandoned in 1977 because, in that agricultural society, metayage tenant farming had fallen into disuse following the progressive industrialisation of the countryside and emigration from the village to Siena. In 1995, the inhabitants of the village reorganised the festival, considering it a "traditional festival" whose renewal meant re-asserting local identity. (Scala, Galgani 2005: 15–56)

23 "Television and direct dialling are presented as tools for the unification of cultural circulation in a country in which internal migration represents the main tool of cultural circulation, first of all in terms of physical mobility" (Ortoleva 1997: 132).

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