

**Mieres: The regeneration of a Catalan village<sup>1</sup>**

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*Synopsis*

Thirty years ago Mieres, a Catalan community in the lower reaches of the Pyrenees, was evidently dying. Having exported its fertility to the towns and cities, it was confronting the senescence and decrepitude that has afflicted countless thousands of rural communities around our changing world. In Mieres, the most conspicuous challenge to this fate has been a proliferation of fiestas, fairs and other public celebrations. Many exiles are still involved in these passionate assertions of belonging and shared identity, but even they recognise that unless Mieres can recover its lost fertility, revival as anything resembling a ‘normal’ community is unlikely. A life-saving infusion has come in the form of a reverse flow of young urban fugitives in pursuit of rustic bliss, for whom the festive activity also provides a creative sense of belonging. Crises of the sort afflicting Mieres, and the compromises achieved, provide an unusually vivid opportunity to observe in detail this interaction of physical (‘biological’), material (‘economic’) and symbolic (‘cultural’) processes on which the *regeneration* of human society everywhere ultimately depends.

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I would like to tell you about a book I'm completing, based on a long-term study of a village in Catalonia in north-east Spain. It is the latest instalment of a career-long preoccupation with the relationship between human reproduction and social history, especially regarding political efforts (local as well national) to organise ‘development’. I have been trying to substantiate a conviction that what we loosely call ‘family life’ is not simply a byproduct of large-scale demographic or political-economic processes, but is a very active force in the making of these processes. I am always surprised when academic colleagues, immersed as they are in their own family dramas, shrug off this proposition, dismissing reproduction as the provision of the raw human material of society, but as instrumentally neutral in the making of history.

Latterly I have become more concerned to know why, in current intellectual contexts, it should be so difficult to argue the contrary. I suspect that this is not just a product of academic expansion and the disciplinary division of labour, but is more deeply rooted in our dualist heritage. Our beliefs about the irreconcilability of the mental and the material frustrate efforts to argue their integrity in both personal experience and social being, or to clear the conceptual obstacles between the domains of ‘biology’ on the one hand and ‘culture’ on the other. Mercifully, the mood is changing, the philosophers are coming back out of the woodwork to advise us, and interesting new questions are being asked. I hope to offer a glimpse of these basic issues in this brief account of the struggle in one particular rural community to survive against what seems to be the inexorable tide of history. ‘Community development’ is as old as humanity, and my mission has been to show how historically recent efforts to organise progress on the large scale ignore at their peril the parallel efforts of ordinary people everywhere to make and remake their lives.

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## I DEGENERATION

Nearly twenty years ago I chose Mieres, an attractive but unexceptional village in the foothills of the Pyrenees, about an hour from the Mediterranean, as a microcosm of the global predicament of rural social decline. In the middle of the nineteenth century the population was at a peak of about fifteen hundred. With the rural exodus after 1950, there has been a steady drop from about a thousand residents to 340 today, 55 of them over the age of 75. When I arrived in 1989 these elderly survivors had resigned themselves gloomily to a fate of neglect and destitution, and their welfare was my initial concern.

The realities of degeneration can be traced back to the traumas of Civil War (1936-1939) and the epoch which older people call *la misèria*, extending through to the late 1950s. My efforts to extract a coherent account of who did what, when and to whom in this traumatic period always reduced my informants to passionate near-speechlessness. For those who had lived through it the *misèria* was marked off by stark contrasts from today and, less vividly, from what had gone before. Its most basic measure was hunger, a truly visceral memory which has afflicted the older generation with pessimism even amid today's affluence. But it was the traumas of political schism, slicing into the heart of families, which reduced the elder generation to an agonised silence. This extreme north-eastern corner of Spain was the last to fall to Franco's nationalist forces in 1939, but Mieres was certainly not 'a Red village' by universal popular commitment. The sacking of the church and chapels, the toppling of the bells, and the hounding of the clergy by retreating Red zealots have not been forgotten, the scorch marks never removed. The young men of Mieres who were drafted to the Republican army fought with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and increasing desperation. Some of them hid out in the forested hills to escape first the Republican and then the Nationalist draft, and then reprisals from both sides. Twenty seven died; three were condemned to death, but reprieved shortly after the war.

As the Spanish economy picked up towards the end of the 1950s, the rising generation in Mieres sought to escape this impoverishment and demoralisation. The fertility of the community was exported wholesale to the towns and cities and the expanding coastal resorts. Of the fifty-six lads in a village school photo taken in 1962, only eight stayed on in the valley. The legacy is a somewhat blurred distinction between the permanent residents and the expatriates who maintain varying degrees of contact with the community. Many absentees including the mayor remain domiciled in Mieres for fiscal as well as emotional reasons, which makes official census data very difficult to interpret.

By the early 1990s older residents had come to believe with the visceral certainty of their own aging bodies that life in the community as they had known it was coming to an end, terminated by the predations of the wider world on their families and livelihoods. Among the dire tales of destitution and abandonment, the most persistent was of neighbours who had literally rotted away in their own beds, a spectre of latter day alienation more familiar in tabloid coverage of big cities. The generation gap is felt keenly: although they may make exceptions of their own grandchildren, the over-50s rail about young people's obsession with play, consumption and material things, their lack of discipline and disinclination to work, and of course their disrespect for their elders. These attitudes are fostered by the daily TV melodrama: drugs, truancy, violence, robbery. It has often been remarked that the passage from youth to age is typically a political shift from radicalism to conservatism, but it is a shock to hear more than a few of these seniors salting their visions of the future with explicit pleas for a return to the social discipline of the Franco regime, especially compulsory military service and tougher policing.

For those who spent their lives keeping the arable fields, pastures, orchards and woodlands in good heart, the degeneration of Mieres is writ large in the landscape. With a certain grim pride,

Catalans like to say of themselves that they ‘get bread out of stones’: they see themselves as congenitally industrious, opportunistic, businesslike, unlike people in certain other regions of Spain. The broad base of the Mieres valley is fertile and well watered, a place where the Catalan ideal of polyculture (‘a little of everything’) has in its time supported a large and relatively healthy population. Towards the end of the 19th century Mieres had an active and diverse agricultural economy. The sown land produced wheat, oats, rye and barley. The meadows raised fodder for local cattle and winter grazing for animals driven down seasonally from the Pyrenees. The orchards produced hazelnuts, olives, apples and pears. The ideal of self-sufficiency did not diminish market opportunism: cash crops – grapes, hemp, flax – have come and gone in response to regional and international demand, along with rural industries of textile production and charcoal-burning.

Although they talk about it wistfully, even the die-hards know that the old agrarian order is dead and gone. This is remembered as a convivial romance of the ideal Catalan farm, the *masia*, based on a landholding family and their sharecropping tenants and labourers. Classic stem family principles entrusted the property intact to a single heir. He (failing whom she) was bound by complex lateral obligations to siblings (a large proportion of whom never married) and lineal obligations to ascending and descending generations. Tenancies devolved on roughly similar principles, each little community living within the grand edifice of the *casa pairal* and dining together in its large central hall. By the 1930s this conviviality was already a romantic fiction fostered by bourgeois nationalists, rather than a reality. The landowners were the first to move to the towns, leaving their *masies* in the hands of the tenants, on contracts which were gravitating towards fixed rents and dependence on hired labour.

This incipient shift towards capitalist relations was interrupted by wider economic changes with drastic consequences for places like Mieres. Employment in agriculture and fisheries dropped from a half of the total Spanish workforce in 1950 to a sixth in 1985, while industrial and service employment increased to 83%.<sup>1</sup> By 1970, only 8% of Catalan farms were hiring permanent workers.<sup>2</sup> The number of farms in Mieres more than halved between 1962 and 1982, a drop from 189 to 87 accounted for in part by the absorption of smaller farms into larger government-subsidised cattle-raising enterprises.<sup>3</sup> In 2006 the decline looked terminal: in Mieres the total farm workforce had fallen to 19, down from 46 ten years before.<sup>4</sup>

Farm enterprise is not yet dead, but has changed drastically, shifting from intensive polyculture to the industrial production of livestock. This is based on new forms of share contract with national and transnational companies which supply most of the variable inputs – the animals, veterinary services, automated feeders and feedstuffs. The landholder usually supplies the site, the sheds, and at least some of the labour, if only custodial. Dairy farming has been followed by intensive battery rearing of beef, poultry, and most conspicuously pork. In 1982, Mieres had a total of 690 pigs in 41 enterprises. Scale economies soon displaced the smaller operators: by 1999, the total of 945 pigs were concentrated into only 6 farms.<sup>5</sup> From a distance, these enterprises look quite compact: long breeze-block sheds with galvanised iron roofs and tall feed hoppers with company logos emblazoned on them. Less visibly, pork production makes extensive use of the surrounding fields, which is the principal reason for siting this industry in an area of declining agriculture like Mieres. By 1993, Catalonia had 5.24 million pigs, producing annually twelve million cubic metres of sewage, ‘*purins*’. That is as much as would be produced by 18 million humans – three times the current population of Catalonia.<sup>6</sup> This waste is disposed of by fleets of tankers which squirt the nauseating black fluid over farmland which can now be rented cheaply for this new ‘productive’ use. Repeatedly saturating the soil with nitrogen and phosphorus pollutes land, water and air, the eutrophic run-off clogging streams and rivers with weed and murky sediment. Over-dosed fields around Catalonia have gone grey and virtually sterile, with dust blowing over populated areas. The urgent need to discharge sewage has led to many abuses with little risk of

reprisal: the emptying of tanks into concealed woodland, on abandoned terraces, or into culverts on isolated roads. Well aware that this lucrative industry, now involving in excess of 10,000 enterprises, is incompatible with tourism as well as public welfare, the Catalan government has struggled for some years to remedy the problem, which threatens to replicate ecological disasters in northwestern France and the Netherlands, and in Iowa, Virginia and other states of the US.

In sum, the new capital-intensive agriculture comes laden with social costs and very few benefits to the local community. Tolerance is fostered by a deeply rooted maxim that people must make a living however they can, and that rural industry is essential to the Catalan renaissance. The physical and moral agonies of degeneration are more usually blamed on the longer-term legacy of the *misèria* and the repressive force of the Franco regime which pervaded village life. Through the 1950s, local police would interrupt Sunday night dances in the village and have young people salute and sing the Nationalist anthem. Two or three people chatting outside their houses could become an 'Illegal Assembly'. This policing underscored the need for neighbourly trust and practical co-operation, always in tension with lingering fears about denunciation and memories of grief and grievance. Nothing was more drastic than the suppression of the Catalan language, which was banned in all public contexts – in newspapers, books, broadcasting, road signs, litigation, legislation. Names of institutions incorporating 'Catalan' were changed: in Barcelona the *Biblioteca de Catalunya* became the *Biblioteca Central*, and the *Plaça de Catalunya* became the *Plaza del Ejército Español* (the Spanish Army Square). Officials were fired immediately for using Catalan on the job, and 'hundreds of thousands' of Catalan books were pulped. Until the reforms of the 1970s children learned to read and write only in Castilian (Spanish), creating a deep functional discontinuity with the language they spoke every day. Those who went to school in the 1940s through to the 1970s still write and sign their names in the official Spanish versions (José, Francisco) not the Catalan (Josep, Francesc).

Immediately after the War, 700 teachers were despatched to Catalonia from Castile and Extremadura to replace Catalans. By an extraordinary stroke of luck Mieres got a Catalan couple, exiled to this decaying backwater for mysterious offences against the Fascist regime. Modest Salsa and Conxita Pujolar set about reviving the near-defunct village school, building classes from a handful of kids to 76 boys and 60 girls in 1960, and running night classes for adults to boot. Modest's constant exposure to spot inspections, informers and police vigilance, compounded by his earlier radical reputation, obliged him to stick rigorously to the educational rules. The children saluted and sang the fascist anthem every morning, and it was important that no traces of Catalan should appear on blackboards or in notebooks. On one thing his former pupils are unanimous: *Modest taught no history*, because he was forbidden to do so on any terms which he could have accepted. Instead, the curriculum obliged him to teach lots of maths and geography, mostly about the rest of Spain. Modest is remembered most respectfully for his rigorous pedagogy in what we might now call 'life skills'. In June 1995 his prosperous and widely dispersed alumni threw a grand party for him. It is not a little ironic that the couple who filled the classrooms had such a prominent role in emptying the village.

## II REGENERATION

For those who lived through the grim silence of the *misèria* and the Franquist repression, recollections of the past have been reduced to personal narrative fragments which are very difficult to fit into larger schemes. This is a grave disability, for any community needs some concerted and durable understanding of the past for its people to do meaningful business with each other in the present, and to contemplate a collective future. And yet, against all this protracted experience of devastation and deprivation, the revivalist spirit in Mieres is remarkable. This is most strikingly evident in what I suppose is a stereotypically Mediterranean manner: a

perennial round of fiestas and fairs, street parties and processions, civic inaugurations and theatrical presentations. All of these offer the magic of instant involvement, of doing and belonging, and are rich in explicit and optimistic assertions of community solidarity. They bring the various ‘stakeholders’ of Mieres together, regularly and very immediately. Prominent among those attending local events are the expatriates, the *Mierencs* and *Mierenques* who cling to their roots in the community. They also gravitate to family homes at weekends, where aging relatives prepare gigantic lunches. A few have inherited and others have bought houses in the valley, joining the ranks of other property-owning ‘weekenders’ from Catalonia and further afield. Present in the village only for holidays, these newcomers also revel in the festive activity for its colour, nostalgia, and immediate sense of inclusion.

Although the public celebrations are a gratifying demonstration that the community is still alive, most people are aware that it will take more than a party to guarantee a future for Mieres. What the village needs, they say bluntly, is kids. But as anthropologists have observed elsewhere, there can be important practical connections between the civic organisation of fun and the social organisation of reproduction. Annual fiestas in the Mediterranean region have for long been scheduled over the summer months to allow people from one community to visit others, reinforcing social contacts and widening the gene pool. In Mieres, the ‘balls’ on the four successive nights of the *Festa Major* at the end of August were regarded as an opportunity for monitored courtship as well as the dissipation of youthful energies.<sup>7</sup> Lluís Roura, a senior Mierenc and well-known Catalan artist, remembers how, having spent a busy day on the farm planting turnips, milking and settling the cows, he would grab supper and then race off on his bike to get to the ball in time to fix himself up with a partner for the evening.<sup>8</sup> But finding a mate is only one step in the reproductive process, and other public events, from the Old People’s Festival in July to the children’s Christmas parade, celebrate other stages in the cycle of regeneration.

Let me press the case by describing what might seem, on the face of it, an unlikely example, the Easter Procession of the Agonies of the Mother of God.<sup>9</sup> It is scheduled for the Friday before Palm Sunday, and belongs in the wider European genre of the Passion Play dating back to at least the thirteenth century, and popular cults of the Virgin Mary which multiplied in the medieval period throughout the region and persist to this day. The *Dolors*, as these Easter ceremonies are locally known, are organised in two distinct parts: a short play in the parochial church of Sant Pere, followed by a lengthy procession through the streets of Mieres. After a brief enactment of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus Christ, a contingent of Roman soldiers in gleaming brass breastplates and scarlet-plumed helmets escorts him down from the rocky eminence of the church through the several barrios of the village to the Plaça Major, and back again. They are accompanied by the women, men and children of the community, some of them portraying biblical characters, the rest processing in two columns on either side. The mood is solemn, the march measured out by the steady rap of the drums and the rhythmic pounding of the soldier’s staves on the ground.

In the words of the Mayor, the procession ‘is a gathering of all the sons and daughters of the village to accompany the virgin of the Dolors’.<sup>10</sup> For expatriate Mierencs it is a homecoming. The car parks fill up, and for several hours after the procession the two restaurants do brisk business into the small hours. There are very few outside spectators (non-processors) and little to alert passers-by: no billboards and bunting at the roadside, such as advertise the other festivals and fairs. Self-celebration is certainly the prime function of the 96-page book, *La Processó dels Dolors de Mieres*, co-edited by the Rector, financed by the provincial and village government, and distributed free to every household in Mieres in 2002.<sup>11</sup> It is generously illustrated, and people take pleasure in recognising themselves and their neighbours, past and present.

While participants like to think of the Dolors as rooting themselves and their community in the

distant past, to persist through many vicissitudes the play and procession have had to change a great deal. Although the event is ostensibly about Christ's death and his mother's grief, many things happen which have no obvious connection with the biblical narrative or Catholic liturgy; and yet for the participants these 'secular' aspects of the procession are as significant, and certainly as emotionally intense, as any of the overtly 'religious' elements. The recorded history of the Dolors is sparse and vague. The oldest extant script of the play, dating from 1773, consists of 22 double-column pages, but the version currently used in Mieres has dwindled to about 350 words. The most recent cause of this compression was religious persecution in the Civil War, when events such as the Dolors were banned by the Republic and the statutory and parochial records destroyed. With no religious images, no priest, no play, and no costumes, the Dolors which resumed in 1940 was by all accounts a very stripped-down affair: a sombre procession of citizens in everyday garb, threading their way silently through the streets. It is remembered as an expression of intense and doubtless very mixed emotions, but above all as a gesture of community solidarity in the aftermath of agonising schism. For many, the religious pretext was simply a convenience: the franquist regime could hardly object to a public assembly to share the anguish of the Mother of God.

The 'naturalness and spontaneity' of the procession is often remarked upon.<sup>12</sup> Even in the few years that I have known it, significant details have been lost, changed and added.<sup>13</sup> Anna P, now in her mid-30s, has missed only one Dolors procession since infancy (last year she was in China picking up her new adoptive daughter, who she plans to induct into the event this year). Born and raised in Mieres, Anna now works with the elderly Rector to ensure that there will be enough actors for the essential roles in the procession, youngsters especially. She speaks modestly about her "responsibilities" in inverted commas' and recognises with a laugh that the event has a life of its own.<sup>14</sup> People appropriate roles from year to year, and performances get embellished or simplified according to the temperament of individual actors. For example, I was puzzled that Mary Magdalene should appear twice in the same procession, once on her own and again as one of 'The Three Marys'. I was given to understand that the latter are perceived as a discrete entity; the trio of women actors had given little thought to which Mary they were portraying, and none could identify for me the third (officially Mary the wife of Clopas). Again, in 2002 I noticed that the Three Kings had strayed into this Easter procession, apparently because costumes from the Christmas pageant had been borrowed at short notice for some unusually small boys who had stepped into the apostles' role.

Despite his best efforts, the Rector is resigned to the impracticality of sustaining religious rationales for a program which has a life and characters of its own. What the procession does is *move*, physically and emotionally. When I pestered Anna about why people of her generation still bother with this procession, she spoke eloquently about the intensity of feeling it provoked. As a child she was deeply awed by the darkness and the flickering lights, the concerted silence and gravity of the adults. 'I was afraid, I was covered in goose-bumps'. She says it has never occurred to her to question the origins and purpose of the Dolors or what it was supposed to mean: 'it's a tradition – people don't think so much about it'. Pressing this distinction, Anna pointed out that despite the overt religious symbolism, the procession is not a 'church' event – witness the shift out into the streets, where the Rector joins the mayor and other civic dignitaries in plain clothes at the back of the procession. Echoing observations of similar events elsewhere in the Mediterranean, Anna ('I'm religious, but not fanatical') insists that the procession is 'not for the church, but for the people. In reality, 80% of the people have no religious feelings. They don't think about that, for them it's a day of fiesta. The centre is the church, because the *infraestructura* is there' (she has in mind particularly the wardrobe). This set me wondering about certain *anti*-religious aspects of the procession. There is no doubt that the ancient story-line of oppression, betrayal, arrest, and martyrdom in these Easter celebrations has resonated deeply with popular political sentiments in Catalonia. There is something oddly discordant about the crier's

interruption of the procession to read out the indictment against Christ, the only speaking role outside the church. The rejection and humiliation of Christ which galvanises the faithful may resonate differently for those who, although they may not have been directly involved in the burning of the church and killing of clerics not so long ago, remain hostile to the Catholic hegemony.

I am concerned with the endogenous motives which sustain events like the Dolors, and how these mesh with the *longue durée* in the region at large, but I resist the suggestion that the procession is best understood as an historically entrenched cultural reflex. Trying to figure out what, if not Catholicism or nationalism, has been structuring the discipline and integrity of the Dolors in recent years, I have been struck by the fact that it dramatises few of the contrasts I might have expected: between natives and newcomers, clergy and lay people, rich and humble. Instead, it arranges the role players into ‘steps’ (*pasos*) by age and sex, and assembles them between two files of ordinary citizens as a community literally on the move. Until recently each *pas* had its own embroidered banner, but now there is only one, borne by three senior women (*Pendonistes*) and bearing the inscription ‘*Congregavis nos in unum Mariae dolor*’ (roughly, ‘O suffering of Mary, you have gathered us together as one’). The female role-players perform in, and over the years graduate through, four distinct categories. The littlest are angels dressed in white smocks. Broken up into small groups they now punctuate the *pasos* of the older women. The adolescent girls are *donzelles* (maidens), who take turns to shoulder a small statue of the virgin, the *Mare de Déu de la Soletat*.<sup>15</sup> The matrons, *donees*, are at the heart of the procession, as befits a celebration of the mother of God, playing the roles of the Marys and the Samaritana, and carrying a model of the sepulchre and the veronica with its impression of Christ’s face. The most senior women and those who have never married play a mostly behind-the-scenes role as *pabordeses*, ‘provosts’, sponsoring and managing the event. Dressed soberly they walk silently with candles on each side of the procession. It was mainly they who revived the procession in 1940 from the ashes of the Civil War, and who have sustained it through the years when migration drew the life-blood from the community. But since then it has been a work continually in progress, negotiating new tensions and accommodating new interests.

While women and children predominate in the main body of the procession, men still lead it (Jesus) and bring up the rear (the Rector and Mayor). As *vespes* (‘wasps’) the main job of the little boys is to bear the *improperis*, the nails and hammer, the INRI card, the crown of thorns, a skull, and other symbols of the torment of Christ. The devils (*dimonis*) are regarded as an oddity of the Mieres Dolors, but have provided an opportunity for male adolescents to get involved in the procession. Together with the Jews who feature in the passion play, they are known collectively as *botxins*, ‘butchers’.<sup>16</sup> Today’s devils are evidently harder to recruit – the Dolors is not the most fashionable event for teenage boys.<sup>17</sup> There has likewise been a sporadic shortage of apostles (*apòstols*). Anna recalls having to step into the role once herself, as a teenager, disguised with a burnt cork beard. The older men who carry the main crucifix and push the large pietà on its illuminated trolley, served as *vespes*, *dimonis* and *manaies* in their time. In village parlance they are now *palers*, a curious term which I think is derived from the Spanish *palo*, a stick, and (shades of the fasces) signals their authority. According to the Rector, these senior men are penitent ‘*Servents*’ of the Virgin and should all be wearing conical masked cowls and carrying candles as they do in other parts of Spain, but recently they have been led by just one such figure. Menacing but passive, his job, I was told, was to keep order, ‘like a traffic policeman’.

Observing the *manaies*, the soldiers, uniformed in a yellow and red blaze of the Catalan national colours, marching to the throbbing of their drums and the pounding of their staves, one could be forgiven for assuming that the whole event is about them rather than the Mother of God. Their identity and origins are interestingly mysterious. The Rector has searched the sparse records for clues: there were traces of them in the various Catalan Easter processions in the eighteenth

century, but the etymology of *manaie* remains inscrutable.<sup>18</sup> Similar contingents of soldiers (often the ‘army’, *armat*) have appeared in Easter parades in other parts of Catalonia, and in recent years they have coalesced into a minor national phenomenon. In 1999 there were 1,400 *manaies* in 34 companies throughout the region, and they convene annually in one of the larger participating towns, where much of the rehearsal and learning of new parade routines takes place.<sup>19</sup> The costumes for most of the Catalan companies, including brass helmets, shields and breastplates, are now custom-made by a workshop in Girona, and when the troops convene annually the turnout is smartly uniform. On the instigation of the Rector, and ‘after many years of improvisation’ with cardboard and string, the local company was officially formed in May 1999 as the *Manípul de Manaies i Botxins de Mieres*.

A brochure celebrating these developments, explains that the new association was set up ‘to foment the popular and traditional culture of our village’; and asserts that ‘despite various shifts of religious significance’ in the Dolors, ‘the *manaies* have had a very prominent and primordial role’. But that role abounds with ambiguities. The elision of the roles of *Manaie* and *Botxin* is now graphically represented in a bizarre hybrid figure: he wears the thick striped worsted shift of a Jew (*jueu*), the soldier’s yellow socks and sandals, and the magnificent red-plumed Roman helmet to which have been added two conspicuous brass horns. As they have marched their way to prominence in recent years, the *manaies* have been making an intriguing shift from ‘baddies’ to ‘goodies’, a transition that is currently accomplished with the movement from church to street in the course of the evening’s drama. Perplexed that the *manaies* should be morally redeemed when they *leave* the church and take to the streets, the Rector has concluded that as they make their way out into the night they are transformed by the emotional power of the procession itself, and ‘function like a guard of honour which escorts the Mother of God.’<sup>20</sup> I asked Isidre, who like so many Mierencs claims never to have missed a procession in his forty years, what he thought about this. He insisted that he is a Roman soldier throughout, marching Jesus to his death, and elaborated on the macho excitement of it all. What, I asked, about the blazing red and yellow kilts? He laughed and shrugged: ‘OK – so I’m a *Catalan* Roman soldier!’

Whatever their evolutionary history, the procession is a great photo opportunity for these young Mierencs, the Maasai *morán* of Mieres, the young virile custodians of the Virgin and of local and Catalan tradition. It is surely no stretch of the imagination to say that they have become an apt symbol of the vitality of the community. But the little children are rival show-stealers, whose presence delights everybody – a celebration of the happy fact that there are now more of them in the community than there were fifteen or twenty years ago. The Rector attaches much importance to these images of youthful regeneration in the procession: ‘the presence of children shows the integrating labour of the new generations in these devotional acts’.<sup>21</sup> They punctuate the procession and hold it together, as awed as Anna was in her time, little angels and wasps who seem to declare that the Dolors is not just a lament for dead people, but truly an affirmation of new life.

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If, as I suggest, the Dolors can be regarded as a ‘ritual of regeneration’, that in itself is no substitute for the hard practical work of reproduction, from raising kids to caring for the aged, on which the survival of Mieres must ultimately depend. In the dualist language of academe: no matter how culturally vital it may appear, a biologically inert community has no future. Social scientists and ordinary people alike use the term ‘community’ to describe groupings of almost any sort, scale and duration, from Internet chat-rooms to religious sects, and from rural hamlets to the whole of Europe. Their proliferation with the modern division of labour into a multiplicity of more transient groupings has progressively detached them from the practical exigencies of regeneration – they ‘reproduce’ only in metaphoric terms. But metaphors do not make babies, and their real-

world referent remains the village, which brings the generative engines we call ‘families’ together into vital and necessarily durable association in a particular place. The irony is that every institution of urban industrial society remains dependent on the reproductive effort of micro-communities, now stripped down to the core of what we call ‘nuclear’ families, or parent-child dyads. And effort it is: reproduction (everywhere – not just in our own messy middle-class lives) has to be *organised*. It is *work* – ideological as well as physical – whether you want to call it autopoiesis or old-fashioned drudgery. Regeneration is demanding, creative and inventive; it is not inertial, as peasants and serious students of agrarian studies know very well.

Having exported its fertility Mieres has been saved since the early 1980s by an unexpected counterflow from the cities. To nervous locals these newcomers have always been ‘hippies’, or less flatteringly ‘hairies’ (*peluts*). If the newcomers refer to themselves at all they prefer the term ‘*neururals*’, coined by a geographer who documented their arrival in the region.<sup>22</sup> They took up residence in the abandoned and untenanted farmhouses around the valley, but as the rigours of goat-herding and scratch horticulture thinned out their ranks the survivors sought more reliable livelihoods, often by commuting to work in the nearby towns. After the first wave it was evident that around twenty families had settled in the valley. Their signal contribution was to the revival of the village school, always the prime index of the life of the community, where they applied the pressure of numbers to expand the curriculum, staffing, library and other services. Their presence has been synergetic, encouraging other parents to remain in Mieres or settle there, and more recently to take over the reins of local government. Although the natives remain divided in their attitudes to the newcomers, some youngsters who were restless within the confinement of the village found a curious affinity with the colourful urban fugitives and their pursuit of rustic bliss.

Nothing has signalled the presence and influence of the Neorurals more vividly than the annual Swap Fair, the *Fira de l'Intercanvi*, which they initiated in 1986. It is, the instigators declare in a booklet commemorating their tenth anniversary, ‘A Fair, created by a group of young people, some sons and daughters of Mieres and others adopted, with a mind to get festive in the village where they live.’<sup>23</sup> They refer to themselves as *l'Associació Cultural La Fulla de Mieres*, having adopted the autumn leaf (*fulla*) as their emblem and alias. A giant leaf walks around the Fair exhorting people to enjoy themselves. The language and imagery are boisterous, energetic, impatient. The event promises to be *espavilat* (lively, bright). Three key themes in the Intercanvi publicity are *Wake up! Connect! and Here's something new!* Favourite words are *gresca*, *rebombori* and *xerinola*, all loosely translatable as racket, rumpus, shindig, binge, or uproar.

The *Fulla* took their cue from the not-so-distant past, the Santa Cecília fair, an annual livestock market dating from around 1900 in Mieres. It was started by the big cattle-owning landlords and in its heyday in the decade following the second world war about 300 beasts were driven in from far afield in the Pyrenees. In the imagination of the organisers of the Intercanvi ‘It was a day of happiness and hullabaloo, which broke the monotonous lives of peasant and villager. It was a day for rediscovering family, neighbours, friends and acquaintances... In hard times the ballyhoo was always welcome.’<sup>24</sup> The Santa Cecília fair waned from 1955 onwards, with the decline in local population and changes in the transport and marketing of cattle. According to its originators, the Intercanvi was incubated in the long sultry summer of 1986. ‘The heat fired up brains and ideas, and stirred up daydreams and musings about the lack of playful activities, fantasies, diversions and delights which in Mieres had been reduced to the Football Club, the Festa Major, the parade of the Three Kings, and the Dolors procession.’<sup>25</sup>

The *Fulla* point out that for the ‘neururals’ like themselves who came to Mieres in the early 1980s, barter (*troc* in Catalan) was essential to survival. As they struggled to establish themselves and their families, they swapped eggs, milk, veggies, rabbits, chickens, honey – the various

commodities that some could produce and others could not. The myths of origin say that chatting about *troc* one day, somebody said: why not let's all get together, make a Fair of it, and let everyone have a spot of fun? Within a few years, the Fair had outgrown the main street and the public square, and was occupying an adjacent meadow where recently more than a thousand visitors have gathered. People swapped vehicles and even dental services as well as food, clothes and household stuff. The *Fulla* urged everyone to go about it light-heartedly ('Do you want to swap a ceramic bowl for a spot of friendship?')<sup>26</sup> but although barter had kept many Mierencs going during the *misèria*, the older generation was reticent about engaging with the newcomers in their strange folksy garments. Luís, the local magistrate, is remembered for a pioneering swap of a pot of hippie honey for a bowl of blackberries he had gathered from the hedgerows. Nevertheless, as the Fair has gained momentum, the whole event has become an object lesson in the usefulness of money; and indeed, when it ends officially at six o'clock there is a flurry of cash transactions, expeditiously closing all the frustrated deals of the day.

While it is fun watching the senior Mierencs struggling to adapt, the *Fulla*, always keen on incorporating rural traditions, has tried to draw the older generation into the Fair, encouraging, encouraging them to retail local lore or demonstrate disappearing crafts. There have been displays of hand tools, ploughs, carts, embroidery, baskets and other relics of the earlier working life drawn from the houses of ordinary Mierencs, and on several occasions a full-scale demonstration of charcoal-burning. There is self-conscious serendipity and experimentation in the way the Fair has developed from year to year. There have been clowns and no clowns, big communal lunches, snacks, and no lunches. The Fair and its organisers have matured together, finding a measure of prosperity and respectability within the community. The *Fulla* insist that impromptu exchange remains at the heart of the event, and play down the administrative implications of its expansion (bank accounts, provision of parking and toilets, liaison with local officials). The '*Fira*', as it is now simply known in Mieres, has slowly been incorporated in the institutional repertoire of the village, though some friendly sparring with the established *Festa (Major)* continues. In 1989, long before it had reached anything like its current proportions, the *Fulla* was already touting the Intercanvi as 'Mieres's premier Fair',<sup>27</sup> to which the Mayor retorted that, as its name indicates, the *Festa Major* is 'the village's most important fiesta.'<sup>28</sup>

Every year the same banner is unfurled: 'THE SPIRIT OF THIS FAIR IS: INTERCHANGE.' The brochure for the tenth anniversary in 1996 urges us to 'learn to exchange the best of each one of us, as much in the spiritual aspect as in the material aspect'.<sup>29</sup> At the Intercanvi 'anyone can swap a laugh for a verse, a tear for a kiss',<sup>30</sup> and to help things along, the air is redolent with pot smoke. Discussing drafts of my book, *Fulla* members have resisted my suggestion that the Intercanvi has quasi religious qualities that mirror the quasi secular qualities of the Dolors. They see themselves in the anti-clerical, anarchist tradition, and the symbols of Catalan nationalism so prevalent elsewhere are conspicuously absent from the Intercanvi. On the face of it, the two events are indeed very different: the Intercanvi a youthful, exotic initiative emphasising material equality and openness to the wider world, in a party atmosphere; the Dolors more sombre and introverted, an effort by older Mierencs to dispel ambivalent memories and rebuild the integrity of the community. But I see them as complementary rather than at odds. Each has been a stimulus to the other; both seek authentic local roots, elaborating on 'traditions' which link the past to today and the future; and both work to draw the old and young, natives and newcomers together into concerted, creative interaction – the body of the procession, the spirit of barter. Both are rich in moral symbolism, and each in its own way is as passionate as the other: the scalp-tingling silence of people moving together through the night, the colourful racket of the Fair; *Manaiès* in Catalan kilts, hippies with long hair and joints; little angels with candles, and kids dancing with clowns. Both events are local declarations about belonging and surviving. Both have wider, trans-national sources of inspiration, and both are profoundly local, idiosyncratic, dynamic, inventive.

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When the residents of Mieres talk about the ‘normal’ community they so passionately desire, they do not, of course, just talk about fiestas and babies, but about the secure livelihood that makes these shorter and longer term pleasures possible: jobs, affordable housing, public services... Spanish prosperity and European Union subsidies have boosted local amenities – the village now has a gigantic *polyvalent* sports pavilion, which has been the object of strenuous debate about spending priorities. A tract of land has been tagged for subsidised housing for young people which it is hoped will nurture a 48% increase in the population by the year 2014. Jobs are more problematic: the Mayor and his administration cling to the ideal that Mieres can generate its own workplaces. As evidence he cites the two flourishing bar-restaurants, a plumbing and electrical business set up recently by a two local lads, and an enterprise making lamps established by a former hippie couple. There are hopes for tourism, but apart from some holiday rentals and a summer camp for kids, progress has been slow – Mieres is neither by the sea nor in the mountains. Small, locally-rooted industries have saved other towns in the region. In Mieres the biggest employer is *Filicor*, an astonishing spinning mill that makes string for the regional sausage and ham industry. This was set up in 1988 and now has 26 employees, working around the clock in three shifts. The workforce consists of local women over the age of 45, and a slightly larger group of younger people who commute into the village from further afield. In historical terms, *Filicor* is less of an oddity than it might appear. Catalonia was involved in the Industrial Revolution from the outset, and by the end of the eighteenth century there were two thousand textile mills employing around 100,000 families.<sup>31</sup> *Filicor*, with its roaring machines and swirling lint, evokes this past, ‘the shock of the old’ in new global structures of demand. String, as the manager remarks, is everywhere, and the strength of the company has been its capacity to respond quickly to multifarious demand: bell ropes for a Girona church, coloured cord for cake-boxes in Venezuela. Tales of some of the more exotic uses filter back to Mieres where they are retailed with relish: the artisanal candlemaker in Japan, the carpet-maker in Turkey, whose specialised needs were originally matched by a particular waxy sausage string. How all these connections are made is truly fascinating, but let us remind ourselves that ‘globalisation’ of this sort has been endemic in Catalonia for centuries. Witness the commercial range of the surviving village blacksmith who makes candelabra for fancy restaurants as well as repairing harrows, and who recently laboured for many months turning out five thousand carcass hooks for Spanish abattoirs. ‘I could have sold fifty thousand, but I knew when I’d had enough.’ He works alone in the heat of the forge where no apprentice has been willing to join him or to master the art of turning a block of steel into an exquisite hand tool.

For their part, village youth convey their attitudes to the future in shrugs and monosyllables, and in the nerve-fraying rasp of the high-revving motor cycles which bear them off to school, work and play in town. Living among the echoes of the *misèria*, the visceral conviction of most of them is that their own prospects lie beyond the valley. Their aspirations have been fostered by the revival of Catalan nationalism, but it is still unclear how far that will carry them. If those who were at school in the 1950s and 1960s are the generation without history, their children have had history fashioned for them in unprecedented quantities, as part of the post-Franco Catalan renaissance. The generation gap is reinforced by language: older people have a linguistic schizophrenia, brought up talking Catalan but literate only in Castilian – two ways of thinking and being, the first intimate and local, the other official, chillier and remote. In Mieres, this functional barrier has kept the two languages remarkably discrete – it is people like me who stumble along in some sort of hybrid ‘Castalan’. Today, people’s feelings about all this are complicated. Many of those who feel ashamed and angry about their Catalan illiteracy also feel apprehensive that today’s radical national commitment to education in Catalan may cost their children the capacity to communicate effectively in an international language. Between their bad Spanish and my bad Catalan, it is usually harder for me to talk with teenagers in Mieres than with their parents and

grandparents. And yet, in a manner so evocative of other beleaguered parts of the world, it is this generation of grandchildren which has set about 'recovering historical memory' of the Civil War era. In 2000 an Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory initiated a 'struggle against forgetting', focused concretely on discovering the mass graves of the Franco era.<sup>52</sup> The breaking of silence, notably the collection and local publication of memoirs, has stirred up a great deal of anguish. A highly controversial law has been struggling through the Spanish parliament, opponents demanding that victims of the left as well as the right should be adequately remembered.

The historiographical revival has fostered a populist enthusiasm for discovering local roots. Atheneums sponsoring lectures, research and publications flourish, much as they did in a previous Catalan renaissance towards the end of the nineteenth century. Like many towns and villages the Mieres municipality has produced and distributed free several illustrated memoirs. A favourite activity of the day camps which keep the village children busy during the long summer holidays is the discovery trail, which leads the kids from place to place, and from one patient older citizen to another, piecing together stories of the past. In these games they have to compete with swarms of kids from the holiday camps in the area, who fan out through the village to collect information for their own projects. In the high season our late neighbour Josep held court on his doorstep while the kids lined up in front of him with their clipboards. The educational process has been two-way: from the children the older citizens learned and rehearsed what was interesting about themselves. For my part, I have learned quite a lot from eavesdropping on the work of these rival researchers.

In May 2004 this educational game was the centrepiece of a split-new public event in Mieres. The Spring Festival (*La Festa de la Primavera*) was organised by a group of relative newcomers to Mieres. The first many of us heard of it was music emanating from the Plaça Major. About a third of the 30-40 participants were weekend visitors with second homes in the village. The populist spirit was carried by folk music on pipes and drums, and dancing lessons directed by an earnest young man with a concertina and castanets. Elderly observers grumbled about the authenticity of these, but were intrigued by the local history game which sent the children scampering out of the Plaça and through the streets. They returned carrying sheets of paper given to them by the occupants of the houses they had been sent to identify:

*Can Carlina.* This was once one of the biggest shops in Mieres, where one could find everything from grain to medical kits, cooking pans to Catalan caps. People came by mule or cart from all over the place...

The child who collected the most sheets (in fact everybody) got a prize, and in the afternoon the collected sheets were posted in the Plaça Major on a big board labelled 'Village Life' (*La Vida del Poble*). The organisers of this bold effort to engage with the community explained that they had chosen a vacant niche in the festive calendar, the public holiday weekend for the Feast of the Pentecost, and that the event played up primeval themes of renewal, reawakened traditions, youthful play, and local solidarity.

It looked like the makings of a robust new institution, but in 2005 Montse, doyenne of the organising group and an early *neorural*, told me sadly 'this year there was no Spring'. The key movers had all had troubles, though they vowed that the Festa would be back. Montse's son Marçal and his wife were struggling to rebuild an isolated ruin they had bought on a spectacular site high above the valley. As he and Anna worked to reassemble the house with their own hands, repair tracks, find water, and rebuild the terraces for their organic vegetable gardens, they found themselves caught in disheartening bureaucratic webs, while all around them the luxury second homes of wealthy urbanites were springing up within the shells of other old *masies*. The tenacity of the few youngsters who have chosen to make their lives in the valley is impressive, but they

have some reason to feel that the generation gap is relentlessly marginalising them. It is galling to be reminded that the future is in their hands, while they are thwarted in their efforts to recover what is essentially the same way of life their elderly critics hold dear – those same critics who have had a hand in pricing the likes of Marçal and Anna out of the local housing market. Between 1950 and 1980 many tenants were able to buy their own and other abandoned houses for what now seem trivial sums, and have subsequently been able to cash in on soaring property values with sales to outsiders. Their ambivalence about this is eased by the improvement in amenities which has accompanied the refurbishment of the village. Owners of second homes pay municipal taxes without the privilege of a local vote, allowing the Mierenc councillors to direct improvements in infrastructure (resurfaced roads, street lighting, water supply and sewage disposal). The two local builders have prospered, and underemployed youth has been absorbed into a bullish market for unskilled labour in the region (along with thousands of workers from Africa and Central Europe). But resident Mierencs usually say they want zero population growth, and regard the expansion of the village into a town as futile and destructive of whatever conviviality remains. Their expatriate progeny are among the most xenophobic, and yet those who inherit and renovate their parents' houses are increasingly difficult to distinguish from all the other outsiders (mostly Catalan) for whom a second home in Mieres affords utopian visions of stress-free rustic bliss. The many problems of definition have likewise made it impossible for the municipality to get beyond crude estimates (around 35%) of the proportion of houses which are actually 'second homes'.<sup>33</sup>

The most striking effect of these changes is architectural. Contrary to the urban fantasies of rural timelessness and inertia, the stones of Mieres have always moved continually with the dynamism of family life – real people eating and shitting, storing their crops and stabling their animals, making love and raising kids, growing old, dying and turning to dust. The stresses and strains of all this threw up walls and tore them down, cut open new doors and windows and filled them in again, hiked-up roof-lines and dropped them, added wings and left their demolished spurs. Gazing at one of these ravaged facades, older people can still read pieces of this human record, remembering who moved certain stones, when and why. But modern refurbishment obliterates the poetry of the past, the histories of human regeneration inscribed on those agonised wall: facades are neatly remortared and replastered, the windows realigned and double-glazed, the brick infill picked out and replaced with new stone. Buildings that expressed the restless life of a community have become stage sets for weekend actors who congratulate themselves for preserving a little bit of the rural heritage.

For the permanent residents of Mieres, old and new, this effacement of the past is a symptom of *sterile growth*, of lives lived elsewhere. The awful portent is the ghost towns of the mountain and coastal resorts, barred and shuttered for most of the year: non-communities that offer their occasional residents a brief flush of seasonal bonhomie. The resident newcomers in Mieres, emphatically green in political orientation, have been the most vocal critics. Consonant with their own living arrangements, they favour the development of Mieres as a dormitory community, a compromise which they celebrate with the fecund image of '*warm beds*'. They see the daily commute to work in the same towns which claimed the fertility of the Mieres a generation ago as a sort of poetic justice, and a small price to pay for building a convivial place to raise kids. Twenty-one of them replied to a municipal planning document in 2004, warning that the proliferation of secondary residences amounted to 'artificial' and 'ambiguous growth'. Jacqueline Navinés, the single green party representative on the Mieres council, wrote:

We regret the move towards a municipality of second residences without social life, without village life, and restricted to intermittent attendance at some of the few festive occasions each year, the sort of thing that makes it impossible to maintain any sorts of service, and leads irreversibly to death as a village, as has unfortunately happened to many

Pyrenean villages. Of course, we reject totally the 'Costa Brava' model which has a minimal basic population that multiplies 10 or 20 times in the summer, with the all the territorial destruction that entails.<sup>34</sup>

Bienvenido Prados, a southern Spaniard who works for the Girona city council, was moved to make his own detailed study of the Romería barrio, the oldest cluster in Mieres where he and his wife have lived since 1980.<sup>35</sup> Challenging the wildly optimistic census and planning statistics, he reckoned that between 1970 and 2004 the number of real people actually living in Romería had dropped from 27 to 7, and the number of houses with perennial residents from 7 to 3, of which only one was owner-occupied. Eleven of the 15 houses in Romería had been refurbished, 4 of which were actively used as second homes. But the rest were standing empty: 'More renovation has not implied more occupancy.' For the future of Mieres it's not houses that are lacking, it's permanent, flesh-and-blood residents. 'The purchase of houses as second residences or houses for let does not promise a recovery of the number of residents in the short or medium term.' Bienvenido's graphic term for this is 'arid growth' ('*Creixament a seques*'). The stark truth, he says, is that reproduction in Romería has effectively ceased: 'It is important to note that in the past 34 years not a single person has been born in our barrio'.<sup>36</sup>

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Casting an eye around this troubled world, it is easy to understand why so many people should crave a 'normal' community life. What that 'normality' should entail is currently under strenuous discussion among those who might fashionably be called the 'stakeholders' in Mieres today. I doubt that any of them imagine that a second-home-owning anthropologist living in their midst has a more plausible definition to offer, but in my work as an anthropologist I have wanted to know why, in the modern global transcendence of 'society' (*Gesellschaft* in the classic sociological contrast), 'community' has such persistent and pervasive power. Why, in a modern world of liberated individuals, does the bondage of community remain so fundamental, so tenacious? My answer is that no other form of human organisation has replaced it as the emotionally intimate, socially complex, temporally durable locus of the vital processes of human reproduction and growth. That, my friends in Mieres can easily be persuaded to admit, is basically what a village is for: why it must persist through time, why its people must cooperate and resolve their differences, and why they should collectively assert its identity. But I am puzzled why such an obvious fact has had such a tenuous grip on the sociological imagination. The squeamishness of many social scientists about admitting 'biology' (or even 'psychology') to our professional knowledge of what makes society tick may be partly to blame. But a more fundamental problem in understanding the vitality of community and our visceral craving for it is the contradictory tendency of all of us to reduce the powers of regeneration to timeless ideals. Whether in popular stereotype or sociological theory, we replace the agonies of birth and death, the traumas of adolescence and senescence, the creative disruption of family fission, with reassuring snapshot images such as the 'nuclear' family (a youthful mum, dad, and two eternally prepubescent kids) celebrated by western advertising, or the expansive embrace of the 'joint' or 'extended' family in Africa or Asia. Stripped of its powers of regeneration, community in this thinking is reduced to timeless inertia, a structural building block rather than a vector of historical change.

We pay the price of this miscomprehension in our collective efforts to come to terms with the future. The inability to program regeneration is why utopian experiments down the centuries, and planned development in recent decades, have so often have failed.<sup>37</sup> Ideas of community which separate it from human growth (as in the current political, economic or architectural dogmas of urban 'regeneration' or 'renewal') are doomed.<sup>38</sup> The corollary of this for villages like Mieres is that even the most passionate assertions that the community must survive will come to nothing

without (as they say) ‘fomenting’ the abundantly physical processes of regeneration. Underlying the mass of persuasive, symbolic activities of fiestas and fairs, religious ceremonies, the rituals of municipal planning, and many other collective performances on which those concerned with the future of Mieres expend so much energy, is the recognition that without the raising of children no amount of public building and civic celebration will keep the community alive.

What began for me as a death watch soon became an exercise in monitoring an energetic struggle for survival, the prime evidence of which is exuberant festive activity. The immediacy and instrumentality of these ‘rituals of regeneration’ are as captivating for me as an observer as for any other participant. As events which are spatially and temporally compact they are generally more accessible for study than those other economic and biological aspects of regeneration which I hold to be fundamental, but which are much more complicated to observe and explain. In my work elsewhere I have been unhappily aware of the disjunction between the temporal extent of these processes and the normal brevity of fieldwork. My explicit intention in 1989 to set up home in Mieres was driven by a desire to match my observation of reproduction to the lengthy processes by which one generation replaces another, to watch real people in real time grow up and grow old in parallel with a sizeable chunk of my own life.<sup>39</sup> This seemed to me the more obvious way of observing not just how history on the grand scale is inscribed in ordinary lives, but the converse: how the mundane struggles for survival in places as apparently insignificant as Mieres ultimately *are* what history on regional, national, and even international levels is fundamentally about.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

For reasons of space I have reduced the potentially voluminous theoretical and comparative references to a minimum here. For more on my ideas about reproduction and history, please see Robertson, A.F., 1991, *Beyond the family: The social organization of human reproduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge / University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1991; *Greed: Gut feelings, growth, and history*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2001; *Reproduction and the making of history: Time, the family, and modernity*, In Roger Friedland and Dierdre Boden (eds.), *NowHere: Space, Time and Social Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1994, pp 95-126; and *The development of meaning: Ontogeny and culture*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* vol 2 no 4 1996, pp 591-610 – reprinted in Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders (eds.) *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology* Blackwell, Oxford 2005, pp 220-232.

I would be grateful to receive bibliographic suggestions (and any other correspondence) about rural regeneration, especially material relating to North American and other non-European experience. My e-mail is <sandy.robertson@ed.ac.uk>

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6. *Novetats Catalunya* April 2003; Generalitat de Catalunya, *Manual de gestió dels purins*: <http://www.arc-cat.net/ca/agencia/publicacions/purins.html>. Consulted February 2007.
7. There is a strong semantic link between *fiesta* = feast, festival, holiday, party, celebration, etc; and *festeig* = courtship. *Festejar* is to court, woo; *festí* = feast, banquet; *festes* are endearments, caresses. A *festejador(a)* is a boyfriend, sweetheart – and the twin lateral window seats in most older houses.
8. Roura, Lluís, *Pregó de la Festa Major*, Ajuntament de Mieres, Mieres 2002, p 8.
9. *La Processó dels Dolors del Mare de Déu*.
10. Massip, Francesc, Prat i Frigola, Joan, & Vila, Pep, *La processó dels Dolors de Mieres i la representació de la passió*, Quaderns de les 7 Sivelles, CCG Edicions / Ajuntament de Mieres, Mieres 2003, p 7.
11. Massip & c 2003.
12. ‘...*naturalitat i espontaneïtat*’ (Valeri, Xavier & Oliveras, Josep, *Arrels i llavors de Mieres*, Ajuntament de Mieres / Ediciones Ecuador 21, Girona 2002, p 13).
13. In earlier undated pictures the procession is taking place in daylight – a strikingly different ambience.
14. “‘*Responsibilidades*’ entre *commillas*.’
15. Not many I spoke to recognised the archaic term *donzella*, signifying a ‘maiden’ or virgin, and used in earlier descriptions of the procession. The male equivalent is the *donzell*, a young nobleman or squire.
16. My impression is that the *jueus/botxins* have persisted more as older symbols of political persecution than as conscious expressions of anti-semitism.
17. The lads portraying jews in the same pre-War picture wear long flaxen wigs, but no-one could explain why – ‘it’s just different’.
18. The etymology of *manaie* (pronounced ‘man-eye-eh’) is obscure. A *manipulus* – literally a ‘handful’ – was part, usually a third, of a roman cohort.
19. Manresa, NE of Barcelona, with a population of 67,000, has a 90-strong *armat*. (<http://www.firesifestes.com/Fires/F-Processo-Div-S-Manresa.htm>, accessed June 2006). Banyoles (population 17,000) has a *trobada de manaies* of 103. (<http://www.grn.es/manaies/banyoles.htm>, accessed June 2006).

20. Massip &c 2003, pp 17-18.
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23. La Fulla, *Mieres: 10 anys d'intercanvi*, Associació Cultural La Fulla de Mieres, Mieres 1995, p 1.
24. La Fulla 1995, p 25.
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26. La Fulla 1995, p 52.
27. La Fulla 1995, p 46.
28. Festa Major, Ajuntament de Mieres 2003.
29. '...aprenquem a intercanviar el millor de cadascun de nosaltres, tant en l'aspecte material com en l'aspecte espiritual.'
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31. McDonogh, Gary Wray, *Good families of Barcelona: A social history of power in the industrial era*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986.
32. *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica – ARMH*. Emilio Silva is the grandson of a Republican killed by the Franquists in 1936 in Leon and buried in a mass grave which Emilio set out to identify. See Ferrándiz, Francisco, The return of Civil War ghosts: The ethnography of exhumations in contemporary Spain, *Anthropology Today* vol 22 no 3 2006, pp 7-12. After much controversy, a law on the Recuperation of Historical Memory was finally enacted in October 2007.
33. This reflects a general trend in Europe: the proportion of householders in Catalunya with more than one residence had grown to 13.6% in 2002, a gain of 3.4% in four years. The figure for Spain as whole was 14.3%. IDESCAT (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya) September 3, 2005: [<http://www.idescat.net/dequavi/Dequavi?TC=444&V0=6&V1=16&lang=en>]
34. 'Suggerències i alternatives al POUM de Mieres, *Alternativa per a la Garrotxa*. Jacqueline Navinés i Escala, en nom d'*Alternativa per a la Garrotxa*, Mieres 20 de gener de 2004'.
35. Bienvenido Prados Solano, *Estudi estadístic del Barri de Romeria de Mieres 1970-2004*, Mieres, 2004.
36. Prados Solano 2004, p 5.
37. Robertson, A. F, *People and the state: An anthropology of planned development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984. And see, of course Scott, James C., *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, Yale University

Press, New Haven 1998. The *metis*-like orientation in this paper to the making of history tempts me to describe it as 'seeing like a village'.

38. A word of semantic caution: In Britain in the new millennium '*Regeneration*' is a major programmatic concern, a private-public sector collaboration widely criticised for being driven by industrial and commercial interests at the expense of 'human factors'. The parallel term in the US is probably (urban) '*Renewal*', suggesting what may be significantly different understandings of what planned change there is about. Web searches on 'regeneration' in the US lead first to religious sites, and then to medical pages dealing with tissue healing processes.

39. In this regard, my senior colleague John Barnes once remarked that botanists bent on observing the growth of trees diachronically can have their work cut out for them.