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Dividing up the territory and going beyond dualism. The bandos festivos of Llanes (Asturias, Spain)

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Dividing up the territory and going beyond dualism. The bandos festivos of Llanes (Asturias, Spain)

Abstract: The bandos festivos (festivity committees) of Llanes are social entities of a territorial nature which made up a dual system at the beginning of the 19th century. The religious and traditional fiestas held during the summer period were their main product, establishing a game of rivalry and rebalancing. But the entry of a third actor almost a century later provoked an anomaly and the dualism was redefined. The aim of this project, which adopts an ethnohistorical perspective and in which the ethnographic method has been used, with fieldwork (interviews and participant observation) and the use of documentary sources, is to analyse the development and transformation of the bandos festivos from dualism to triadism through their conflicts over time and territory. The conflicts, which were the expression of the changes, occurred in relation to the chronotopic dimension of the bandos festivos, shaped around the territory of a town increasingly dependent on summer tourism. With urban development, a third bando festivo entered the fray, intervening in the competitive rivalry and ousting one of the historical bandos festivos. However, the actor that had been pushed out continued in the new structure, assisted by the trends of late modernity: the revival of festivities, the prevalence of leisure, aestheticisation, the re-anchoring of the subjects, the intensification of participation, etc. This went beyond and transformed the dualism.

Key words: sociability, urban development, tourism, chronotopes.

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IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El territorio configura la realidad social y define un “nosotros/as” (identidad) frente a otros “nosotros/as” (alteridad).2. Los bandos son agrupaciones sociales vinculadas real o simbólico-afectivamente a segmentos territoriales.3. Los bandos rivalizan mediante las fiestas de verano, recurso para el ocio del turismo, en un juego de emulación y reequilibrio.4. El reparto simbólico del territorio y del tiempo estival genera tensiones, conflictos y pactos.5. El desarrollo territorial, el cambio social y las tendencias de la modernidad tardía transforman el inicial dualismo en triadismo. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The territory shapes social reality and defines an ‘us’ (identity) versus another ‘us’ (otherness).2. The <i>bandos festivos</i> are social groupings (‘we’) linked in a real or symbolic-emotional way to territorial segments.3. The <i>bandos festivos</i> compete with each other in a game of emulation and rebalancing through the summer fiestas, which are a source of leisure for tourists.4. The symbolic distribution of territory and summer time generates tensions, conflicts and pacts.5. Territorial development, social change and the trends of late modernity transform the initial dualism into triadism. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El territori configura la realitat social i defineix un “nosaltres” (identitat) front a un altres “nosaltres” (alteritat)2. Els bàndols són agrupacions socials vinculades real o simbòlic-afectivament a segments territorials3. Els bàndols rivalitzen mitjançant les festes d’estiu, recurs per a l’oci del turisme, en un joc d’emulació i reequilibri.4. El repartiment simbòlic del territori i del temps estival genera tensions, conflictes i pactes.5. E desenvolupament territorial, el canvi social i les tendències de la modernitat tardana transformen l’inicial dualisme en triadisme. |
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

The fiesta is a complex phenomenon, with multiple dimensions and meanings. In Llanes, a town of medieval origin and the main tourist destination in Asturias, there is a unique model of fiestas, with high participation in traditional religious and summer celebrations, the architects of which are the social entities known as *bandos festivos* (festivity committees).

The *bandos festivos* were founded in the political climate of 1837, when progressives and conservatives acted out their struggle for power through festive celebrations. Originally, they formed a dual system; however, they soon lost this political connotation and the rivalry took on a territorial nature, associated with neighbourhoods.

This territorial nature was the basis for their expansion and transformation. But it was also a potential source of conflict. With territorial and social development, it became clear that the fiesta season and the territory of the town were limited. This gave rise to tensions over the symbolic occupation of these two spheres, which led to serious conflicts and even altered the very system of *bandos festivos*.

The aim of this article is to analyse, from an ethnohistorical perspective, the transformation of the *bandos festivos* from their original dual system to the current triadism, through their main conflicts. These conflicts are linked to the chronotopic dimension of the *bandos festivos* and can be seen in their symbolic appropriation of time and territory.

The ethnographic method has been used, with semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and participant observation, which have been carried out over several years. Documentary, photographic, newspaper and archive sources have been used, in particular the local press, the Internet, and non-specialised local publications. The project is part of a doctoral thesis, the results of which consisted of a comprehensive study of the *bandos festivos* and their fiestas.

The territory, as a socialised and culturised space, is a structuring element of social reality, and provides a framework for the expression of sociability. It sets the limits and boundaries that help to define social groups. The *bandos festivos*, social groups that constitute a dual system or system of halves, have competitive rivalry as their main defining feature. A significant landmark of the territory are the chapels, home to the sacred images that serve as major symbols of each side and around which the neighbourhood that shapes them is structured. The social fragmentation between one 'us' and another 'us', the polarity and rivalry, is thus expressed on the basis of territory.

The *bandos festivos* are stable social groups, with a loose structure, related in a real or emotional way to segments of the territory. Affiliation develops within the family; in the case of parents from different *bandos festivos*, various strategies are established for the recruitment of their children, with the intention of swaying them to one side or the other. In adolescence, freedom of choice is feasible, a freedom enjoyed by non-natives, although

¹ Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

it is conditioned, in each case, by friendships, the neighbourhood in which one lives or one's own family.

Over the course of the 19th century, the fiesta model of the *bandos festivos* was established and consolidated. The *bandos festivos* showed off and competed with each other through their fiestas, in a game of emulation and rebalancing, and these fiestas also provided a source of leisure for the emerging tourist industry. Among the actors involved were the elites, who provided large financial injections; the merchants, who saw business opportunities; and the local press, which generated news.

But the initial polarisation between the two original *bandos festivos* was to be altered. One of them, the one occupying the territory inside the town walls, became weaker economically and demographically, providing an opportunity for another territorial segment of Llanes —separated from the town centre by the river— which was growing in population and celebrated a fiesta of great devotion, to enter into this scenario of rivalry in the first third of the 20th century. Although the former (La Magdalena) recovered after the civil war, urban development intensified in the mid-1950s in the area of the new actor (La Guía), with the construction of social housing estates. Demographics were in favour of what would become the third *bando festivo* in the future.

In the mid and late 20th century, the main conflicts developed between this new player and La Magdalena's old rival: San Roque. These conflicts were related to the chronotopic dimension of the *bandos festivos*. Here, the territorial aspect combined with the temporal aspect; both being dominant and mutually implicated. Each of the *bandos festivos* symbolically claimed a time segment and a territorial segment. In terms of time, this took the form of a month of the summer for each side, corresponding to the month in which the Catholic liturgical calendar established the festivity of the religious figure used as the symbol of the *bando festivo*. In terms of territory, this was established by the part of the town where the hermitage or chapel home to the sacred image was located, being divided into three clearly defined areas: within the town walls, outside the walls and, across the river, in the eastern neighbourhoods.

The first conflict was related to the distribution of time and it took place in the second half of the 1950s. This is when developmentalism and the change in the tourist model began, with a broadening of the social base, as well as the demographic expansion of the eastern part of the town. The La Guía fiesta committee wanted to 'start' August with a new secondary celebration, but the San Roque fiesta committee claimed the month as its own. After four years of disagreements, including a strike in festivities, a written pact was signed, indicating the circumstances under which this fiesta could 'invade' August, setting limits to an annual event.

From then on, it can be said that La Guía became a third *bando festivo*, as it is from that pivotal moment that exclusive possession was established. It is true that the dualism could have been altered with a change of contender, but the *bando festivo* that had been pushed out of the polarity, confined to a territory with no possibility of construction or population expansion, was to receive a boost from more general dynamics.

At the end of the 20th century, during a time of intensified tourist and urban development, Llanes received an important financial injection, allowing it to consolidate its position as the main tourist destination in Asturias. The *bandos festivos* were filling an increasing

number of dates in the calendar of ‘their’ month with secondary activities. But they were also expanding in terms of territory. San Roque organised a new activity and ‘occupied’ spaces that La Guía claimed to be its own. After three years of disagreements, the three *bandos festivos* signed a pact establishing the ‘ownership’ of the territories, as well as certain conditions and routes.

During this time, the *bando festivo* that had been pushed out of the polarity did not disappear, but rather it continued to occupy a place in the new configuration. Paradoxically, the *bando festivo* with the least capacity for territorial and social expansion gained a new lease of life. This was helped by its strategic position in July, the first month of the tourist season, the intensification of tourism and the town’s economic shift towards the service sector, with the expansion of the urban territory. The trends of late modernity also helped, such as the revival of festivities, the prevalence of leisure and aestheticisation, the re-anchoring of individuals and the intensification of participation. These factors moved the system beyond dualism.

Anthropological literature has highlighted the coexistence of dual structures with triadic structures or a certain apparent triadism that hides a dualism. As far as this case study is concerned, it can be concluded that the transformations from dualism to triadism are related to the chronotopic dimension of the *bandos festivos*, i.e. the territorial basis that shapes them, and the time period in which their fiestas take place. But, beyond the local framework, they are related to the characteristics and transformations of late modernity, already noted, which boosted participation. This has generated a triadism that incorporates dualism, which is expressed in two ways, with a weakened polarity—that of the historical *bandos festivos*— and another strong polarity—that of one of these *bandos festivos* with the third *bando festivo*. The three rival each other to achieve the best fiesta, but friction is made possible by temporal and territorial proximity. Therefore, conflicts occur mainly between the rivals who share temporal and territorial borders, which are precisely those of the two polarities.

As for the future developments, an analysis is needed of how the fiestas have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, how they have continued, broken down and been transformed, and how the organisational model of the *bandos festivos* and their cultural practices have spread throughout the area. Likewise, analysis is also needed of the role of outsiders, whether or not they have native ties, and how they participate in the structure of the *bandos festivos* and the organisation of the fiestas.