



The Possibility of Transgression and Fluidity

A Study of the Festival *La Mucada*

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Abstract. Identity problem is a hot topic in today's society and academia. In the cultural, political, gender, regional, and other different systems, people's identity is stuck with different labels, and various stereotypes attached to people are constantly being reinforced. Logocentrism and binary opposition are the conceptual basis of this thinking mode. The queer theory provides people with another way of thinking and behavior. Its emphasis on the fluidity and transgression of identity strongly opposes and attacks the inherent and pre-existing identity construction. *La Mucada* is a festival established on the basis of queer theory. This paper tries to use queer theory to understand the connotation and influence of this festival and the possibility that logocentrism and binary opposition can be broken through this festival. It demonstrates that this festival challenges people's previous gender, cultural, and social identity through irrational carnival and dramatic resistance to tradition and participants achieve the transgression and flow of identity.

Keywords: Queer theory · Identity · Transgression · Orientalism · *La Mucada*

1 Introduction

Identity is not solely one of the most common and usual items in our lives all the time but also one of the most mysterious and intractable riddles in modern academia. This paper focuses on the aggressiveness and fluidity of identity and attempts to expose the critical “queer core” of the fluid identity, taking *La Mucada* as a significant example. The queer theory provides the most crucial principles for this festival while this festival itself is a practice of queer theory. Based on queer theory, this paper attempts to study and analyze this festival from the perspectives of body dimension, nonlinear narrative and carnival and tries to answer whether it is possible to transgress identity through *La Mucada*.

The rise of queer theory was closely related to the growth of anti-foundationalism, anti-essentialism, anti-logocentrism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction at the end of the 20th century, which provided a solid foundation for queer theory. The queer theory brings new possibilities for people to understand modernity in modern life and people's

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bodies, identities, and thoughts. It tries to sublimate the intrinsic, inherent, and transcendental nature of human beings and provides people with a structure for understanding themselves and the society in which they live from various perspectives. One of the most striking features is the fluidity of identity. *La Mucada*, a festival celebrated in Mallorca, promotes the queer spirit and offers the possibility of identity flow. It enables people to deconstruct their identity by revealing their bodies and rebelling against the traditions and the preconceptions in the narration of this festival and treats all cultural heritages with an attitude of publicity, banter, joke, and absurdity. However, it has to face the risks of dropping into the binary opposition itself, which potentially has some defects and limitations.

At present, there is much research on the application of queer theory in the academic circle. These diverse viewpoints and perspectives have opened a new door for queer theory. Queer theory has also jumped out of the analysis, research and criticism of pure gender identity issues and moved to a broader field, including political identity, cultural identity, social class issues, and the composition of ideas [1, 2]. In addition, the analysis objects of queer theory are more and more diverse, such as archives, literature, film and television, entertainment, sports, education, political movement, and international relations [1–6]. This paper attempts to analyze *La Mucada*, the rebellious queer festival, from the perspective of festival and carnival to understand “queer” people’s attempts to transgress in the face of their traditions and cultural and gender identity.

2 The Breakdown of Binary Opposition and Dichotomy

Queer theory fights against the fundamentalist and essentialist principle, which has played a leading role in the history of conceptualization: the male and female, the Occidental and the Oriental, the knower and the known, “We” and “The Other,” good and evil, mind and matter, the normal and the abnormal, etc. Queer theorists (the poststructuralists and deconstructionists like Foucault, Butler, and Derrida) criticized this inclination toward binary opposition. Such binary positions are not equal and juxtaposed. “Logocentrism” takes the former item as superior, central, and original, while the latter is secondary, derivative, marginal, and non-central [7]. The principle of queer theory – the collapse of the binary opposition and dichotomy – can provide the philosophical foundation for the Orientalized groups to solve the problems they face.

2.1 The Binary Opposition and Orientalism

Orientalism is a discourse or a knowledge/power system in which the Occidental is potentially defined as a group with a superordinate identity while the Oriental is a subordinate one inversely. The underlying conceptual structure of this knowledge/power system is the binary opposition that has been rooted in people’s minds, making the “We-The Other” hierarchical model “natural” and necessarily certain both ontologically and epistemically. With time elapsing, the Orient has accepted this “Orientalized” model gradually, inserting the “Occidental” ideas and perspectives into their mind, subjectifying and objectifying themselves through the Orientalist discourse. The Orientalist discourse is completely extended beyond the limit of geographical region. It is rooted in

the entwined relations between different identities politically, academically, culturally, socially, etc. The Orient is the object of being gazed at and being said by the Occidental. Inside the Orientalist hierarchy, the group with a subordinate identity has lost its discourse power and is kept in silence without utterance that can clarify itself. Like what Shehla Burney explained, Orientalism is a “complex web of Western representations of the Orient” where the “Orient was orientalized by a hegemonic process that robbed it of its true identity, voice, and indigenous culture” [8]. Briefly, the Occident is the absolute authority with rationality, while the Orient is the object being observed, written, studied, and spoken of by the Occident.

This Orientalist discourse is defined as natural by Western logocentrism that is rational, logical, powerful, and masculine. According to Jacques Derrida, logocentrism is the tendency and practice in the history of Western thought to regard logos as the absolute authority and centre and exclude and suppress irrational things [9]. It is the foundation for the system of binary opposition to operate. Under the binary opposition, the Orient, or Orientalist discourse is actually not a geographical constitution but a discursive and cultural one that wields its power to define the identity within its huge system.

Rural Mallorca where *La Mucada* takes place has been constrained by the images of features like romantic, conservative, Catholic, decorous, organic, and exotic, which are all defined as opposing characteristics of modern Western civilization. These features have been imposed on the imaginary appearances. The local residents and this island itself are reinforced by the emphasis on the “Holy Easter celebrations”, the “agricultural market”, the “summer festival in honour of the Lady in August”, and “a more recent gastronomical fair” [10]. The innate logocentrism and binary opposition have grounded the touristified romantic, Mediterranean, and Orientalist features in the relation between the modern Western industrial discourse and this Orientalist constitution.

The deconstructive element in queer theory’s philosophical principle can play an important role in destroying the traditional tendency of “logocentrism” and the binary opposition. *La Mucada* is a festival taking place in Sineu, “a picturesque village with 3600 habitants at the heart of the island (Mallorca)” [10]. It is an example of a constructive attempt against logocentrism and binary opposition. With queer theory as its core, it emphasizes transgressivity, mobility, and diversity, and tries to open the door for trans-cultural, trans-regional, trans-political, and trans-gender mobility.

2.2 Non-linear Narrative and Anti-tradition

La Mucada originated from a local folktale, *Lo Much de Reig*, in which *Much* is a bull who would lead anyone who could run three times around the hill with olive oil in his mouth without swallowing it to the place where the treasure was hidden. *Much* is the core figure of this festival and gives the name to it. However, the local youth got rid of the constraint of the traditional constraint of the legend and tried to invent and create new traditions for themselves, to “queer” the traditions and those decrepit, conservative, and romantic characteristics [11]. In 2016, a feminine LGBTI-friendly character named *Muca* was added to this festival and got married to *Much* in the carnival in 2017. In this arrangement, the traditional narrative structure was completely broken, replaced by the rise of a new discourse.

The most powerful, dramatic, absurd, and “queer” moment of the festival is the encounter between *Much* and *Muca* in the market square. The encounter is modelled after the Easter encounter between Jesus and the Virgin Mary which is one of the most typical scenes in the touristified traditional festival “Holy Easter celebrations” in Mallorca. The character *Much* is from local lore and represents Jesus, a conservative, traditional, religious, sacred, rational, spiritual, romantic, centralized, solidified symbol in the Orientalist constitution of local culture; at the same time, as a female character in the LGBT community, *Muca* plays the Virgin Mary. *Much* and *Muca* make their debut in a seething crowd, where they meet in the square to cheers, laughter, applause, and clamour, and engage in a simulated unrestrained sexual intercourse. This scene completely breaks the original image of the holy, spiritual, pure, faithful characters of Jesus and the Virgin Mary through this materialized, animal, instinctive, emotional, irrational, impulsive sexual intercourse. Their antics, which break through all religions and ethics, make people’s cultural identity separate from the rigid cultural heritage and provide a space for the activities of things previously marked as taboo. The cultural heritage and traditions that have been over consumed here become ridiculous and absurd. Such a narrative is non-linear, that is to say, it is a break from tradition and a jump towards disorder, irrationality, absurdity, and the “queer core”. This kind of non-linear, sensual, and centrifugal narrative challenges the rational, linear, and central narrative of logocentrism. There is not one complete and logical story but some nonsensical, absurd, and purely materialized scraps of traditional figures.

2.3 The Dimension of Body: The Performativity in the Revel

The very space for the practice of the modern power, including the Oriental discourse, according to Foucault’s view, is the body. Roughly, the core of solving the problems is to focus on the individual body and derive the solutions from the body. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault exposes that the “object and target of power” is the body – “the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces” [12]. The disciplinary power enforces its rulings in accordance with norms. The norms measure different behaviours as normal and abnormal and establish the normal as the “Principle of Coercion” for the abnormal [13]. Specifically, the norms behind the Orientalist discourse are those imagined, well-organized, implicit images imposed on the Orientalized groups. Their body is an Oriental body. In the Oriental discourse of the West, those norms or images are being reinforced by the practice or performance of the Oriental, which can be both imagined or represented by the Occidental or carried by those individual Oriental bodies themselves through the coloured lens of the Western. The Oriental body is the place where the Orientalist disciplinary power can operate.

La Mucada tries to wipe out the norms imposed on these bodies and to set people free from the preconceptual Western gaze. The body here is used as a tool to break down the constructed and fixed identity in terms of geographical politics, culture, gender, sexuality, society, etc. “In creating *La Mucada*, youth effectively queered the established identity of Sineu, producing an ambiguous space that alters the established relation between local and the global” [10]. As local residents and tourists crowd the streets, blending into a large group with others amid noise and laughter, their cultural, gender, and regional identities are dissolved. They are the subjects of acting, practising, or to use

Judith Butler's term, "exercising their performativity". According to Butler's *Critical Genealogy*, those identities mentioned above are not "the cause of system, discourse and practice". Rather, they are "their result, that is, it is not that the subject creates institutions, discourses, practices, but that they create the subject by determining" those "discursive formations" [14]. Using their bodies, the local residents and tourists play the role of the performativity of their identity which is an uncertain, changeable, unstable, and variable product of their performances. Just like Nietzsche's belief, "if a person wants to achieve true free will, he should break free from the shackles of rules and requirements instilled into his soul by his culture and 'burn yourself in your own fire', because 'if you do not first become ashes, how can you become a new person', the 'creator' of the self" [15]. They become the destroyers of their previous identities and the creators of themselves via the power of this revel. In a Dionysian carnival atmosphere, they try to break through the solidified concept of binary opposition, make the cultural characteristics of marginalized positions stand out, and "decentralize" the inherent mainstream identity through weird and crazy performances. The Dionysian spirit contained in it enables people to get rid of the shackles imposed by custom and return to a natural, authentic, irrational, and non-logos state integrated with equal emotion. This type of mental state is the ground for queer theory's principle to practice in this case.

In this "street of queering", what is displayed is not the fixity and universality of identity, but its variability, fluidity, difference, and plasticity. Using their bodies, the swing of the arms, the jumps for delight, the extreme and drastic emotions, intensive nerves, dizzy colours in their costumes, loud shoutings and laughter, and the chaotic scenes, people are free to wipe out the disciplinary power and the discursive constitution imposed on their bodies and are active to escape from the norms and to practise those deviations as the "abnormal", or more precisely, the "queer". In short, they are performing a new self through the usage of the body in the revel.

This broke through the limit of sexuality, gender, cultures, regions, and traditions so that the model of binary opposition between the Occident and the Orient has no ground during the revel. In this almost crazy carnival atmosphere, everyone is the subject of action, speech, performance, and transgression. It has no space left for the "Western gaze" to wield its power. All the tourists and locals are dressed in pink and some men are wearing weird pink skirts and bras, using feminine elements to challenge male hegemony. This anomaly enables the body marked by gender, ethnicity, race, and culture, to temporarily leave behind the history it carries and plunge all into the ecstasy of the moment. Thus, masculinity and femininity are both marked with the symbols of entertainment, banter, irony, and ridicule in this carnival, and become an object of absurdity, a clown on the stage, performing his acrobatics. The Oriental discourse has no discursive power at all at this moment. Moreover, each subject of behaviour interprets and performs the images, roles, and characters through their own differences, making the traditional and hereditary image a kind of individual symbol that can be performed, rather than some innate, fixed, and natural identity. People play their absurd and ironic cultural roles in which there is no prior hierarchy or hegemonic system and erase the inherence of discursive constitution through this fluid cultural identity and playful performance.

It is interesting to realize that *La Mucada* uses two opposite elements in terms of the dimension of the body, that is, dissolution of the self in the Dionysian revel and

the difference between individuals. The former illustrates the ground for the practice of queer theory, namely, it wipes out the foundation of the fixity and unchangeability of the identity. Everyone here has no previous identities and no hierarchical privileges which can form the identity hegemony. On the other hand, the latter refers to personal performativity and the capacity to exercise their initiative actions to form their own identities. This provides them with the power of defining and creating one new self further.

3 Limitations of *La Mucada*

While *La Mucada* aims to deconstruct the problematic aspect of the traditional society regarding gender roles and LGBTQ rights, as well as to pave the way for the marginalized groups to step up to the centre of society, it unintentionally raises some issues that possibly hinder its way from creating a community of transgression and fluidity.

3.1 A New Binary Discursive System

The festival has the potential to eliminate binary discursive systems and create a platform for minorities to speak up and turn the local area into a community of transgression and fluidity. However, the goal might not be achieved with the existing approaches; it could even create a new binary discursive system.

The festival focuses on “transgression”, which is defined as “the act or process of breaking a law or moral rule” [10, 16]. However, rather than providing options for people to be whomever they want, the attendees are expected to behave against the norm. Masculinity is the dominant power of the local community, and blue is thought to be a typical representation of the traits of males. Therefore, at *La Mucada*, every attendee wears pink, a social representation of the “feminine” characteristic. Conceivably, instead of encouraging people to break the existing rules, the “transgression” here means jumping from the centre of the society to the edges, or the “other”, which is defined in the first chapter of this paper. Unlike non-binary genders, there is always something between the norm and the marginalized and this festival does not fit in any existing brackets when it comes to gender transgression. The transgression here is just getting away from the norm.

Instead of letting every attendee have their unique identity, the festival wipes off their original identities and makes everyone be at the same starting point. Each attendee is like a piece of blank paper, waiting for the festival to add colours to it, which violates the inclusive aspect of the festival as one’s identity is shaped by multiple factors like their family, cultural, ethnic background, and educational background, rather than what they suddenly decide to be like at a carnival. All these factors also contribute to their thinking process and the way they conceive things [17]. At *La Mucada*, everyone seems to have one identity that is the non-norm, the weirdo. As mentioned in the first chapter, Butler sees gender as a performance – people behave in a certain way in order to fit in the brackets and thus creating the illusion of binary sex [18]. Participating in *La Mucada* is like a performance. The attendees are told to forget the rules from the outside world and just enjoy “queering” here. Essentially the festival asks the attendees to become unconscious of their original identities.

3.2 The Denormalization of the LGBTIQ+ Community

The festival is attempting to make the LGBTIQ+ community visible and appreciated in the rather conservative local community. However, its approach to the goal is simultaneously denormalizing the actual LGBTIQ+ community. The “queering” part of the festival contains activities that would be identified as extremely weird without the festival’s context, like public sex between *Much* and *Muca* [10]. Even with some milder behaviours during the festival, like dressing up in unusual ways, the festival potentially builds up stereotypes of one having to be a “weird creep” to be a part of the LGBTIQ+ community. Unlike other LGBTIQ+ events that provide educational information and bring up public awareness, *La Mucada* only offers an opportunity for the attendees to have a one-day trial to be a part of the LGBTIQ+ community but they do not have to experience all the discriminations and inequalities that these people have to face outside of this event. Like cultural appropriation, where outsiders get to “experience” minority cultures, the cis-gendered and straight attendees gender/identity appropriate the LGBTIQ+ community [19]. The fundamental of the festival is a carnival. It is a celebration that only happens once a year, and it does not include any campaign that demands changes in society. The festival is more of a rebellious exercise than an approach to change. People dress up in ways that are considered unusual, making the festival a celebration of being unusual rather than actually seeing the problems that the community is facing and attempting to find solutions for them.

3.3 Tourist Gaze

La Mucada creates a “tourist gaze” toward the local community. The term was originally introduced by the British sociologist John Urry in 1990 in *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. He articulates that “the gaze is constructed and reinforced” [20]. The desire to see unfamiliarity is a driving force of the tourist gaze. Urry uses the example of tourism in China in his work. He states that “(v)isitors have found it particularly interesting to gaze upon the carrying out of domestic tasks in a ‘communist’ country, and hence to see that the routines of life are not that unfamiliar” [20]. What causes the tourist gaze is the explicit and implicit indications that are given to the tourists by the tourism organizers. In this case, *La Mucada* turns the local area into a strange and rather mysterious place compared to the traditional to attract visitors, which puts the local area in the position of being gazed at by the outside world. Therefore, like orientalism, the image of the local area is no longer determined by its people instead of by its tourism industry.

4 Conclusion

This paper introduces and analyses the festival *La Mucada* through the perspective of queer theory, poststructuralism, social constructionism, etc. This is not only an attempt to expose the activity, transgressiveness, fluidity, and performativity of identities but also an attempt to show the possibility to break through the Orientalist discourse and the binary opposition by this tourist carnival as the model.

Through *La Mucada*, this Dionysian carnival, the participants are given great freedom to wield their power of the body to get rid of the preexisting identity and redefine their identity by restructuring and individualising their mode of behaviours when being immersed in the wild, bodily and instinctive excitement. The performativity of identity is highly valued. This provides people with a model for the future of their position in this globalized, interacting and coexisting world, that is, people are not simply constrained in a narrow space of their preexisting essence, but rather they are the active, and mobile factors of themselves to change their identity and try to participate in a larger scope of multicultural relation with others. The binary opposition and logocentrism of their existence cannot be justified in this case, and even, cannot be justified by their relationship with other communities, because every single person is an active being that is exercising his or her own performativity. In this sense, this carnival is not just an entertaining festival, but more likely to be an experiment for local residents and tourists to transgress, and a symbol to show the world the power of performances.

However, it is potentially limited by the possible power it can produce. The whole society is, using Foucault's terminology, a disciplinary society where people's body is restricted by infinite branches of modern power, like blood capillaries intertwined in their performances and mode of thinking and acting. To cast off all of these restrictions is not possible and unnecessary since the mechanism and operation of society and individuals in it are actually based on these infinite norms and their relatively fixed identity. No one would like to live in a world with turbulence and chaos. Moreover, this festival faces the problems of dropping into the discursive formation of Orientalism and binary opposition, which has been mentioned above.

Actually, it is not so easy to break through the Oriental discourse or whatever binary opposition that has rooted in the mind and the whole world. Those prejudices, clichés, preconceptions, historically fixed identities, and limited perspectives may still be powerful. To wipe off those impediments, what is needed is not solely a festival or a single event, but also a whole change of the system where those images of identity are produced, presented, and exhibited. This would be a great endeavour in all fields like political campaigns, education, culture, economic event, international relation, and even one's own everyday performance.

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