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Religion in Latin America

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Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Popular Catholicism in Ecuador



Terminology

- Folk Catholicism
- Vernacular Catholicism
- Popular Catholicism.....
- => at the borderline of mainstream Catholicism, often practised without (or with just a little) involvement of the Roman Catholic Church

Background



- Research project in the southern part of the Andes in Ecuador
- Between Cuenca (capital of Azuay) and Loja (capital of Loja)
- To the border between Ecuador and Peru
 - at the time of the project still officially a conflict area

Population

- “mestizos” -> mixed race between Spaniards and indigenous
- Language: Spanish plus some Quichua
- Culture: mixture of Spanish and indigenous elements
- Religion: (nominal) Catholic and a growing number of Protestants



- Economy: small agricultural units (family based) but growing number of emigration to industrial parts of Ecuador (and beyond)
- Area at app. 2500 to 3500 meter (8202 to 11482 feet) high in the Andes
- Cuenca is the largest town in the southern part of the Andes but Guayaquil (at the coast) is the largest town in the region

The relevance of religious festivals

- “Celebrations have always been vital to the well-being of society.....they bring an essential and rich spirit to its everyday existence as well as to its special moments. They are touchstones for its strength and cohesion or for its tensions and conflicts.” (Genevieve Fabre, p. 1)

Types of festivals

- Fiestas patronales – celebrations in honour of the patron of the village
- Fiesta de peregrinaciones – celebrations at the end of a pilgrimage
- Urban Catholic feasts as pases del Nino for Christmas, Semana Santa as Eastern and Corpus Christi, procession at Corpus Christi
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Christmas



Eastern



Corpus Christi



Cargo

- = traditional system to finance and organise festivals and other rituals
- Cargo = offices or responsibilities for sponsors in religious festivals
- Outcome is to gain prestige in the community (= the main motivation for taking on the duties)



1. It is voluntary service without remuneration;
2. Holders of the civil or religious office (cargo) perform most or all of the functions necessary for the running of the local government and/or the church; and
3. Tenure in these offices is rotated.
4. Those who hold the higher positions (and therefore has to spend more money) receive the most prestige.

But

- Not depended on personal wealth
- => The cargo system is based on social exchange and reciprocity between (extended) families
 - All family, friends, godparents of their children, neighbours and so on will support the family with the understanding that the family returns the help next year.

Jim and Linda Belote

- “While ethnic identity of the individual Indian is marked by hair style and clothing ...the fiesta cargo system is the only important institution existing today which serves to integrate the social structures of the Indians ...and to differentiate it from non-Indian social systems” (Belote/Belote 1973. p. 2)

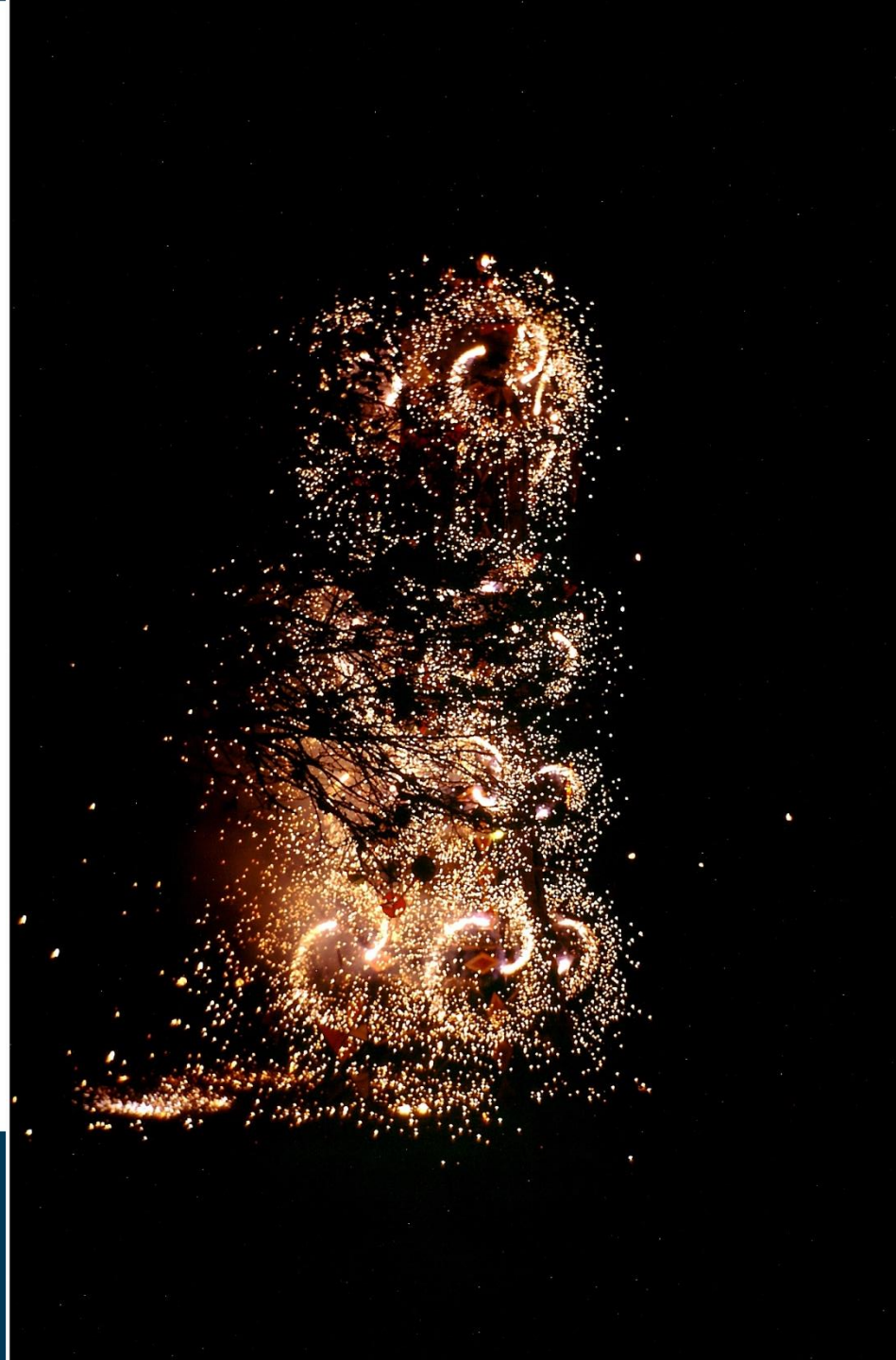
Preparation

- Announcement of the *prioste* (main organiser) -> planning begins with recruitment of assistants for each item (e.g. firewood, cleaning the church building, decoration, music, flowers, dancers, ...)
- Training the dances and so on



Structure of celebration

- *Visperas* (evening before the main day, filled with music, dance, fireworks, open fire ...)
- Festival day with mass and procession through the village
- Party in the house of the main organisers the day after



Social meaning

- Originally festivals were regarded by scholars as a symbol of the social-economic structure of the village
- -> means to celebrate the village and to structure (and present) the social hierarchy of the village



Changes

- Inclusion of emigrants from coast and abroad (even adjustment of date)
- New elements such as football competition and beauty queen election
- and even the flag of the USA on top of the “castillo” (=tower structure for firework)