Beyond the Nature-Culture Frontier: Sea Urchin Festivals in French and Brazilian Communities

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ABSTRACT

In order to challenge the culture–nature dichotomy, this article investigates two festivities centered around fishing and consuming the sea urchin in two different locations: the Suape Bay Ouriçada (Brazil) in the Southern Hemisphere, and the Carry-le-Rouet Oursinade (France) in the Northern Hemisphere. This study employs both bibliographic and ethnographic research carried out at the two festivals over the last six years. The communities that originated these sea urchin festivals are both historically connected to artisanal fishing traditions that aim at creating bonds of sociability and connection with nature. While these festivities feature a wide variety of “things,” the one that stands out is the sea urchin itself. During these festivals, this species is taken by human hands from their habitat on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea to become the main reason for celebration and sociability in two different communities. On the one hand, sea urchin festivals can be seen as the heritage of local immaterial culture and as a symbol of the struggle for environmental protection. On the other hand, they are both the victim and the perpetrator of environmental degradations that threaten the event’s survival. Although the communities in these two geographic locations devised very different celebratory rituals around the same marine creature, by comparing and contrasting the two festivities we can contend that, despite their specificities, these sea urchin festivals challenge the culture–nature dichotomy. In other words, it is precisely through food that the natural and cultural worlds can become one.

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Introduction

In two distinct points of the globe, two communities designed different ways to celebrate yearly the same element of marine wildlife: the sea urchin. The Ouriçada at Suape Bay takes place in the town of Cabo de Santo Agostinho in Brazil's Pernambuco State, and the Oursinade at Carry-le-Rouet is celebrated in the Bouches-du-Rhône department of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region in France. Although both festivities focus on the same element of nature, their local populations produce different types of material and immaterial culture through their specific traditions of sociability and commensality as well as their techniques of catching, preparing, and eating the same gastronomic seafood element.

This study is based on intensive ethnography combining empirical fieldwork, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews focused on the two communities' festive praxis. It includes bibliographic and documentary research on historical, environmental, and legislative data conducted over six years. Through an interdisciplinary perspective, it seeks to cover the festive range of cultural, historical, social, and environmental elements. The Oursinade fieldwork research consisted of eight visits to Carry-le-Rouet before, during, and after the 2015 and 2016 festivals to survey the festive space, establish contacts with local people, create photographic records, and engage in participant observation. In 2015, the researchers carried out nine interviews: three with raw seafood traders, one with a prepared seafood trader, one with a couple of artisanal bakers, one with a couple of ceramic artisans, one with the Carry-le-Rouet tourism secretary, one with a tourist, one with a journalist, one with a university professor, and one with a local resident who practices the Oursinade on his own. In 2016, they conducted four additional interviews, two with seafood traders, one with a tourist, and one with a sea urchin fisherman.

In the Suape fieldwork, the researchers made a total of ten visits between 2016 and 2019 in order to understand the sociocultural context of the region and its changes. During the visit on September 8, 2016, researchers took an exploratory boat tour of Suape Bay, aiming to capture the estuarine scenario and observe some critical aspects such as the expropriation of the local people from Tatuoca Island and the environmental impacts. In 2016, they conducted nine interviews: four with the family members of Ms. A. S. and Mr. R. M. V. C., who is considered a guardian of the traditions of Ouriçada; one with a local resident who was a fisherman and is currently a member of the fire brigade as a lifeguard for the region; and four with fishermen and tourist boat drivers. In December 2018, another six interviews were completed, three with the family members of Ms. A. S. and Mr. R. M. V. C., two with fishermen and tour boat drivers, and one with a university professor. In 2019, the authors conducted six final interviews, one with a family member of Ms. A. S. and Mr. R. M. V. C., one with another member of the lifeguard team, one with a fisherman and tour boat driver, two with tourists, and one with a fisherman who runs a small bar on Cocaia Island during the Ouriçada.

Considering the complexity of social relationships in contemporary society, this article explores the materiality produced by the connection between culture and nature observed in these two

festivities, centering on the festive sociability and the commensality of the sea urchin. Taking as reference a nonmodern approach using theoretical frameworks from Bruno Latour and Tim Ingold, it questions the old object/subject and nature/society distinctions in these two festivities composed of heterogenic elements such as the economic, the environmental, and even the spiritual. The analysis of the sea urchin festivals is also based on the festive studies theoretical frameworks of authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile Durkheim, Jean Duvignaud, Roger Caillois, Georges Bataille, Roberto DaMatta, Rita Amaral, Norberto Guarinello, and Naomi Milthorpe and Eliza Murphy, who discuss how the festivity and its sociability play with many apparent societal dichotomies. We investigate how these sea urchin festivals play all these games of festive sociability. For the commensality theoretical framework, this article highlights Nir Avieli's ideas, through which the sea urchin may be seen as a cultural–natural “thing” that has an incomparable power to penetrate the human body and to break the dichotomy between “the World” and “the Self.”

The sea urchin festivals feature a wide variety of “things,” but the one that stands out is the sea urchin itself. During these festivals, these animals leave their physical home at the bottom of the sea, where they are collected by human hands to symbolically occupy the role of the festivities' protagonist, becoming simultaneously a special item of the local gastronomy and an object of desire and curiosity. Hence, this element of nature emerges symbolically from its habitat to become the main reason for celebration and sociability in two very different communities, connected by the same marine species and the same commensality desire. Although the communities in these two geographic locations devised very different celebratory rituals around the same creature, by comparing and contrasting the two festivities we can contend that, despite their specificities, these sea urchin festivals challenge the culture–nature dichotomy. In other words, it is precisely through food that the natural and cultural worlds can become one.

Contrasting Fields and Local Environments of the Sea Urchin Festivals

In Brazil, the Ouriçada occurs in Suape Bay at the town of Cabo de Santo Agostinho on the northeast coast, in Pernambuco State. Suape Bay is located 52 kilometers from Recife City (the capital of Pernambuco State) and its ecosystem is formed by the meeting of the Atlantic Ocean with the waters of Tatuoca and Massangana Rivers, and some islands of different sizes. This region still has some areas of preserved Atlantic forest, mangroves, salt marshes, and the promontory of Cabo de Santo Agostinho, which is recognized as natural and cultural national patrimony. Another important natural element is the sandstone reef which is the habitat of the sea urchins collected for the Ouriçada. It is worth noting that the Suape Bay landscape has been threatened by the Industrial Port of Suape (Complexo Industrial Portuário Governador Eraldo Gueiros de Suape, CIPS), the most emblematic mega-project of Pernambuco's economic policy in the last thirty years.

In France, Carry-le-Rouet is a Mediterranean village on the Blue Coast located in the Bouches-du-Rhône department in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. It has a surface area of 1,010 hectares, of which 280 hectares have been urbanized (27 percent of its territory) and the rest is a natural forest reserve.¹ But it is located 28 kilometers from Marseille, a metropolis that houses the Port of Marseille (Grand Port Maritime de Marseille, GPMM), an industrial port that causes significant environmental impacts in the region. With a population of 5,884² Carry is

1. Mairie Carry le Rouet, <https://www.mairie-carrylerouet.fr/>, accessed July 7, 2018.

2. INSEE - Populations légales 2018, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5001880?geo=COM-13021>, accessed January 6, 2020.

3. INSEE - Statistiques Lieu de travail des actifs de 15 ans ou plus ayant un emploi qui résident dans la zone, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=COM-13021>, accessed February 3, 2021.

characterized mainly as a residential area, and 79.2 percent of its economically active population works outside of the village.³ Having previously been a small fishing village, Carry-le-Rouet is now close to major towns and economic development zones and has over time become one of the most exclusive family destinations in the Bouches-du-Rhône. This village is considered a very popular seaside destination in summer, with a marina, beaches, sheltered coves, and many nautical and sports activities. In the past few years, it has been classified as a tourist town, becoming part of the "Marseille–Aix-en-Provence's touristic attraction area." Carry-le-Rouet is recognized as the pioneer village in the French celebration of the Oursinade, which is one of its main touristic events.

Festival Origins

In Brazil, the Ouriçada of Suape has its origins in a local belief from popular Catholicism related to the devotion of Saint Lucy, the protector of the eyes and human vision. According to this belief, anyone who fishes during Saint Lucy's day, December 13, can become blind. Therefore, to avoid this risk, the community catches sea urchins and holds a festival in devotion to Saint Lucy. It is not clear when this tradition started, but according to information from the town hall of Cabo de Santo Agostinho, it began in the 1960s. However, the inhabitants of the fishing village of Suape claim that the festival has been taking place since their parents' time, which suggests that it was passed on from one generation to another.

In France, "Oursinade" originally referred to the habit of eating sea urchin, a custom maintained by artisanal fishermen and local groups of families or close friends, especially in the southern region. The Oursinade of Carry-le-Rouet began in 1952 when the local fishing community of Cap Rousset Bay organized a symbolic offering of this seafood to the mayor at the time, Jean-Baptiste Grimaldi, in a quantity corresponding to his body weight, as a symbolic gesture of appreciation for his support of the fishing sector. In the 1960s, the village's public administration established that the first Sunday of February would henceforth be "Sea Urchin Day." Later, the entire month of February was designated "Sea Urchin Month" in this locality.

The Sea Urchin Festival in Brazil

The Brazilian celebration is organized by members of the fishing community and is more informal and spontaneous. Suape Bay still has some remarkable natural landscapes, which reaffirm its historical and environmental importance. Its population tries to preserve its spontaneous and informal way of life whether through practice or through communal memory.

The Ouriçada of Suape marks its festive territorial space, as well as its mobility, between the land and the sea, more specifically between the Suape beach, the sandstone reef, and Cocaia Island. This festival produces remarkable mobility, facilitated by fishing boats and rafts that constantly cross these three different environments. The Suape beach is the continental space where the local population comes from, while the uninhabited Cocaia Island is the festive place par excellence where the local population gather for "a day on the beach" and build improvised structures on the shore. The third festive territory is the sandstone reef where the sea urchins are traditionally collected in an artisanal way.

This community's connection with nature becomes more explicit through the Ouriçada celebration, and is especially apparent in the harvesting of sea urchins by hand along the sandstone reef, as well by the whole process of preparing the Ouriçada dish, in which the sea urchins are roasted on a bonfire made from Cocaia Island's coconut palm. Sea urchin harvesting (figs. 1–2) requires some traditional knowledge about tidal dynamics, navigation techniques, and the harvesting practice itself. At Suape, since the tide usually has a high oscillation on the Atlantic coast, the sea urchins that live in reef pools can be harvested on foot from the reef. At that time, it is possible to observe groups of people standing and leaning to catch this desirable animal. In general, this is an activity performed by men, who are also responsible for preparing the coconut palm bonfire to roast the sea urchins. After the roasting ritual, the sea urchins are usually broken by women, who finish the preparation of the Ouriçada dish.

Figures 1-2. Harvesting of sea urchins on the Suape reef (PE, Brazil), December 12, 2019; Bonfire lit to burn sea urchins on the island of Cocaia in the region of Suape (PE, Brazil), 2011. Authors' photos.

The gonads (the reproductive organs and the edible part of the sea urchin) are extracted from the sea urchin body by groups of women who start the preparation of the special dish (fig. 3) that gave the name to this popular festival: the Ouriçada. This dish is made of sea urchin gonads, vegetables such as onions, tomatoes, and green peppers, and manioc (cassava) flour and has become a familiar and communal meal in the fishing community of Suape that can be distributed collectively, as used to happen before. Nowadays, this familiar and communal commensality of sea urchins co-exists with increasing commercialization of the celebration.⁴

Figure 3. Women breaking sea urchins with traditional instruments on Cocaia Island during the Ouriçada (PE, Brazil). Authors' photos.

4. For more details of the celebration see Juana de Oliveira Santos and Maristela Oliveira de Andrade, "Festa da Ouriçada e devoção a Santa Luzia na praia de Suape, PE: expressão sincrética e simbólica da biodiversidade e do território de pescadores artesanais," *Horizonte PUC Minas* 11, no. 30 (2013): 545–71.

Despite increasing commercialization of the festival, the Ouriçada remains a strong cultural expression of the local people. It is a day of gathering established by a specific group that transforms the landscape of an uninhabited small island into a festive atmosphere, full of makeshift tents made from local material such as wood, palm leaves, or plastic sheets that house the sellers' market and the visitors (figs.4–5). Usually these structures are brought by the local population, whether sellers, consumers, or independent family groups, or made *in situ* with natural materials extracted from the island. The festivity is popular and reinforces the community identity with a spontaneous and informal way of life strongly connected with nature.

Figures 4–5. Festive structures on the island of Cocaia during the Ouriçada (PE, Brazil), December 13, 2016. Authors' photos.

A further festive peculiarity is precisely the celebration and commensality of the sea urchin (fig. 6), which is an extraordinary practice, especially in comparison to local habits of fishing and eating seafood. The ordinary fishing expedition in the daily life of Suape village does not include sea urchin harvesting or consumption. Hence, on one day of the year, the daily fishing activity of that community is replaced by the unusual ritual of harvesting sea urchins in the middle of nature, on the sandstone reefs of Suape Bay.

Figure 6. Sea urchin breaking process for the Ouriçada (PE, Brazil), December 13, 2018. Authors' photo.

The Sea Urchin Festival in France

Unlike the Ouriçada Festival of Suape Bay, the Oursinade of Carry-le-Rouet has fewer traces of spontaneity and informality, as it is more regulated by official authorities and guided by the capitalist market and neoliberalism. It possesses instead other characteristics related to its urban, touristic, globalized features. This becomes clearer when we focus, for instance, on the way that the plates are carefully presented to their consumers (fig. 7–9); in the standardization of the picnic tables market stalls; and, finally, in the public administration's active role in the festival's production.

Figures 7–9. Different ways in which sea urchin are served at the Oursinade in Carry-le-Rouet (Bouches-du-Rhône, France), February 2015. Photos courtesy of Franky'mages-Photographies (left and top right) and Noel Lapa.

The festive territorial space of the Oursinade is an urbanized border of the leisure port of Carry-le-Rouet, which has approximately 600 meters that can be easily visited on foot. The festive space is demarcated by the presence of a stage and some sellers' stalls that are subdivided according to the products sold or the cultural attractions promoted. The stalls sell a vast range of products, mostly handcrafted, and they are concentrated along the Professeur Vayssieres quay to Jean-Jaurès central square. The latter is the village's main square, which is often transformed during festive periods. This is where modern globalization's logic becomes more explicit. Once the stage is set up, visitors can watch cultural attractions such as raffles, interviews, stand-up comedians, and magicians' presentations, for instance. The ambiance is composed of background music, mostly in the pop culture style. As part of the event's official program, the opening of the festival is followed by a brief meeting with some members of the village's public administration, who used to offer free coffee to the visitors and local inhabitants. This practice can be understood as a way of welcoming visitors in general and as an opportunity for social interaction between the public administration's members and the local population.

5. Juana de Oliveira Santos,
"Comensalidade e gestão de
recursos naturais na festa da
Oursinade - Costa Azul francesa,"
*Gaia Scientia. Edição Especial
Cultura, Sociedade & Ambiente* 10,
no. 1 (2016): 117–25.

One of the Oursinade's interesting characteristics is the village's outdoor picnic infrastructure on the right side of the Professeur Malleville quay, erected between the sellers' stalls and Carry-le-Rouet's pebble beach. There are 70 long tables and 140 wooden benches set up by the village's public administration, arranged differently each year, with stickers reminding people to keep the place clean.⁵

At the Professeur Malleville quay, the village's public administration and the local inhabitants create a cozy environment to accommodate the visitors, most of whom are seeking a typical French picnic day. Over the table at the picnic space, it is possible to observe the festive ambiance (figs. 10–11) and the diversity of food consumed, especially the fresh or hot dishes prepared from local seafood. The Professeur Malleville quay is the festive territory par excellence where the Oursinade commensality is revealed, which means that it is possible to note how the visitors prepare their own picnic. Most of the commensals bring their own picnic baskets, tote bags, and coolers with ice, along with checkered tablecloths, napkins, plates, cutlery, cups (disposables or not), and even wine glasses (disposable or glass ones). Other components that cannot be missing from a traditional French picnic kit are a fresh baguette and a favorite regional wine.

Figures 10–11. Arrangement of tables and benches before the Oursinade; Tables occupied by the public during Oursinade at the pier P. Malleville in Carry-le-Rouet (Bouches-du-Rhône, France), February 8, 2015. Photos courtesy of Noel Lapa.

However, the main "object" of desire in the Oursinade is the sea urchin, more specifically its edible part, the gonads, which are also appreciated in many other countries such as Japan, Italy, Spain, Malta, and Lebanon. In France, especially in Carry-le-Rouet, the sea urchin is enjoyed fresh and raw, on a loaf of bread, plain or with a few drops of Sicilian lemon. Fresh sea urchin can be sold closed, to be opened later by the consumer, or already opened by local sellers (fig. 12), who tend to be careful about the aesthetic presentation of this dish in their stalls.

Figure 12. A restaurant worker cutting sea urchins with scissors during the Oursinade in Carry-le-Rouet (Bouches-du-Rhône, France), February 1, 2015. Photo courtesy of Noel Lapa.

According to our fieldwork data, the sea urchin is mostly harvested from the Mediterranean village of Sette or from the Atlantic Ocean in Galicia. Their origin can be determined by their size. Sea urchins that inhabit the open sea are usually bigger than those inhabiting lagoons and rock pools in the Mediterranean.

In France, sea urchin harvesting must follow the local regulations, which mandate a set period for harvesting; some restrictions on the size and number of specimens harvested; and specific harvesting methods. In general, the Oursinade Festivals happen between January and March, respecting the authorized period for sea urchin harvesting according to the environmental protection regulation that applies to the Bouches-du-Rhône, Var, and the Alpes Maritimes (Arrêté-DRAM 27/October/ 2008), which restricts fishing to the period from November 1 to April 15 along the continental Mediterranean coast. This interdiction period can vary according to the maritime region. Another important environmental protection law concerning the sea urchin harvesting is the Arrêté 29/January/2013 modifying the Arrêté 26/October/2012, which determined the minimum size and weight for catching fish and other marine organisms according to their species and geographical area. This decree established a minimum size of 5 centimeters for sea urchins from the sea and 3.5 centimeters for those from lakes, excluding the thorns. This standard limit on the number and size of the fished species is valid for both professional and amateur fishing and seeks to avoid occasional overharvesting of premature specimens, contributing to the preservation of sea urchin population stocks.

In this regard, it is worth remembering that there is no industrial fishing of sea urchins. Sea urchin harvesting is still done traditionally, according to precise rules, which means that the sea urchins are harvested by hand with simple instruments such as knives. On the Mediterranean coast, with a small tidal oscillation, the sea urchin is harvested by diving without an oxygen mask (i.e., apnea), which means the fisherman can neither reach great depths nor remain under the water for long periods. The low temperature of the water is also a limiting factor for divers. All of this ultimately avoids overburdening the local sea urchin population. In relation to the sea urchin harvesting quota established by the Arrêté-DRAM 27/ October/2008, each fisherman is allowed to harvest four dozen sea urchins per day, or ten dozen for recreational fishing boats.

6. Eduardo J. B. Lima, "Dinâmica populacional de *Echinometra lucunter* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Echinodermata: echinoidea) na praia de Muro Alto, Ipojuca, Pernambuco" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2006), 6, 9.

7. McClanahan T. R., and N. A. Muthiga, "Ecology of *Echinometra*," in *Edible Sea Urchins: Biology and Ecology*, edited by John M. Lawrence, 2nd edition (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 297–317.

8. Lima, Eduardo J. B., Paula Braga Gomes, and Jose Roberto Botelho Souza, "Reproductive Biology of *Echinometra lucunter* (Echinodermata: Echinoidea) in a Northeast Brazilian Sandstone Reef," *Anais da Academia Brasileira de Ciências* 81, no. 1 (2009): 51–59.

This environmental legal framework also establishes that the sale of sea urchins must be done exclusively by professional fishermen, which leads recreational fishermen to consume sea urchins either on the seashore or on their boats. This rule has been especially problematic as it is open to interpretation. Even with this environmental regulation, it is still possible to observe the harvesting and consumption of sea urchin outside of the authorized fishing period, because amateur fishing commonly understand that fishing and consumption are legal as long as they take place on the boat, without any commercial transaction.

It is interesting to note that, nowadays, sea urchin harvesting is no longer undertaken by consumers during the festival, as it is in Suape. For the Oursinade festivity, the harvesting is done by professional fishermen rather than by groups of families and close friends, as it used to be done before when the fishing and the commensality of sea urchin came together to compose the moment of connection with local nature and with each other. This means that, currently, there are fewer and fewer groups doing their own fishing, and the commensality of sea urchin and the Oursinade Festival—despite the absence of the fishing experience and the urbanized environment—remains an opportunity for festivalgoers to seek this connection with nature through an open-air event and, especially, through the sea urchin flavor

The Sea Urchin: The Protagonist of the Festival

The two different cultural expressions described above share in common the main celebration "thing," the sea urchin, an animal that can be found in almost every ocean on the planet and which is especially known for its ability to filter seawater. This species of marine fauna inhabits coral reefs and rocky areas in shallow or deep waters, but symbolically it also inhabits the imagery of artisanal fishing communities and commensals of seafood all over the world.

In Brazil, the species consumed in Suape is *Echinometra lucunter*, which includes two subspecies: *Echinometra lucunter lucunter* and *Echinometra lucunter polypora*. This species has wide geographic distribution, encompassing the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean from North Carolina, Bermuda, and Puerto Rico in North America to Santa Catarina in Brazil. It is interesting to note that "the regular echinoid *Echinometra lucunter* is an edible species common along the Brazilian coast, being an important indicator of the limit between intertidal and the infralittoral zones and acting in the erosion of the reefs."⁶ This species of sea urchin that inhabits Brazilian waters has its spawning period between December and May.⁷ However, due to the great length of the Brazilian coast, its reproductive period may vary according to the specific location.⁸ The spawning period of this species in Pernambuco State occurs in the dry season, which coincides with the sea urchin festival period in December. While fieldwork research during some sea urchin harvesting expeditions in Suape found an abundant population of the *Echinometra lucunter* species at the sandstone reef of Suape, harvesting is not regulated by any environmental law in Pernambuco State and the Ouriçada happens in December, which is the reproductive period.

In France, the species predominantly consumed during Carry's Oursinade Festival is *Paracentrotus lividus*, which belongs to the *Parechinidae* family and the *Paracentrotus* genus. This species has its natural distribution on the rocky bottoms of the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic coasts of Scotland, the Azores, and the Canaries. The *Paracentrotus lividus*—known as

9. Camille Oger, "Le goût des oursins." Le Manger website, accessed November 4, 2013, <http://www.lemanger.fr/index.php/le-gout-des-oursins/>; and. DORIS (Données d'Observations pour la Reconnaissance et l'Identification de la faune et la flore Subaquatiques), website, accessed March 2020, <https://doris.ffesm.fr>.

the purple sea urchin (*oursin violet*, in French) because of its color—usually inhabits up to twenty meters of water in rock pools found on boulders and in seagrass meadows, and avoids soft substrates. To protect itself, the sea urchin digs into some rocks to create cavities as shelter from predators, especially in more exposed water. These excavations explain why rocks that host a large population density of sea urchin are sometimes honeycombed. The specific *Paracentrotus lividus* species prefers saltier water as it does not tolerate low salinity. Its reproductive cycle is annual, with the development of the gonads between summer and autumn (in the Northern Hemisphere), maturation during the winter and, finally, the release of gametes in the spring or early summer.⁹ Despite the existence of specific regulations for fishing, this species is about to disappear in the Carry-le-Rouet region.

Current Developments

Although it seems that both festivals originated in local family traditions expressed through commensality and sociability, and both are becoming increasingly institutionalized and commercialized, this comparative research shows that they present more contrasts than similarities. At Suape Bay, it is worth noting that these territories—as well as their related identities—have been threatened by constant and increasing environmental and social impacts over recent years. This is the result of economic pressure coming from business and industry and, especially, from the broken promises of social development made by the most emblematic mega-project of Pernambuco State's economic policy: the Industrial Port of Suape (CIPS). This mega-project represents the hegemonic modern logic, which contrasts with the logic of the local community of artisanal fishermen. The community, in turn, makes the modern and metallic world of the CIPS stop for one day every year to celebrate its nonmodernity. Almost as a form of social resistance, the local population "decrees" a kind of holiday in their own calendar, transforming Cocaia Island into a place where they can materialize their performative alliances with the local environment, with the sea urchin as a nonhuman species, and with themselves as human beings.

In the case of Carry-le-Rouet, despite the environmental impacts caused by the GPMM, its biggest threat comes from the festivity itself. It is possible to observe an increase in sea urchin festivities in French Mediterranean villages and, consequently, an increase in sea urchin consumption, which directly impacts the local sea urchin population. If the process continues to threaten the sea urchin population, it will threaten the survival of the festivity itself, since the latter depends directly on the existence of this specific marine species.

The Carry-le-Rouet Oursinade originated from the local tradition of eating sea urchin in communal meals. Sea urchin commensality in the Mediterranean region used to happen on boats or at the beach and the animals were collected by the consumers themselves, who dived using the apnea method in the cold water during the winter, according to the environmental law. Nowadays, we see hardly any fishermen among the festivalgoers, or any tourists diving to collect the sea urchins they will eat later. Those who collect and those who consume the sea urchins are increasingly divided into two different groups: the fishing communities, who have experience diving, and the tourists, who have gastronomic experience in urban areas while still seeking contact with nature. Nevertheless, we can still find some groups of friends and families who celebrate the old-fashioned (and more intimate) Oursinade, diving and fishing on their own and eating the sea urchins in small communal meals on boats or at the beach.

On the other hand, in Suape, the sea urchin is still collected and consumed by the same people within local and fishing communities, maintaining the local traditions. The old cooking method involved several bonfires made from coconut straw which were spread along the Suape beach and shared among an intimate group of families. Since the 1990s, the celebration has moved to Cocaia Island as a consequence of regional tourism development, but the bonfires as well as the traditional commensality of sea urchin remains. One particular family started making the sea urchin dish and sharing it with the entire festival community, providing an element of solidarity to this commensality that has become a large communal meal.

While the Suape Festival originated from a belief common in popular Catholicism, the family that established the communal meal distribution is deeply devoted to Saint Lucy and has moved away from the Ouriçada celebration in the last few years. Consequently, the religious aspects have been removed from the festival's practices, resulting in the event's separation into two different festivities: The religious celebration of Saint Lucy on one side, and the profane Ouriçada Festival on the other. In other words, this has established a clear separation between religious and lay celebrations. The Ouriçada celebration is also undergoing a transition in its commensality social form, moving away from the solidarity and communal aspects of preparing and sharing meals. At the same time, it is possible to observe an increase in the commercialization of the Ouriçada dish. Thus, nowadays the Ouriçada consists, effectively, of a single, leisurely day on the beach—a common practice during the summertime—created and enjoyed by and for the inhabitants of Suape's artisanal fishing village and the local population in general.

In France, on the other hand, Oursinade today is essentially considered a consolidated gastronomic seafood festival that moves the local economy and celebrates seasonal and artisanal local products. The importance of the economic role played by the Oursinade Festival is accentuated by the fact that Carry-le-Rouet is considered a dormitory village. It is also highlighted by the festival's co-optation by the village's public administration and the institutionalization of a sea urchin eating tradition belonging to the old local culture. Currently, Oursinade at Carry-le-Rouet occurs every Sunday in February, which is, on the one hand, a weekend day that facilitates the presence of the visitors. On the other hand, it happens during the European winter and is sometimes postponed or canceled according to the weather forecast. Although the festival is a winter activity, it is celebrated outdoors under the sun and blue sky of the Mediterranean Blue Coast. So, if the weather allows, a little spot of the French south coast is transformed, and the village is filled with sellers' stalls and commensals celebrating sociability through seafood.

Although the Oursinade Festival of Carry-le-Rouet is more institutionalized as a tourist event, we observed in Suape an increased distance taken by some families as well as a stronger presence of small, local entrepreneurs selling the sea urchin dish rather than sharing it, as used to happen before. However, as if to prove that there is no linearity guiding these two festivities, we seek to capture the multiplicity they embody through the theoretical discussion below.

Theoretical Discussion

Despite their particularities, we believe that by contrasting these two festivities we can challenge several societal dichotomies. Hence, we will now analyze these two sea urchin festivals from the perspective of nonmodernity, in dialogue with festive studies scholarship and through the

10. Bruno Latour, *Jamais fomos modernos* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34, 1994).

11. This refers only to the Ouriçada Festival of Suape, as it has a link with popular Catholicism.

12. Latour, *Jamais fomos modernos*.

commensality theoretical discussion to show how powerful festive sociability centered on food can be, and, finally, how it can break the culture–nature dichotomy.

Human and Nature

Despite their conceptual divergences, Bruno Latour and Tim Ingold contribute to the theoretical framing of the relationship between culture and nature, which is relevant to the analysis of festive phenomena such as the sea urchin festivals studied here. From Latour,¹⁰ this research took the “heterogeneity perspective” to show that these two festivities have a heterogeneous composition and, above all, a potential to establish a relationship between human and nonhuman beings. In this sense, there is a multiplicity of actors within these festivals that becomes clearer when we focus on the heterogeneity of the human actors (artisanal fishermen, tourist guides, product sellers, artists, tourists, local populations, local public administrations, port companies, and churches)¹¹ and on the biological diversity of nonhuman actors (whether the sea urchin itself, the sandstone reef, the local flora and fauna, or the estuarine and marine environments in general).

Furthermore, during these festivals there are performative connections or alliances among these actors, diversifying their festive representativeness. Once a year, during their festive moment, these multiple actors will be unified by a common interest, breaking the division between subjects and objects of science and, at the same time, breaking the dichotomy between nature and society¹² through the celebration of the sea urchin festivals. Through this approach, we can replace this old division of subject/object and nature/society for hybrids that Latour calls “quasi-objects” or “quasi-subjects.”

Continuing with Latour’s framework, it is possible to say that those “quasi-objects” observed in the festivals produce a dialogue between the human and nonhuman actors, forming new “hybrids.” Hence, these festivals provide a good example of the constant production and reproduction of these “subject-object hybrids.” What emerges from festive phenomena, like those analyzed here, is a nonmodern perspective in which the environment is seen as a subject, among other festive protagonists, that behaves as a mediator of the relationship between fishing communities and their respective cultural expressions. At the same time, the festivities themselves can be considered protagonists as well, because they play a mediator role in the relationship between humans and nonhumans, or in other words, between culture and nature. Therefore, Latour’s “principle of generalized symmetry” is applied to this study, as humans and nonhumans are being analyzed symmetrically here. And many of the theoretical concepts that can be used for festive analyses can also be applied to the natural actors. It is worth emphasizing that the use of the “principle of generalized symmetry” in this comparative research should not be interpreted as an attempt to homogenize these two festivities since each is analyzed according to its specificities and its heterogeneities.

The choice of sea urchin festivals as the quasi-objects of this research was due to their ability to establish connections between human and nonhuman actors. In other words, we believe that festive sociability has the potential to connect human beings with the natural environment. Therefore, we are interested in analyzing the ability of these festivals to forge “performative alliances” between human actors and the environment around them through their specific festive materiality process. Thus, both festivity and environment abandon their commonplace

13. Michel Serres, *O contrato natural* (Coleção: Epistemologia e Sociedade Lisboa, Instituto Piaget, 1990).

14. Tim Ingold, "Trazendo as coisas de volta à vida: emaranhados criativos num mundo de materiais," *Horizonte Antropológico* 18, no. 37 (January–June 2012): 25–44.

15. Ibid.

position as passive objects—as viewed by the modernity perspective—to become rights-bearing subjects¹³ according to the nonmodernity perspective.

However, in this analysis, such subjects and the multiple connections created by them—those established between humans and nonhumans, for example—are closer to Ingold's thinking than to Latour's. In other words, the natural environment and the cultural expressions studied in both fieldworks are understood as "things" as defined by Ingold. Despite the importance of the principle of generalized symmetry as applied to human–nonhuman relationships and defended by Latour, these festivities require other principles that go even further. It is worth noting that Latour still adheres to the notion that the world needs human actors to bestow "agency" to the objects around them, while Ingold talks about the inherent "life of things."¹⁴ Ingold proposes the use of an ontology focused on the "vital processes of things" which contrasts with the idea of agency being granted by some subject to an inanimate and amorphous object. In this sense, these festivities and their interconnected elements should not be viewed as static and inert objects under the effects of time or space. From this perspective, we would include not only humans and nonhumans but also inanimate beings such as infrastructures and artifacts as part of the cultural material observed in these festivals.

Unlike the performative alliances that connect these actors in Latour's thinking, these sea urchin festivals may be understood as things in and of themselves, since they are alive, dynamic, permeable, and fluid, each under the influence of their specific temporality and spatiality. According to Ingold's conception of "the creativity for undergoing," it is possible to understand the current festivals as the result of historical constructions (as a result of past events), but also to understand that they already contain elements of their future. This includes the itinerant and improvisation conceptions that demonstrate how dynamic these festivals can be. This point of view contributes to the debate about the "life" of festivals, considering the meshing and connections between the objects as well the transformation of these festivities into "things," against the background that, implicitly or explicitly, establishes a separation between the concepts of culture and nature. According to Ingold,¹⁵ everything that is alive can move as a dynamic thing, and everything alive can leak across its surfaces, crossing its frontiers and touching other things surround it, which makes a lot of sense when we understand these festivities as "things."

In this article, our conception of anything that has the potential to establish connections and mediations between "things" is closer to the perspective of "meshwork" proposed by Ingold than to Latour's concept of "network." Thus, the alliances created by sea urchin species do not connect one point directly to another, one by one, in an independent or sterile way. Instead, these alliances should be seen as intertwining lines that influence each other simultaneously. Once these festivals are understood as "things," they are constituted by a "mesh of threads" that keep moving constantly and result in a tangle. In this perspective, the connections do not constitute one more element in the network, but these threads are combined with the original elements which are in turn interconnected and intertwined. Using Ingold's example in which the threads of the cobweb can be considered an extension of the spider's body, the sea urchin festivals can be understood as an extension of the threads created physically and symbolically by the sea urchin species itself.

16. Norberto Guarinello, "Festa, trabalho e cotidiano," in *Festa: Cultura e sociabilidade na América Portuguesa*, vol. 2, ed. István Jancsó and Iris Kantor (São Paulo: Edusp/Imprensa Oficial/Hucitec/Fapesp, 2001), 974.
17. François-André Isambert, *Le sens du sacré – fête et religion populaire* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1982), 315.
18. Leach, Edmund R. "Ritualization in Man in Relation to Conceptual and Social Development," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 251, no. 772 (1966): 403–408.
19. Léa Freitas Perez, "Dionísio nos trópicos: festa religiosa e barroquização do mundo. Por uma antropologia das efervescências coletivas," in *A festa na vida: significado e imagens*, ed. M. Passos (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002), 15–58, as cited in Carla L. P. Águas, "Celebrações rebeldes: festa e resistência em contexto quilombola," *Teoria e sociedade* 20, no. 2 (July–December 2012): 89.
20. Guarinello, "Festa, trabalho e cotidiano," 972.
21. Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 547–48.

Festivities

After explaining a nonmodern view of "things," we move this discussion to the debate that has animated the field of celebration studies. While the field presents a multiplicity of perspectives, the festivity is often presented as a mediator of (apparent) societal dichotomies such as social order and disorder; containment and overflow; joy and violence; individual and collective entity; equality and inequality; self and other, and, finally, culture and nature.

This debate can start with the idea that the festivity is a specific action of society about itself that culminates in a sharing, sometimes sensory, of a collectively celebrated symbol.¹⁶ These two sea urchin festivals are united by their celebration of the same symbol, the sea urchin (a native animal that is extracted locally and transformed by hand into an edible dish). Yet they produce (and are produced by) distinct identities, triggering a series of differentiations: the manual harvesting of sea urchins using different techniques, the different sea urchin dishes, the different expressions of commensality, and even the abundance or scarcity of the species consumed at the festivities.

The festivity, as a symbolic celebration of an object, requires a collective devotion to a multiplicity of activities¹⁷ that produces diverse aesthetic festive expressions. Hence, the aesthetic elaboration also reveals many of the identities intrinsic to that collective, often invisible in everyday time. The festivity can also be considered as a language (verbal or nonverbal) that conveys messages related to collective identities, which are encoded in myths, symbols, gestures, music, dances, and food specially prepared and consumed during the festivity. Thus, communication and magic¹⁸ come together in the symbolism and effervescence of the festivity that conveys things that are never explicit outside of the festive time. The aestheticization or poetization of the human experience in society, presented in the festive phenomenon, is sometimes a way found by a specific group to insist on not following the dominant rules or to express their "other logics," invisible in everyday life.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the festive aesthetic expression is a type of language related to collective identity and, in this sense, the two sea urchin festivals are distinguished both by the aesthetic expression of their festive effervescence and by the preparation and presentation of their dishes based on the sea urchin.

As a human experience, the festivity creates a dialectic between the daily routine time and the festivity's time. For instance, the festivity becomes integrated into daily routine time, constituting itself as one of its products. Yet, the festivity seems to break with the established "normality" of the routine once the festive sociability is constituted as a suspension of ordinary time, proving that festive time crosses the barrier of everyday time. Thus, the festivity is the result of a collective action that needs to be integrated into the participants' routine; requires a special time and place; and involves affections and emotions around the celebrated thing "whose main product is symbolizing the unity of the participants" related with a certain identity.²⁰ Hence, the festivity also plays with the individual/collective relationship in which the festivity can contribute to social cohesion. In this regard, Durkheim argues that this power of cohesion exercised by the festival (with or without religious origins) is enhanced by its religious sense since the festivity has the power to bring individuals together and to create a sphere of effervescence in a connective way such as is typical of a religious state.²¹

22. Naomi Milthorpe and Eliza Murphy, "Reading the Party: Festivity as Waste in Evelyn Waugh's 1930s Fiction," *Journal of Festive Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 37, <https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2019.1.1.20>.

23. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (Paris, Hachette, 1896).

24. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1961), as cited in Milthorpe and Murphy, "Reading the Party," 38.

25. Ibid.

26. Jean Duvignaud, *Le Don du rien. Essai d'anthropologie de la fête* (Paris: Stock, 1977), 9.

27. Ibid., 26.

28. Roberto DaMatta, *Carnavais, malandros e heróis: Para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro*, 6th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1997), 177.

In festivities, this individual-collective relationship is directly related to the order-disorder theoretical debate. One side of the debate is represented by authors who believe that the festivity tends toward destructive disorder, playing a deleterious role in society and threatening the rules established in everyday social life. The other side argues that the festive disorder is an important mechanism to reestablish everyday life order, being "an opportunity for social, cultural, or political inclusion and renewal that fosters *communitas*, cultural cohesion, and the transmission of tradition and ritual."²²

Thus, the festivity can be understood as a religious or social performative experience composed of a set of codified practices that intend to act as organizers of the real for a certain group, restoring order, aiming at the smooth functioning of society. Rousseau was one of the early authors to adopt this perspective, defending the importance of the role of the festivity in this fusion of individuals, in the dissolution of their identities, in the expansion of individual consciousness, which is no longer the consciousness of oneself but a collective one, and, finally, in the rupture with the order established by the social contract of everyday life.²³ Yet, if the festivity breaks with the rules and prohibitions of everyday life, it also establishes new rules and prohibitions, as exemplified in the two sea urchin festivals that present their own rules and prohibitions. In the case of Suape, the most evident prohibition is the ban on certain types of fishing dictated by religious belief. In the case of Carry, the ban on sea urchin harvesting is established by environmental preservation laws (concerning the period and method of harvesting, and the quantity and size of the sea urchins).

In this festive role of breaking with the order established by everyday life, the festivity introduces moments of play, transgression, insolence, and freedom. According to Caillois, the festivity is mostly composed of vertigo, effervescence, and fluidity, understood inside two categories of play, such as *mimicry* or simulation, where the subject pretends to be someone else, and *ilinx* or vertigo, as games that can temporarily destabilize the lucid mind.²⁴ Thus, the pair of categories mimicry and *ilinx* "create a world that has no rules and is full of improvisation, guided only by a 'fantasy or a supreme inspiration.'"²⁵ According to Duvignaud, celebrations could be considered as "a-structural manifestations that escape (or try to escape) from all institutions."²⁶ That is, the festivity, with its a-structural characteristics, has the potential to transpose daily life's rules, social positions, and institutionalized roles, as soon as the individuals can develop the "ability to be 'something else': a person without personality,"²⁷ in an act of subversion, of freedom and spontaneity, going beyond the boundaries of everyday social life. This rupture (or inversion) of rules and prohibitions is not necessarily a denial of the status quo of society, but a stretching of the limits of the societal order so that they can be reestablished later, serving as a release of social tensions that precedes the return to routine. In this sense, the festivity can be a temporary subversion of the secular social hierarchy in a controlled experience that unsettles hierarchy or inequality.²⁸

But if the experience of tasting the sea urchin seems to be a democratizing element of the sea urchin festivals, these festivities are not exempt from power disputes, oscillating between social expansion and restraint, and being considered as a political instrument. If sometimes this takes the form of cultural language of contestation and resistance (as seen in Suape's popular protagonism and resilience), it is at other times reflected in the appropriation and

29. Jean Duvignaud, *Fêtes et civilisations* (Paris: Weber, 1973), as cited in Thierry Paquot, "Jean Duvignaud (1921–2007). Des coulisses des sociétés à une anthropologie de soi." *Hermès, La Revue* 48, (2007/2): 233, <https://doi.org/10.4267/2042/30602>.

30. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, as cited in Milthorpe and Murphy, "Reading the Party," 38.

31. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (Paris: Hachette, 1896).

32. Águas, "Celebrações rebeldes," 69.

33. "Commemorate" comes from the Latin word *commemorare*, which means "to bring to memory, to remember."

34. Olga Rodrigues de Moraes von Simpson, "Carnaval em preto e branco: comemoração e resistência étnicocultural na São Paulo do século passado," 34° *Encontro Nacional do CERU* (São Paulo: Humanitas/CERU, 2008), 39–53; and Mircea Eliade, *El mito del eterno retorno* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1972), as cited in Rita Amaral, "As mediações culturais da festa," *Revista Mediações* 3, no. 1 (January–June 1998): 13–22.

institutionalization of traditional practices (as when Carry's city hall transformed the native habit of eating sea urchin into a tourist event), (re)establishing their political, economic, and identity use. Festive environments are also an object of control and power dispute. Despite being characterized by greater popular overflow and spontaneity, the Ouriçada of Suape takes place far from urbanization on an uninhabited island that is currently the propriety of the Port of Suape, requiring caution and formal authorization for its realization, and the Oursinade of Carry takes place in the central part of an urban waterfront and is promoted by the local city hall.

Regarding the presence of modern logic in the festive phenomenon, Duvignaud argues that "perhaps the festivity suffers from the ailment that affects most of the inhabitants of this so-called modern world," as we consume the festivity instead of being consumed by it.²⁹ Caillois agrees, arguing that as soon as the collectives are touched by modernity's logic, they lose the feelings and behaviors of excess and revelry presented in their celebrations, and the "simulation and vertigo become intermittent and limited, serving only as an escape from the monotony of everyday life."³⁰ Conversely, Rousseau believes that the festivity contributes to overcoming the overvaluation of the "self," as the festivity has the power to close the gap between one individual and other, in a movement of expansion of the subject that abandons their individual interests to form a single collective voice.³¹ Thus, the festivity can allow the individual to overflow in the face of the containment of everyday life, being able to merge social gaps.

In a contemporary context, the festivity can be an answer to current modern logic, changing its festive rituals to adapt them to the actual reality.³² And, if this reality is immersed in modern and capitalist logic, it is natural that the festivities will absorb some aspects of modernity and mechanisms of the economic market. The festivity is at the threshold between tradition and modernity as it oscillates between these two worlds. Thus, modernity challenges the festivities, pressing them to subvert and reinvent themselves, adapting to survive as the sea urchin festivals that present contrasting changes far from their original identities. While the Ouriçada seems to distance itself from its religiosity and the solidary distribution of the sea urchin dish, the Oursinade had its original intimate commensality transformed into an event promoted by local management.

Despite these changes, the sea urchin festivals continue to celebrate their original identities—after all, every commemoration³³ can be understood as a return to its origins.³⁴ People from Suape maintain a spontaneous and informal way of life directly connected to local nature through their social practices and their memory. Thus, the identity of the Suape community is constituted of traditional knowledges related to the world of fishing and subsistence agriculture, which is reflected in their cultural expressions. Carry-le-Rouet was mostly composed of a fishing community until the beginning of the twentieth century and had its identity also based on traditional knowledge related to the fishing world, which has increasingly been lost due to the local urbanization process. Yet the Oursinade is one way of reviving this history and identity through the commensality of this marine species that is threatened with extinction in Carry's seawaters.

The revitalization of the collective memory and self-awareness will only take place in the transcendent encounter in which festivities play a relevant connective role. The festivity can (re) establish not only the bonds between human beings by maintaining their collective memory and

35. Georges Bataille, *Théorie de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

36. Ibid., 27.

37. Sigmund Freud, *Totem e tabu* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1974), 168.

38. John M. Lawrence, ed., *Edible Sea Urchins: Biology and Ecology*. 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 297–317.

the transmission of their intergenerational cultural heritage, but also those between humans and nonhuman entities. Inside the modernity constitution, the human being tends to turn everything that is not human into an object, justifying its free and indiscriminate use, which applies equally to festive artifacts, to sacrificed and consumed animals such as the sea urchin, and to nature in general. The festivity can be interpreted as a space-time in which the human being reintegrates, even if temporarily, into the nature from which the human has been separated since the foundation of modern society.

For Bataille,³⁵ this fusion of human life that occurs through the festivity requires a nonmodern subject-object relationship. If the sea urchin needs to become an object in human eyes in order to be consumed freely, the community needs to become the fusion between subject and object that plays with, on the one hand, the expressive expansion and unlimited freedom of the subject and, on the other hand, the containment of objects that delimited their precise objectives, such as the practical results of a sea urchin harvesting and its commensality. The festivity is, therefore, a symbolic and temporary solution to the mismatch between human beings and nature, giving only a taste of what would be the reach of the lost immanence.³⁶

If we consider that the festivity is “a permitted excess, or rather, mandatory, the solemn break of a prohibition,”³⁷ we can conclude that the festivity constitutes a spatialized time made for excessive bodily expressions, human senses, and emotions. During the festivities, the overflow of senses has the human body as its expressive territory. This space–body expansion is a nonverbal language that can be expressed in several ways, including eating the foods specially prepared for the festive event. Bodily boundaries are crossed both in food intake and in sharing, which communicates something that goes beyond the food itself.

Sea Urchin Commensality

Although many people tend to see sea urchins as an inconvenient species during leisure days on the beach because of their thorns, this species has significant economic and sociocultural value in some areas. There is evidence that the introduction of the sea urchin into the human diet began during the prehistoric period, and this eating habit once had a wide geographical breadth, having been practiced in the Pacific Ocean islands (e.g., New Ireland and New Zealand), on the American continent (e.g., the United States of America, Peru, and Chile), and in many other countries such as France, Japan, Italy, Spain, Malta, and Lebanon. Among all the places where this eating habit has been observed, Japan stands out because some historical evidence indicates that Japanese consumption of sea urchins has existed since the nineteenth century BCE, a tradition that continues today.³⁸

Analyzing the commensality practices in both festivals, we can see that they present as many similarities as contrasts. On the one hand, in France, this habit of eating sea urchins existed before the creation of the Oursinade Festival, although this does not mean that the sea urchin is part of the eating routine of the French population. On the other hand, Brazil is not among the countries that have a historical tradition of eating sea urchins; rather, the Ouriçada Festival is a peculiar exception in the daily commensality practice on the Brazilian coast. Hence, while the French Oursinade celebrates an already consolidated habit of eating sea urchin, the Brazilian Ouriçada celebrates an eating exception, which can be considered one of the main contrasts observed between these two festivities.

39. Georg Simmel, *Questões fundamentais de sociologia: indivíduo e sociedade* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Ed., 2006).

40. Nir Avieli, "At Christmas We Don't Like Pork, Just Like the MacCabees': Festive Food and Religious Identity at the Protestant Christmas Picnic in Hoi An," *Journal of Material Culture* 14, no. 2 (2009): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183509103063>.

In terms of similarities, the practice of an outdoor picnic is one of the most symbolic elements in both festivals, even if they are elaborated according to their own local cultures and identities. Whether at the tables organized by the village's public administration in Carry-le-Rouet or the makeshift structures installed along the beachside in Suape Bay, the sea urchin festivals create a specific space for hosting the visitors, allowing them to enjoy a moment of conviviality and to practice the commensality of sea urchin, seafood in general, and even other kinds of food. Thus these two festivals also evoke analysis of commensality, or food sharing, which considers the social function of the meals.

The analysis of festive phenomena such as these two festivals allows us to visualize the interactive dynamics of certain collectives, because these phenomena create a meeting point through which each individual can experience their specific way of being with, for, and against others.³⁹ The festive catharsis is used to promote the correlation between individuals, who externalize and release their inner selves and, although this may be ephemeral, form a specific oneness that gains a life of its own. Thus, this whole process makes the festive engagement an important way to satisfy the social impulse that comes from certain collectives. Only the close bond between the festivity and the forms of sociability of each social group explains the diversity and, at the same time, the uniqueness presented by these festivities' expressions within such a wide cultural universe. Through the act of eating, the commensals can express their identities as well as can practice their cultural resistance/resilience, even if they do it unconsciously. After all, it is just food, it is part of everyone's routine, and it is trivial enough to escape to social control or analysis.

In this regard, it is interesting to observe that some celebration and commensality processes easily go unnoticed by social control and analysis, even if "a large amount of money, effort and time ... [have been] invested in the preparation and consumption of the feast,"⁴⁰ as in these two festivities. In the French Oursinade, the large amount of money and time can be observed in the event production organized by the public administration of Carry-le-Rouet with the participation of the local population and the work commitment of the local sellers. The effort can be also seen in the apnea method of fishing during the winter in the freezing waters of the Mediterranean Sea. And in the Brazilian Ouriçada, it can be observed through the hard work needed to follow the local rules governing the festivity, which include harvesting the sea urchin by walking on the sandstone reef as well preparing the Ouriçada dish by roasting the sea urchins on a bonfire made from coconut palm of the Cocaia Island, all of which is done under the hot summer sun of the Brazilian northeast.

Despite its origins, the Oursinade nowadays is strongly influenced by the logic of globalization and capitalism. Over time, this familiar, traditional habit of eating sea urchins that used to take place among groups of close friends and families has passed through a historical process that has taken it beyond these intimate confines. Something similar is happening in Suape. Even though the Brazilian celebration is still strongly guided by the local fishing community's spontaneous and informal traditions and way of life, the Ouriçada's values are undergoing social change as the commercialization of its sea urchin dish replaces the communal distribution of the recent past.

41. Ibid., 219.

42. Ibid., 223.

43. "Editorial," *Journal of Material Culture* 1, no. 1 (March 1996): 5–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135918359600100101>.

44. Santos, "Comensalidade e gestão de recursos naturais na festa da Oursinade - Costa Azul francesa."

Food is a powerful artifact that carries the cultural identities as well as the interests of each specific social group. As Avieli notes, "by analyzing the dishes and eating arrangements at the picnic [we can see] how different facets of the participants' identity—the religious, the ethnic and the regional—are exposed, defined and negotiated."⁴¹ And this is the core of the explanation for such a huge difference between two festivities that celebrate the commensality of the same artifact. When the commensals of France and Brazil consume the "same" marine animal, they are consuming more than a specific food—they are consuming their own cultures, thereby reinforcing their own identities. That is why, even though these two festivities center on the sea urchin, this representation of marine wildlife is the only similar element between them, and everything else seems to differ. When the commensals eat the sea urchin (even if they do so spontaneously and in a nonreflexive way), they want to say different things about themselves. As Avieli notes:

The power of food is epitomized in the process of incorporation (literally: 'into [the] body'), in which culturally transformed edible matter crosses the borders of the body (p. 279 [citing Fischler 1988]), breaching the dichotomy between 'Outside' and 'Inside', between 'the World' and 'the Self'. No other cultural artifact penetrates our body in such an immediate, direct and intense manner. 'A man is what he eats' goes the saying, suggesting that while we eat, we become the most perfect consumers of our culture, physically internalizing its principles and values, swallowing and digesting them into our bodies.⁴²

Conclusion

We should look at the "things themselves" and when we investigate the role of the sea urchin in these two festivities, we can see the importance of their role in the "construction, maintenance and transformation of social identities"⁴³ in these two different communities placed at two distinct points on the planet: one festivity happens in the tropical waters of the South Atlantic, and the other on the Blue Coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Both communities have their roots in cultural traditions related to their fishing worlds and corresponding cosmovision. Both have their historical constitution as a community based on social production and reproduction, which, in turn, are strongly bonded with nature as materialized in the ocean and marine wildlife.

The celebration of Ouriçada on the Brazilian coast is one of the most important cultural expressions of that fishing community, and can be interpreted as an act of social resistance. Despite the social and environmental impact coming from the progress of the Industrial Port of Suape that threatens the Ouriçada, this festivity has not attracted enough attention from any media or governmental institution to become institutionalized, as occurred in France. This isolation from the media's interest can contribute to perpetuating the spontaneity and informal way of life of the local population, preserving its connection with nature and protecting its cultural expression, as the Ouriçada is made by and for their local community. On the other continent, the French Oursinade went through a historical process in which the commensality of the sea urchin, rooted in a traditional habit of local people, was institutionalized and appropriated by the local public administration.⁴⁴

There is no evidence that these two festivities were in touch at any time in the past. Yet there is no evidence of their historical disconnection, either. In times of globalization, it is almost impossible to guarantee that any artifact or idea from one festivity will never reach another. At

45. This refers only to the Ouriçada Festival of Suape, as the local population has been undergoing a process of expropriation due to the current expansion of the Suape Port structure.

present, while we cannot prove the circulation of “things” between these festivities promoted in two distinct hemispheres, we can talk about the circulation of the sea urchin festival inside the French territory. If one adult sea urchin moves slowly, this festival that originated in Carry-le-Rouet has been quickly multiplying among coastal Mediterranean villages in the last few years. And this circulation of the idea to celebrate the sea urchin is conducted by globalization’s logic and capitalist interest, considering that these festivals have no root in historical anecdote, but are mostly motivated by touristic and economic interests.

In terms of environmental impacts, we can say that the sea urchin plays a different role in each festivity. On one side, in Carry, the sea urchin can play the role of a victim of globalization’s logic as expressed by tourism and economic policies that affect the local sea urchin population. If there were plenty of sea urchins at Carry-le-Rouet’s beaches in the past, this species has been threatened with extinction in recent years. Even if other reasons help to explain this population decrease, such as the environmental impact of the Port of Marseille, it is related at least in part to this festive phenomenon, with its increasing demand for this specific article of gastronomic desire. If at Carry-le-Rouet tourism and economic interests are at the center of the celebration, Suape’s festivity is also starting to be touched by these elements. Once one of the most traditional families in the region gave up organizing the feast, the solidary and communal meal of sea urchin commensality began to be replaced by the commercialization of the sea urchin dish. On other side, the Ouriçada in Suape can be considered a conservation factor, as the consumption of sea urchin is a short-lived episode that depends on the animal’s natural preservation. The Suape region already contends with the devastating environmental impact of the Port of Suape mega-project, which is defended as an economic solution implemented by the politicians and decision-makers of Pernambuco State. Yet the project ignores the needs of the local population and of nature, advancing physically and symbolically over their territory.

In these sea urchin festivals, the environment, the local population,⁴⁵ and the festivity is being strongly impacted by other human practices based on modern logic, suffering the pressures exerted by decisions made in the political and economic spheres (within both the public and private sectors) regarding the industrial port, tourism, and even environmental policy. And, given this scenario, these victims impacted by modern thinking must be considered as subjects and they must claim their rights, urgently. According to Latour’s parliament of things or Ingold’s parliament of threads, nonmodern thought is not a court of judgment on the empire of truth, but a way of recognizing Latour’s heterogeneity of actors and Ingold’s vital processes of the world.

The material culture that these two festivities have in common is the sea urchin as a “thing” that became representative of their respective communities’ identities, even if the latter are expressed in different ways. The sea urchin festival, then, is a moment in the community’s life—a gathering at a precise time and place—that forms and (re)forms its identity, its culture, its sociability, and the connections established between humans and things, or society and nature. The sea urchin, understood as a “thing,” is one of the festive artifacts. It is also simultaneously the main festive actor, capable of transforming itself into “the thing” that mediates the relationship between these people and the other things around them. Finally, through these festivities, the sea urchin as a marine species is capable of mediating the relationship between humans, culture, and the local environment.

During these festivals, the sea urchin attracts attention and interest, and is therefore capable of creating an imagined community around itself, initiating and maintaining the phenomenon of sociability. This common desire to taste the sea urchin brings together the desire to be reconnected, physically or symbolically, with nature itself. Each individual has their own reasons for doing so, but they choose this specific marine element to form a single community, interacting with each other and enjoying this contact with nature. The festivities (as a cultural expression), focused on the commensality of the sea urchin (as natural element), are understood as nonmodern “things” that establish connections between humans and nonhuman actors, with the potential to forge performative alliances between culture and nature, finally breaking this old dichotomy socially built between them.

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