

CULTURAL VALUES & MODERNIZATION Micro-Study on Valencia

Ricardo Sanmartín

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rev_NOMA.2014.v44.n4.49294

The paper presented here is the result of fieldwork carried out in Valencia during the last 90' years, in which my aim was to understand the role of local culture in certain processes of political and economic modernization.

I visited small companies, financial institutions and cooperatives. I interviewed businessmen and employees, professional persons, politicians and trade-union experts.

In the course of our conversations a panorama emerged that was by no means strange to me, though at times it did prove surprising. Models or images returned to my memory in which some degree of understanding of the local culture had been condensed from my previous fieldwork in the area, during the 1980's or even the 70's. Nevertheless, in twenty years we had gone from Franco's Spain to that of the autonomous regions. It was no easy matter to recognise the country. A century seemed to have passed in a few years, and yet there is a resemblance between the past and the present. In the change of circumstances one may perceive similar ways of doing different things.

From this previous ethnography were derived cultural models which, as symptoms, I grouped together under the term of **personal syndrome**. In studying them I was able to underline a singular cultural preoccupation centred on the person, on the person's moral valuation, and on which, as centre of this attention, rested a tense play between categories, strategies and values such as equality, solidarity and freedom, though always maintaining their application within very limited spheres.

Ethnography of Changes.

Though from an historical viewpoint the political changes are clearly the most visible ones, nevertheless the actors stress the economic changes. While, in the informants' opinion, the political change has been superficial, the increase in material well-being has been enormous, assuming a consumer culture with great ease. Other informants consider this to be the result of the economic success of small and medium-sized businesses and of the growth in exports.

To achieve this situation the informants comment that they have suffered severe competition and a sharp reduction in profit margins. This obliged them to innovate without any aid from the central or regional governments, but on their own initiative.

In the brief history of a traditionally exporting economy, which has undergone drastic transformations at least since the 18th century, we can observe how the challenge of these successive changes, seen from the wide horizon of the

external market, has not led to responses with an equivalent dimension. Their responses are atomised, scaled down to the size of their businesses. In each case, this multiplication of small enterprises reveals the absence of large volumes of capital, and something more. If, nevertheless, the economy responds, and Valencia is situated among the Spanish regions with fastest growth, this means that there is not only an important potential of initiative, but also that the linking together of multiple small units, the conduction between them of such a varied collection of elements making up the economic current, has some special conductor *metal*, different from the power of the capital they do not possess. The sum is not equal, though its amount may be. Both the nature of the result and the process of the operation change when there are so many addends. values, attitudes and strategies, as well as the extra-economic references that make up their objectives, differ when the economy depends on small businesses. In this case there are always more decisions to be added together or coordinated, and the cultural, human factor intervening in the process leaves its mark, sets a style. By way of example one could quote the ethnography based on rural cooperatives, on financial institutions such as the local savings banks, or even the industrial districts, which have played a central, vertebrating role in many towns and areas.

Obviously, in the districts there are municipal councils and political parties. In some cases it is even possible to follow council meetings directly on local closed-circuit television. However, and even when democracy and regional autonomy have widened the citizen's political participation, the traditional prestige of the economic institutions still occupies a prevalent place in their mental structures. In comparison to local economic initiative, the informants criticise the political paralysation caused by the mutual opposition of the parties represented on the municipal councils.

The local prestige of the savings banks is largely based on the fact that they are the closest financial institutions to the client in the district, and also on their social activities which have traditionally eclipsed what could have been public services provided by a municipal council. The eternal budgetary shortages of the municipal authorities have not allowed them to compete with the role of the local financial institutions. In order to have done so they would have had to take measures as unpopular as raising taxes. It is the savings banks that created, financed or donated land and resources to build schools, residences for the elderly, libraries, secondary schools, abattoirs, professional training centres, drinking-water supplies, fertilizer warehouses, social housing or soft credits to modernise the local economy. Indeed, after the advent of democracy, with the political parties and municipal councils assuming their weakened functions with greater resources, in many cases they were seen as an straneous factor, alien to the people's interests, and forming part of a wider and more distant horizon of problems and strategies than that to which the actors were accustomed. Thus, the new political situation appears to be conditioned in these communities by programmes and resolutions adopted by the parties beyond their local areas. Centralism, whether from Madrid or from the capital of the autonomous region, implies an ambit of solidarity bursting in as insolidarity into the local community, causing confrontation between neighbours of different parties. As against this, the process of expansion by the saving banks is seen in the opposite way. The opening of branches beyond its own district, as embassies or consulates of its

identity, is seen as a widening of horizons, which from the informants' point of view does not deny the identity of the smaller segments. This leads on to a higher degree of identification with this type of institution: "For the town it is an institution that has always been governed by persons from the street, by normal clients who have a (clear) idea of what progress is. As the savings bank functions better, what will it do? It will be able to undertake more social activities". In the words of another informant, "people who have always lived in the town, when they are born are given a savings book. This happened to me with my children. This way, for them it was an institution. It matters to them more than a town council".

In the informants' opinion, the models adopted by members of political parties for their political strategies are those they already possessed in their festive and friendly associations, such as musical bands and Fallas (the principal festivity, in which hundreds of cardboard sculptures criticising public affairs are burned on the night of 19th March), using the associations to attain other aims apart from political ones, such as the search for work. In this way the parties lose their modernising capacity, and remain as mere primary associations.

Furthermore, not only is the novelty or youth of certain forms mixed or crossed with other more vintage ones, but both presuppose and point to cultural horizons of different dimensions. Economic progress, "now that does give a capacity for freedom and equality and welfare for people, which is more like opening up a range of opportunities, and there you would understand it to be modernising. This is the basic element, that the citizens themselves have freedom and equality, and that they have a life of well-being, and therefore are able to decide, having capacity for decisions or options. I think that many people pay no attention to politics".

Values.

In general terms, competition in the market and democratization, with its corollary of autonomous regions, imply a widening of economic and political horizons, within which situations are redefined. There are many more options for consumption, and possibilities for distributing time between leisure and work or between different jobs, with the greater part of agriculture being a part-time activity. There are also many more political options between which to choose, but these are seen as alternatives foreign to the group still felt as being the one to which the informants belong. Faced by such alternatives, the old, blurred republican memory proves inefficient and confused in attempting to understand them. However, being able to decide, and having to do so within a wider panorama of possibilities, represents not only a substantial increase in freedom, but also a change in the specific cultural configuration of this value as a consequence of this widening of horizons.

Values are never univocal or homogeneous entities, with an historical and cultural sense that can be presupposed simply by naming them. Neither can they be understood by considering each one in isolation, but rather in the tense interplay established between them all. In the history of our actors it is possible to appreciate subtle transformations of the value, or the tense copresence of several meanings within it. While in ethnography prior to the most recent changes, freedom was principally understood as independence, in its negative

sense in accordance with the Berlin terminology, as a space free from outside interference, within which it was possible to exercise personal differences gained in interaction between equals, nowadays there is a new emphasis on the capacity of choice and decision, which differs from and overlaps with the former. As against the concept that "we didn't want to depend on anyone. That was the ideal, not to have to depend on anyone", now the informants come to express how it is economic progress that "gives a capacity of freedom and equality and well-being to the people, which is more a range of choices... they have equality and can decide, they have a capacity of decision or of option". The former emphasis on not depending on anyone not only implied a narrower range of alternatives, but also presupposed the weight of the links of a coexistence under the moral control of the local community. The new emphasis on choice and decision occurs within a horizon where there is more from which to choose and a greater difference between the political or economic alternatives, the production of which exceeds the horizon of the local community. Furthermore, choice is no longer something that can be eluded, trusting in the acritical inertia of a known tradition. It is this that turns obscure when the informant is asked to answer in respect of the new options. And this occurs within a context where the alternatives are more than the possibilities. The actor does not forget that to choose implies renouncing. Not being able to take all the paths, which others of his equals do take, paradoxically intensifies the perception of his limitations. In its turn, the disparity of the ways now available finally produces greater diversity. His equals no longer identify themselves merely by exercising their personal differences within the family, friendship circle or neighbourhood. The old circles of equality are losing part of their identifying capacity. The new horizon, by reference to which the differences are taking on meaning, includes a qualitative component of foreignness due to its very amplitude.

The culture of the actors is characterised by a proliferation of circles of equality, and what the new situation introduces is not only a change in the type of association or forum, but also a demand that the actors should extend their horizon, and this implies a change of relations between equality and identity. The difference between family, circle of friends or neighbourhood on the one hand, and trade union, party, town council or parliament on the other, lies in the fact that while the former are circles of equality within which each actor is identified by the exercise of his personal differences, the later are circles to which one accedes not in order to gain personal identifying differences in them, but from a prior identification with certain ideological and programmatic differences, by means of casting a vote or exercising membership. Furthermore, the extension of the political and economic horizon, even when it widens the range of options and extends their scope, to the same extent it widens the context and diversifies the institutions on which one depends. Institutions or challenges the creation of which is no longer so close, and not in the hands of the actors. In this sense, the increase of *freedom as choice* occurs in a desired historical process, but it provokes a decrease in *freedom as independence*. In their turn, the circles of equality operating as frameworks of identity expand and diversify.

Solidarity, classified by the actors as "primary", now appears in contraposition to a more complex type such as that required by the organization and hierarchical

nature of political parties and trade unions. Primary solidarity is, above all, a *solidarity in the face of the others*, enveloping the entire person, from whom is demanded loyalty, coherent with the personalist model serving to identify equality, and with *negative freedom or independence*. On the other hand, the organization, hierarchical structure and discipline of political parties and trade unions make up a *solidarity for* the achievement of specific objectives, coherent with an *equality* of militancy which standardises the actors beyond the local horizon, and which requires them to choose and decide as an expression of freedom, but which does not extend to the entire person, just as it does not imply the corresponding model of equality. Solidarity and equality, in this case, affect partial and less radical aspects of the actor, constituting some of the roles (whether political or professional) into which the image of the actors is segmented in a more complex society.

The same criticism does not occur within the traditional cooperatives. The same images of values produces different results. Each village wants to maintain its agricultural cooperative, but either they create a company to channel sales so as to gain strength against the European supermarket chains, or they create second-grade cooperatives. These are cooperatives created exclusively to market 90 % of the fruit of the local or first-grade cooperatives. In this way, the *solidarity for* facing the competition of clients monopolizing demand, is achieved with greater efficiency because there is an underlying *solidarity in the face of* those same foreign buyers. One is achieved due to the other, because, moreover, it respects the identity and independence of each one of its segments (of its cooperatives, and within them, of the proprietors), while at the same time the economic interests involved continue to be in their hands and they retain a closer and more direct relationship with the known, traditional and all-enveloping image of their persons within their local context.

Tradition, Strategies and Modernity.

The great challenge of competition and the reduction in profit margins have led to the creation of these new types of organization, to innovation in agriculture through research on new varieties, and also to a change in the irrigation systems, and making part-time agriculture the general practice. One of its effects is to allow relative social stability in local communities parallel to their modernization. The modernization of agriculture, together with the actors' system of equal divisions of inheritances, allows a survival of agricultural activities without preventing a wider dedication to industry, trade and services. The actors do not lose their inherited links with their local communities, but neither do they find themselves anchored to the old rural world.

A similar widening of the horizon and maintenance of the relative autonomy of the actors may be seen in the characteristic phenomenos of the industrial district. This is a collection of villages in which small and medium-sized independent businesses proliferate, each one of which specialises in a single part of a final product (shoes, tiles or toys). The informants say that singular relationships of cooperation and rivalry develop between them. Technology, financial strategies and innovations are transmitted in a *sui generis* manner, for instance in a bar or a restaurant, wherever people meet, or through the professional persons working for several of them. Thus, their efficacy is based

on a highly intercommunicated society. Even so, though the figure resulting from the sum might prove equivalent to the volume of production and capital of a large company, the nature and structure of the phenomenon is substantially different. Here also, the appropriate response to the wider economic horizon of foreign competition, does not eliminate the relative autonomy of the different segments of this singular chain. The capital never comes together in a single pair of hands, and decision-taking is dispersed between many actors. If "the economy functions very well" it is because, "in this sense, the economy is democratic!".

To multiply the segments, and coordinate them in order to face the necessary widening of the horizon, but without eliminating the autonomy of the parts, and preserving the local framework as the horizon of their objectives, requires an intensive use of their personal resources, which eventually become efficient conductors of this economic current that is not derived from the power of capital but from the creativity of their tradition, from the use of their cultural values. Overall, these are strategies with a close family resemblance to those employed by the actors in other fields of their economic, political and trade-union activities. Even fraud against the tax authorities or the social security ends up by being coherent with the foregoing.

The proliferation of small businesses, with some being customers of others, separates responsibilities despite their links, and gives them a greater degree of flexibility than large companies. Nevertheless, the weakness of their capital and the inadequate corporate structure of many of them restricts the horizon of their possibilities. Positive and negative effects are also felt in a chain reaction. If these are some of the prices paid to maintain their negative freedom, nonetheless, they can call upon other cultural resources within their tradition to mitigate their effects in part. The attention provided by each producer to a client can be much more personal: "You embark on the same business adventure as your client, and you almost always know when a client is in difficulties. We are very close. We have a highly personal relationship with our clients; we can virtually guess what they need. Then, when they ask you for something you serve them immediately, different from the way they are served by a multinational, and in this aspect we are beating the multinationals to some extent".

The strategy is very similar to that of the local financial institutions in contrast to the policy of the large banks.

If economic activity is sustained despite the reduction in profit margins, to a large extent this is due to the submerged economy. In Valencia, electricity consumption increases every year, but there is no parallel growth in tax receipts. In the opinion of the actors, this justifies the central government investing less in Valencia than in other autonomous regions. Strangely enough, this negative perception of central government treatment, in a community with its own language, has not produced nationalist demands as strong as those in the Basque and Catalan regions. Indeed, statistically the Valencians appear to be less nationalist than the Spanish average. If we combine these political and fiscal data, the apparent result is an indirect State "investment" by way of fraud, which could be seen as an ironic use of distributive justice, but one that is perfectly coherent with the interpretation derived from the use of the models

tested here. In this way, this ironic indirect "investment" depends autonomously on each segment.

The other facet of the submerged economy is social security fraud. Given the weakness of capital, one way available to businessmen, within their limited horizon, to widen the profit margins so reduced by competition is to cut the cost of social security. On this subject, the informants spread their criticism equally on the two parts involved: both the local employers' organization and the Valencian trade unions continue to depend on decisions taken by their headquarters in Madrid. Their limited capacity for negotiation is contrasted by the informants with the rapid achievements of other historic autonomous communities, in which there is greater nationalist awareness. Here, on the other hand, they consider that personalism continues to prevail. "Here we succumb either to centralism or atomization. One or the other: either there are national labour agreements, totally remote from the world of the companies to which they apply, or there are agreements for specific companies displaying absolute insolidarity towards the rest and looking only to their own interests".

Given the atomization of solidarity and a political awareness that falls short of the horizon even of the local autonomous region, together with the preponderance of personalism and the difficulty of translating negotiating experience from the traditional economic institutions to the political and labour institutions, the self-image that Valencians offer of themselves should not surprise us. They describe their regional capital as a city swallowed up by the market gardens, where everything is unfinished, governed by a myopic petty bourgeoisie. A city that in its main festivity, the Fallas, offers a negative, mistrustful image of power as something alien, identifying the cardboard figures with politics, as though the private world was somehow less created, more natural. Their imagination rests on a cultural substratum in which the public sphere seems more precariously constituted, without meriting any presumption of innocence, and standing under a perpetual suspicion of falsehood.

Moreover, away from the trade-union world and beyond the regional capital and its festivities, the overall image of public life offered by these actors is repeated: "Valencia is not like Catalonia. There they do care, and the Basques and the Galicians, they do, but not us, and why not?. Because we have this character, and because from above nobody encourages us to be nationalists. If the autonomy is there, let's make it work!. And let us depend on ourselves". This negative view of solidarity is repeated by other informants, in terms almost worthy of Ortega, attributing it to an inheritance from the region's history rather than to a result of character: "This land of ours is very anarchic, at its base, because so many races have passed this way, so many peoples and cultures, in small, underdeveloped local communities this people of ours is an indigenous, unsociable people... we are anarchic. We are not a race! We are not a community, or a culture... and therefore, we are not a society!... We never get round to agreeing between ourselves".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BERLIN, I. (1988) "Cuatro ensayos sobre la libertad", Madrid, Alianza.

GARCÍA FERRANDO, M. (1992) "Nacionalismos incluyentes y excluyentes: la identidad nacional dual en España" en R. Sanmartín (ed): Homenaje a Carmelo Lisón. Madrid, C.I.S.

ORTEGAY GASSET, J. (1947): "En torno a Galileo", Madrid, Alianza.

SANMARTIN, R. 1982: "La Albufera y sus hombres. Un estudio de Antropología Social en Valencia", Madrid, Akal.

- (1993) "Identidad y Creación. Horizontes culturales e interpretación antropológica", Barcelona, Humanidades.

- (1993) "Igualdades desiguales: la estructura semántica del discurso político valenciano" en R.Avila y T.Calvo (comp): Identidades, Nacionalismos y Regiones. Univ. Guadalajara, México, Univ. Complutense, Madrid. pp. 263-287.

- (1993) "Modelos culturales de igualdad y estilos de vida", en T. Pérez de Guzmán Moore (Dir.): "Modos de vida: un puente entre cultura y conducta", 13 autores, 398 pp. Generalitat Valenciana, Valencia, 1993.

