

St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires An Expression of Urban Folk Tradition

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Theoretical considerations

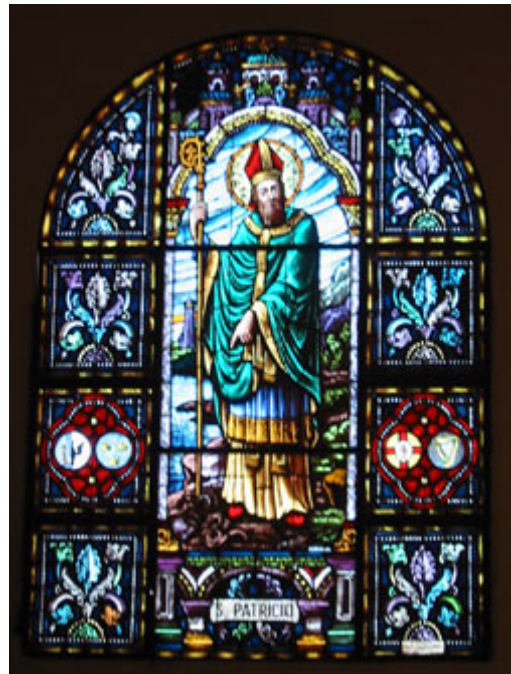
In order to study the processes of traditionalisation and inversion of traditions in the urban sphere, we take as our focal point the specific case of St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires in 2005 and its redefinition in 2006. We contextualise this event within the processes of the appropriation of public space connected to consumerism, which allow us to demonstrate the socio-cultural transformations which are currently taking place in Buenos Aires (Martín 2005), examined within the disciplinary field of folk-tradition.

We use the concept of *'performance'* as defined by Richard Bauman (1975, 1986) in the sense of a form of aesthetically marked communication, carried out in a concrete socio-historical context and before an audience that assesses its communicative effectiveness. We consider the aforementioned celebration an event of folk-tradition performance, with certain aesthetic characteristics which will be analysed in this paper. We can characterise the traditional folk message as the spontaneous expression of a group's differential identity (Bauman 1974), constructed as such by means of a contrasting comparison with other groups in a determined social context. [1] We emphasise the processual dimension of traditions (Fine 1989, Handler y Linnekin 1984), signifying a dynamic performance of the past undertaken in the present and, in this sense, we pay special attention to the 'invention' of tradition (Hobsbawn 1983), linked to the poetic reconstruction of historical subject matter (White 1988). Such a reconstruction, according to our hypothesis, relates to the act of redefining significance and symbols such as the emblematic figure of St. Patrick, in new contexts of expression.

With these theoretical bases, we compiled an archive of material relating to the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, understanding archive in the etymological sense of *arkhé* or principle of organising the past and memory (Derrida, 1997). In putting together this archive, we adopted a genetic hypertextual focus (Palleiro 2004a 2004b) which proposes a means of ordering materials capable of reflecting its own process, leaving the marks of the dynamic of construction or genesis and its itineraries of circulation visible, similar to those of a virtual hypertext, which reflect the flexible connective structure of the processes of memory construction (Assmn 1997).

Starting with this archive, we proposed an analytical route through the main points of the history and legend in the medieval tradition, the immigrant communities of the American continent and the plural convergence of identities and memories in St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires, as shown in the different areas of celebration: from religious services to street parties and Celtic festivals; the processes of the carnivalesque inversion and reversion of the canonical celebration in the street celebration; the marketing of the celebration in advertising discourse, and the comments on the event in the virtual fora of the internet. All these aspects, which we will briefly summarise in what follows, were approached in a more detailed manner in our research, which has been published.

A new contribution which we would like to outline in this paper, as a means of proposal for a diachronic study of the event in relation to the redefinition of Ireland's patron saint's day in the Argentine context, is to point out some



Stained-glass window in St. Patrick's chapel at Santa Lucía, district of San Pedro, province of Buenos Aires
(Edmundo Murray, January 2003)

of the transformations that have taken place in 2006, which correspond to the position adopted by Argentina's Irish community regarding the events of 2005.

St. Patrick: history and legend in medieval tradition

Regarding the historical existence of the saint, we can situate his birth in the year 389 into the heart of a family of Welsh origin, and his life as a slave from the age of sixteen in Ireland until his escape to Italy by ship six years later. There he was ordained a priest, later returning to Ireland to evangelise on the island. His preaching and work as a priest continued up to his death on 17 March 464. Woodeene Koenig-Bricker (1996), author of *365 Saints: Your daily guide to the wisdom and wonder of their lives*, presents the emblematic figure of St. Patrick as 'someone whose life contains as much fiction as fact'. In the same way the religious literature faces us with the problem of the crossovers between fiction and reality, as emphasised in the historiography of Hayden White (1988) in his thoughts on the 'poetics of history', and by Roland Barthes (1970) in literary theory in his studies on 'the illusion of reality'. This theme was one of the focal points of Palleiro's doctoral thesis (1993), dedicated to the study of the methods of fictionalisation of historical context in traditional narrative discourse.

The character of the saint who, in his role as paradigmatic figure, legitimises the popular celebration in its articulation between history, fiction and legend, is one of the main aspects of our research. This problem leads us to consider his links to exemplary literature, tackled by Susan Suleiman (1977), among others, in her paper 'History as example, and example as history'. For his part, the medievalist Welter (1927), in his work on exemplary literature in the Middle Ages, defines the *exemplo* as an 'account' or 'story', 'fable' or 'parable', 'anecdote' or account used to support a doctrinal, religious or moral statement. He thus emphasises the dependence of the *exemplo*, as a type of discourse, in relation to doctrinal teachings, which can also be seen in our archive in the sermons of the liturgical celebrations of St. Patrick in Buenos Aires, where the story of the saint's life is used as a pretext for preaching a doctrine. We therefore include, as part of our archive, different versions of the saint's life taken from hagiographic writings, whose most distinctive feature is the intertextual framework between a written register and oral tradition. Such texts interweave fictional elements characteristic of legendary discourse – whose defining feature is a fictional elaboration of belief (Dégh y Vászonyi 1976)- with a canonical discourse which legitimises the figure of the saint as a paradigmatic model, composed of an emblematic concentration of 'Christian virtue'. In the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires, this line of argument from exemplary literature will be taken up again in the sermons of the liturgical celebrations.



St. Patrick's church at San Antonio de Areco, province of Buenos Aires (Edmundo Murray, January 2003)

The celebration of St. Patrick in the European context and its re-traditionalisation in America

Taking the concept of the 'invention' of traditions as a starting point (Hobsbawn 1983), concerning the processes of redefining elements of the traditional culture of certain groups in different contexts, we wish to emphasise the journey of St. Patrick's Day celebrations from Europe to the American continent and its links to migratory movements. Due to spatial constraints, we will only mention the celebrations in Québec and Mexico City, by way of comparison with the celebrations in Ireland.

St. Patrick's Day grew more important outside Ireland when Irish immigrants, as a minority group, faced the problem of differentiating themselves from other European ethnic groups with whom they shared a number of customs. In this way the celebrations acquired a value as a symbol of differential identity (Bauman 1974).

This is what happened in the Québec area where the English-speaking Irish found themselves in a unique linguistic context among the predominant French-speaking population and, as speaking English naturally distanced them from the majority, they did not feel the need to use the Gaelic language as an ethnic signifier (Schmitz 1991). Within its particular religious context, their Catholicism placed them in a subordinate position in relation to the dominant Protestantism of the English and Scottish. Nevertheless, the rapid recognition of the civil rights of the Francophone French population which followed the British conquest, the presence of Irish people in different social strata and their marriage to French people, were all factors that prevented the formation of a ghetto situation in Québec. Thus, with the

passing of time, it was more and more difficult to proclaim a 'purist' ancestry among the numerous Irish, which allows us establish a certain parallel with the Irish community in Buenos Aires. Nowadays, the assimilation of the Irish has acquired a greater dynamism and St. Patrick's Day has been incorporated into the 'tradition' of urban celebrations in the city of Québec, where anyone can be 'Irish for a day'.

For its part, the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in Mexico City appears on the internet's virtual network as an 'Irish party' with a global dimension, in contrast to the deep-rooted local folk celebrations such as the Day of the Dead. The name of Ireland's patron saint is used by an Irish battalion, the St. Patrick's Battalion, as an emblem of the courage and heroism of a group of Irishmen, considered martyrs, who gave their lives for the Mexican cause during the North American invasion of 1847. In Argentina also, the saint was associated with Irishmen who took up arms and defended the nation, such as William Brown. In sum, the dynamic between local and global and the union of the patron saint of Ireland with emblems of nationality can also be seen in the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires in 2006, which is this article's main point of interest, from the point of view of the analysis of the diachronic changes in regard to the celebrations in previous years, and tackling the specificities of this historical context.

The liturgical celebration of the patron saint of Ireland in Argentina

In the context of Buenos Aires, the liturgical celebration of St. Patrick's Day is seen by its participants as a festival for the Catholic community and particularly the Irish Catholic community. This event is organised around a sequence of religious practices, and has a special place within the canonical calendar, where the saints are remembered systematically each year on the day of their death in accordance with a *canon* legitimised by the ecclesiastical institution (Le Goff 1996). This context of a religious service shares characteristics with other commemorations; among which we find the performance of a past fact in the here and now which simultaneously generates a re-elaboration of its meaning in the present. In this communicative performance, the participants consider the celebrant a symbol of the ecclesiastical institution in the role of the authorised *performer* and legitimate narrator of a story, whose clothing and intonation, and the very ornamentation of the temple favour the reception of a message which attempts to achieve the audience's support in terms of belief (Birge-Vitz 1987). This allows for a narrative composed like a sermon which, on the one hand, is similar to mythic discourse in so far as it suspends temporality (Eliade 1968) and represents the patron saint as a divine mediator (Baños Vallejo 1989), and on the other hand, emphasises the historical dimension of the saint's life as an effective tool for the celebrant to achieve an 'effect of reality' in the canonical narration. In this way, the mythical and historical anchoring of the saint's life-story acquires the paradigmatic value of an exemplary life at the service of religious doctrinal teaching which expresses the ethical precepts of the group of participants (Welter *op. cit.*).

Another of the characteristics of this event is shown in the liturgical performance in St. Patrick's church in Belgrano, where we noted the entrance of the celebrants accompanied by the Papal, Irish and Argentine flags, demonstrating the convergence of religious symbolism with emblems of ethnicity. This convergence was reflected in the allusions made by the celebrant Fr. Eugenio Lynch, in the following terms: '...thinking about the patron saint of Ireland... about when he was a child... about shamrocks... the Holy Trinity... symbols which marked my childhood... symbols of St. Patrick, of Ireland and Argentina... St. Patrick... a young man who was a slave... who left his life to be a missionary... Sometimes we lose the value... of symbols, of flags... and we are caught up in the symbols of commerce...' Also in the celebration, the figure of St. Patrick was linked to ethnic emblems as collective processes of identity construction, as set forth by the celebrant of the Church of Santa Cruz in the question: 'Did Ireland save the culture of a large part of Europe? An important question...?'

Finally, in the liturgical sermon as well as in the interviews with the different participants in the parish hall that took place at a later date, the existence of the street parties identified with media and commercial interests was mentioned. One of the participants observed that: 'We do not like the street parties very much... because the religious significance is lost', while another young woman asserted 'The street parties... as long as the idea of celebrating the saint is maintained, that's fine, but getting drunk, no...?'

The surveys carried out in the rural context of San Antonio de Areco (Province of Buenos Aires) demonstrate the same contrast between the Festival of San Antonio de Areco, closely linked to the liturgical celebrations and the Irish traditions, with the excesses attributed to the 'street' celebrations in the city of Buenos Aires. Furthermore, however, the traditional Irish contribution is emphatically linked to the local *criollista* tradition, as exemplified in the relationship established by the parish priest and Irish descendants between St. Patrick and figures like William Brown, the *gauchista* author Ricardo Güiraldes and, in the present day, the historian and journalist Pacho O'Donnell, as models of ethnic identity.

In short, these social actors, both urban and rural, refer to the figure of St. Patrick as a marker of a differential identity which concentrates religious, national and ethnic symbols in the context of a form of celebration situated in



The faithful approach a statue of St. Patrick during a Roman Catholic celebration (EPIF Photo Archive, 20 March 2005).

reduced spheres. We will now consider these festive forms and their comparison to Celtic festivals and street celebrations.

St. Patrick and the Celtic festivals

The ‘Celtic Festival of St. Patrick’ which was held on 18 March 2005 in the *Auditorio* theatre in Belgrano demonstrates the celebration of St. Patrick as a show destined for a wider audience. In this sense, the performance took the form of a Celtic music and dance show, which included Galician as well as Irish repertoires courtesy of the groups *Celtic Argentina*, *O’Connor Celtic Band*, *Na Fianna* and *El bolsón de Frodo*.

Without pausing to analyse these events, which we will leave for a future paper, it is worth mentioning how the category Celtic has opened up to include Galician as well as Irish, and the mention of the paradigmatic figure of St. Patrick in the festival’s leaflets and programmes, which note his biographical information, emphasise his role as saint, priest, missionary and Ireland’s evangelist (‘...he travelled to Ireland to carry Christ’s word’), emphasise the legendary aspects of his character (‘legend has it that... he banished the snakes from Ireland, which fled to the sea and drowned’) and the symbols associated with his figure, such as the shamrock and the Celtic cross. Such symbols gave rise to the widespread marketing of icons such as shamrocks, leprechauns, Celtic crosses, stickers of the saint, hats, T-shirts with the shamrock icon, all of which formed part of a ‘Celtic-Expo’ which happened at the same time as the festival, in which the selling of beer and typical Irish and Galician food were also a feature. It is worth highlighting in this respect that *Isenbeck* was sponsoring the event, and advertised its beer in the festival’s programme.



Ceolraidh choir at the Celtic Festival
(Auditorio de Belgrano, 11 September 2004)

In interviews carried out with two groups of young people between 20 and 22 years old and a couple aged 52 and 57 attending the festival, they claimed to be ‘followers of the Celtic vibe’. They declared that their attendance at the festival was due to their love of music and dance and the possibility of buying crafts. When asked if they had known about the figure of St. Patrick before, they responded negatively and referred back to the information received at the festival, at which his biography was read aloud by a voice ‘off-stage’. A group of young girls said that they thought it was good that the Irish community celebrated their festival and, also, that their was an element of cultural exchange; but that, to be on equal terms, ‘we Argentines should preserve and spread our traditions.’ A young musician offered a very interesting opinion: he said that he did not like the festival taking root in Argentina, because of the way in which it simplified and trivialised

Celtic culture, reducing it to ‘the little leprechauns and the little shamrock’ and used the music as an example, defining it as ‘a mix of arrangements from various musical styles, because original Irish music would not be very attractive to modern listeners’. The older couple felt that the celebration of St. Patrick’s Day in Argentina was simply a trend that would soon pass, as they all do.

In summary, in these festivals the figure of St. Patrick was a pretext in order to enjoy a music and dance show of diverse origins concentrated around the ‘Celtic’ signifier, and for merchandising characterised by this same heterogeneity, which even included the sale of traditional Argentine crafts, together with crafts advertised as ‘Irish’ and, in a much smaller number, Galician, accompanied by the sale of food and beer from the sponsorship company, with a consumption level that did not reach the excesses that marked the street celebrations.

In 2006, ‘The Great Celtic Festival of St. Patrick’ held in the *Auditorio* theatre in Belgrano, the repertoire of which comprised ‘Celtic’ music and dance performed by Argentine groups like *Celtic Argentina*, *Na Fianna*, *Shiga Draoi* and others, restricted the sale of beer during the intervals to purely ‘home-brewed’, more expensive than industrial brands like *Quilmes* or *Isenbeck*, and resulting in the reduced consumption of this alcoholic beverage by the attending public. This is a clear example of the re-appropriation of the ‘rhetoric of control’ of the previous year’s media debate which we will examine in what follows.

The street celebrations: a diverse crowd

On 17 March 2005, some streets in the Retiro area of the city of Buenos Aires were the stage for a crowded celebration organised by the group of bars and breweries and the Government of Buenos Aires, which set the scene for a *performance* with its own meaning (Parente 2006). In the past four or five years these celebrations have redefined their exclusivity in order to attract tens of thousands of people, the majority of whom have no connection to the migrant group, and who consume large quantities of beer. Using first-hand observation as a means of surveying, we noticed that the party in Retiro mainly attracted the active participation of young people, the majority from a middle-class social group, particularly office staff who work in downtown Buenos Aires and who join in the celebration after finishing work.



San Martín street in Buenos Aires, 17 March 2005

In principle, this public celebration of the Irish saint can be considered as a kind of carnival similar to the public holidays of the Middle Ages with their burlesque and grotesque demonstrations far removed from the serious tone of religious services and official parish celebrations (Bajtín 1987). In the street parties we encounter a transformation from the ideal to the material and physical plane demonstrated by the behaviour of the attendees: excess, close physical contact, the euphoric behaviour of the participants channelled through shouting and jumping, and an uninhibited vocabulary full of elements associated with the satisfaction of bodily desires such as sex and drinking alcohol. In parallel, we could note the total freedom of alcohol consumption on the streets, the lack of official regulation with regards to the ban on cars in the streets, and the appropriation by individuals, as *performers*, of public space according to their specific needs and desires. A police officer who was on duty that night went so far as to affirm in a confidential tone that ‘anything goes here’.

The particular nuances of the celebrations in Buenos Aires are linked to the form that the contemporary attendance took, and its consequent redefinition of St. Patrick’s Day, which distinguish it as much from medieval public expressions as from the contexts of liturgical celebration. If the medieval public carnivals are considered as a spectacle felt and lived as something universal, by everyone and for everyone (Bakhtin *op. cit.*), the feeling of Irish belonging, shared and exalted in the celebration, disappeared in the street carnival, and the satisfaction of the crowd, and the expression of a specific social group to which the invitation was aimed, all of which seemed only to indicate a feeling of fleeting belonging born of their very attendance at the event, where the star attraction was beer. [2]

Furthermore, one of the distinctive features of the celebrations on the streets of Buenos Aires was the radical heterogeneity of the artistic displays. Such heterogeneity was evidenced by the diversity of the mini-musical shows (*murgas*, rock music, Scottish bagpipes) related to different ethnic and social backgrounds, which may be seen as indicators of the lack of a ‘clear’ and ‘unique’ shared social identity. The distinction from liturgical celebrations, and in this case from Celtic festivals, is more obvious if we consider the scarcity of icons representative of Ireland, such as shamrocks and leprechauns, together with the relative absence of the marketing of identifying symbols of the community. In this sense, the street celebrations of St. Patrick’s Day show a multicultural and pluriethnic convergence which cohabits in Buenos Aires in a plural mosaic of identities.

In reference to the street celebrations of 2006, we find the same numerous attendance, but with a greater active police presence and barriers that officially marked the public celebration area. In this way, the intervention of local state bodies in the public festivities can be registered, in part, into the framework of policies of multiculturalism and citizenship (Canale 2006). In parallel, this state cultural policy is linked to the plea for regulation, demanded as much by the Irish community – in its claim of a distancing and usurpation of traditions – as by the residents of the area, of the ‘incidents’ which took place in 2005 and which were recontextualised by the media that year in the debate on ‘lack of safety’, as we will examine in more depth below.

St. Patrick’s Day 2006 and the rhetoric of safety

The celebrations of 2006 showed signs of the impact of an intertextual network of debates about the absence of security, [3] initiated by media campaigns sparked off by, among others, the case of the kidnap and murder of Axel Blumberg and the tragedy of the young people who died in the Buenos Aires nightclub Cromañón. The latter event, which led to the political trial and subsequent dismissal from office of the governor of Buenos Aires, Dr Aníbal Ibarra, set the scene for a debate about the city government’s safety mechanisms, which could be seen in the discursive construction of the news surrounding the St. Patrick’s Day celebrations. Thus the Buenos Aires morning edition of *Clarín* newspaper reported on the celebrations under the headline ‘St. Patrick’s Day: without incidents, but several closures’, focusing attention on the control mechanisms put into operation for the celebrations. In this way the news report stressed that ‘This time, aiming to avoid incidents, the sale of alcohol on the street was banned...’ and ‘by order of the public prosecutors... 1,100 cans [of beer]... were seized... charges were filed against 40 people ... The Security Department of the Government of Buenos Aires informed the press that it had closed ... shops... selling alcohol... and 5 bars... for ... violating the Buenos Aires law... which regulates safety in nightclubs’. The construction of a semantic field surrounding regulation and punishment for any infringement associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol which gives rise to out-of-control behaviour is evident here. The enumerative style, in which the accumulation of details relating to punishments dominate along with the mention of the security authorities, articulates this semantic field drawn around regulation, constructed from the antithesis regarding the excesses of 2005, implied in the temporal sintagma ‘This time’. The use of the typographic tool of bold lettering is also orientated towards highlighting this rhetorical effect, and also intensified by the attention given to the discourse of the image. The article includes a photograph depicting a police officer in a medium shot profile, accompanied by others, whose function, stressed in the paratext which accompanies the photograph (‘A number of police officers patrolled the streets in the traditional celebration’), is to ensure the safety of the street celebrations. All these elements contribute to the discursive construction of this ‘rhetoric of control’ which marked the celebrations of 2006.



A crowd celebrating St. Patrick's Day at Reconquista street, downtown Buenos Aires
(*Infobae.com*, 18 March 2006)



St Patrick's Day in Luján, 1912
(The *Southern Cross*, 22 March 1912)

The St. Patrick's Day celebrations according to *The Southern Cross* newspaper

In March 2006, the local newspaper *The Southern Cross*, the Irish community's means of media circulation in Argentina, summed up in the motto 'expressing our Argentine plenitude, from our Irish ancestry' published an editorial in an exhortative tone, entitled 'May St. Patrick's Day return to being an Irish festival', signed by F. O'Killian, a contributor to the newspaper. In a clearly endo-groupal positioning, tied to the 'genuine' tradition of 'the Irish blood which flows through all the descendants of far-distant Erin', the article exhorts, using the inclusive 'we' which establishes a differentiation regarding the exo-group of non-Irish, to 'clean up our image', rectifying the lack of control of the street celebrations and alcohol consumption, associating its dangers with the tragic events of Cromañón. In this way the article's author demands 'safety and regulation'

from the authorities of the Government of Buenos Aires, and closes the article by establishing a distinction between an 'authentic Irish gathering in Adrogué' which corresponds to 'the style of origin, in a safe and respectful atmosphere', and 'the other' which 'cannot continue like this'. Using the rhetorical tool of antithesis, the author requests 'responses and proposals' in order to achieve a transformation in the way it is celebrated. The context of this editorial corresponds to a front page article on 'St. Patrick's Day. The thousand ways to celebrate it', from Dublin to Boston and New York, to Munich and Tokyo, to Luján, Mercedes, Lincoln and Capilla del Señor (Province of Buenos Aires), and from the 'Solemn Mass' of the 'Patron Saint' to the 'street shows and beer' which 'are shown by the media'. This context, which also includes an agenda of celebrations subscribed to by the Federation of Irish-Argentine Societies, connects the canonical religious celebration of the 'Mass celebrated in honour of St. Patrick' to emblems of nationality like the 'tributes' to 'General Don José de San Martín' and to 'Admiral Don Guillermo Brown' and with the 'social gathering' of the Irish community in St. Brendan's College. All of these elements demonstrate the metaphorical concentration of ethnic and religious meanings around the emblematic figure of St. Patrick, united in a dynamic between endo-group and exo-group, linked to a distinction between 'genuine' and 'spurious tradition' to use Handler and Linnekin's (1984) terms. Such aspects serve as a framework for a debate on the safety and control discourse, associated with the excesses of the street celebrations, inserted into an intertextual web which gives rise to a kind of 'rhetoric demanding social regulation' into which the discourses surrounding the Cromañón catastrophe can also be placed. Our hypothesis maintains that this rhetoric produced some modifications in the forms of celebration in 2006, in relation to those we documented in 2005.

Advertising discourse on St. Patrick's Day

The impact of graphic advertising in the St. Patrick's Day street celebrations, which unite five thousand participants, is becoming more and more notorious for the dimensions it has attained in the last four years. For this reason in this section we will try to explore the dynamic which supports the celebration on the streets on the day of Ireland's patron saint. As this feast day is considered a commercial event, we will take into account the strategies of group identification used as means of persuasion which, in advertising narrative discourse, are associated with the Irish community. Broadening the concept of a commercial event, the advertising takes elements susceptible to being recognised by the wider public. These elements put forward as identifying are based on the supposed representations to which the potential audience it is directed towards relates, in this case, Irish identity. Furthermore, we understand that advertising 'campaigns' as concentrated, intensive actions, designed to achieve an objective, which not only refers to the sale of a product but, also to achieving the desired effect in a section of the population, namely the sale of a behaviour, through the use of discursive strategies (Kaplún 1997). We also highlight that a particular feature of these discourses is the homogenisation of diversity, for example, the term 'Celtic' as a signifier in the advertisements is used in different contexts with distinct meanings. The purpose of this strategy is manipulation starting with the convergence of plurality in synthetic expressions which are repeated, stripping the message of nuance and complexity so that it may be effectively appropriated by the public.



Beer advertising at a public house in Buenos Aires, 17 March 2005

In recent times, a diverse range of beer brands have been launched onto the market, like *Warsteiner*, one of the beers that achieved greatest coverage on the streets of downtown Buenos Aires in the week leading up to 2005's celebrations. This company, together with the *Guinness* brand, sponsored the beer party in what were considered the 'sweet times' of the 'dollar-peso one to one'. [4]

In the campaign that they used, *Warsteiner's* graphics stand out as the bottle of beer is taken as a religious symbol. In an iconic subversion with liturgical associations through which the product is worshipped, the religious element is subverted by worshipping alcohol. Furthermore, these graphics were displayed on the streets, especially in the 'La City' area of Buenos Aires, attempting to attract the prospective attendees (or clients) who get together to celebrate the day by drinking beer on the streets and in the pubs. Thus these advertising narratives, drawing on an important iconic foundation, based on the burlesque reversion of the saint's day, contain, in their semiotic game, another implicit narrative which is considered so popular that it can form part of 'what is not said': the saint 'is' the emblem of a community commonly associated with alcohol; and this saint 'is' beer's paradigm. This element implied by the advertisement gives rise to a game of narrative ellipsis, which sets up an intertextual breach between the canonical stories relating to the Irish community's patron saint and the narrative of alcohol, and in particular, beer. It is precisely this 'unsaid' narrative which completes and, at the same time, makes the iconic reversion possible. In summary, it is worth pointing out that the elements chosen in the advertising messages assigned to be recognised by the public are concerned with operations of the construction of Irish identity favoured by the local media. In this way an association would be produced among the public, beginning with identifying the community with beer as it is considered the element which identifies 'Irishness'.

Ireland's patron saint in the virtual nation of the internet: Identity debates and resistance

We shall now examine the idea that St. Patrick's Day appears as a key element for the debate about the redefinition of traditions in the urban context, within the virtual community that is the internet. For this reason we consider relevant the reflection of social identities starting from the recent massive updates and circulation of this celebration commented on in some webfora. We particularly refer to the high levels of attendance of this celebration in recent years; St. Patrick's Day is seen by those attending as an element of the group identification of the Irish community, which does not invalidate the attendance of people outside that community, consuming large quantities of beer, as we noted in reference to the street parties. Attendance extends to young people, whether employees or not in the downtown area, who have access to virtual communication on the internet. We highlight that the commentaries which arise in some web fora refer, [5] on the one hand, to the need to define a contrastive identity in comparison with the immigrant festivities, and on the other, to the devaluing of those who adopt customs promoted in advertising and the media. [6] In this manner, in different messages they try to establish and mark the boundaries of the

'traditional' performance of each group in the face of the complex need to institute a differential and contrastive identity highlighting the effects of recent media promotions on social conduct.

Indeed, in some virtual commentaries, through different critical references, the implied relationship of the overestimation of 'foreign' practices which entails the devaluation of the festivities of the local public, is mentioned. At the same time as, while still recognising the plurality of the communities who settled in the country, and the inter-ethnic relationships of their descendants, the search for a singular identity which distinguishes itself from other cultural units and expresses itself in social rituals continues. Moreover, the existence of a presumption regarding traditions is inferred from the commentaries on the web, given that they are seen as a set of successive and identical phenomena which should be celebrated for their perpetuation and continuity, and whose beginning dates back to an 'original' instance with mythical resonance. Thus, the ruptures, discontinuities and redefinitions of the elements of the past given in the present, as key aspects of the 'traditional' performances, are not taken into account. [7] In this way, 'importing festivities', as is debated on internet fora, corresponds to a re-traditionalisation, where the meanings assigned to the feast day have been selected from the past by advertising agencies, and adopted by the participants. Also, the axiological qualification which alludes to 'being mediocre' in this communicative context is significant. This can be understood as a means of devaluation in the face of the over-valuation of what is Saxon, which is related to an economic and cultural subordination exteriorised as much in the approval of 'foreign' customs linked to the English code, as in the participation in 'traditions' imposed by advertising and the media. [8] Finally we wish to highlight the singular absence of references to the festivities in Buenos Aires on the 'official' web-page designated for the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in Ireland, despite the fact that this celebration has been held on a grand scale for at least the last four years. [9] Therefore we can infer that the Buenos Aires celebration is still not 'visible' for the Irish community, which is paradoxical as, in Buenos Aires, people believe they are recreating the 'legitimately' Irish feast day.

The possible effects of a discursive transference

In reflection, we underline the possible divergence in some registers presented in 2006 in relation to the previous year. In effect, we have noted a discursive distancing as much in the media circulation and in the comments on some webfora, as in the sphere of the Celtic festival previously examined. In 2006 we observed that in the days leading up to St. Patrick's Day, there was little mention of this celebration in the media, and also a reduction in the advertising references to beer aimed at associating Irish identity with that product, targeted at the overwhelming majority of non-Irish people attending. Moreover, we have noted the repeated mention in publications after the event of the effectiveness of institutional regulations on those attending the celebration, through the closure of some businesses and a greater police presence. [10]

The divergence we refer to particularly takes into account the information on the front page of the capital's newspapers in 2005, [11] in which the image of bottles and rubbish after the party was notable: this news story is later expanded upon inside the publications. Yet one year later, the celebration is only referred to inside the newspaper *Clarín*. Although the high levels of attendance of the festival in the downtown area were highlighted, it was also repeatedly pointed out that 'this is the first time that the sale of alcohol in the streets was not permitted'. Similarly, the mention of a greater institutional presence at the event was disseminated in the online version of *Clarín* on the day before the party. Here it was indicated that the public area would be cordoned off to clearly outline the contrast that Parente pointed out regarding the rapid changing of boundaries in the event a year previously. Also, in some webfora the communications only make reference to getting together to 'celebrate St. Patrick's' without debating the participation of people outside the migrant community in the celebrations. We think it possible that these differences may, in part, be linked to some of the comments made by members of that community about this issue. The majority expressed their disapproval of the copious consumption of alcohol in the streets caused by this celebration, as this facilitated a unidirectional association of the saint with beer. In this way, the identification significance that the saint has for this endo-group, linked to his sainthood, is excluded.

We therefore suggest, as possible lines of inquiry for further research, on the one hand, the effective intervention which some members of this group may have in certain social institutions. This incidence may be aimed at mitigating the image perceived as negative, noting the unfavourable light in which their migrant community has been represented to the rest of society. Similarly, it reflects the role of the institutional mechanisms triggered by the demands of the residents of the area, as a consequence of the disturbances caused the previous year. It is therefore possible that protests by certain social groups offer a better opportunity for an effective and evident state presence.



St. Patrick's Day Parade, Dublin
(Embassy of Ireland in Buenos Aires)

In conclusion

We have presented here a non-exhaustive account of the convergence and dispersal of the figure of St. Patrick and his value as an emblem of group identification. We began with his function as *exemplum*, as spiritual edification, present in the different versions which refer to his life and legend. We continued by pointing out the redefinition of Irish traditions in the Canadian and Mexican context, as a migrant group expresses its contrasting and different identities in its social interactions, emphasising folk-tradition *performance* in parades and street parties. We also considered the importance of the religious element as an aspect of group cohesion within the Irish community, and the symbolic function of identification which the liturgical celebration of St. Patrick in rural and

urban contexts produces, and which enables the construction of an exo-group based on excesses and the excessive consumption of alcohol. In this sense, we noted the reversion of the emblem of the saint for that of beer, from advertising ('the young saint of parties and beer', 'the sinner saint', 'the Irish saint') to the party on the streets of downtown Buenos Aires, in which beer was linked to the plural convergence of identities and memories. Finally we examined the debate surrounding the validity of this festival in the city, which appeared on internet fora, in relation to the problem of identity construction.

In view of what has been put forward here, it can be considered that the celebration of St. Patrick's Day constitutes the emblem of cultural identification of a specific migrant group which is shown in the celebration, understood as a *performance*. As with all emblems of identity, this celebration presents elements of rupture and continuity, which favour the adhesion of other participants from outside the Irish community, who transitorily appropriate this differential identity, in the invention of tradition and redefinition of St. Patrick's Day in the city of Buenos Aires.

Ultimately, we noted the effect of a media discourse related to the problem of safety, which gives rise to the appearance of a 'rhetoric of control', and produced modifications in the way it is celebrated, especially those related to the street parties and with the consumption of alcohol associated with the emblematic figure of the saint. Such transformations, in the light of the processes of redefinition of practices and discourses we documented in dealing with the celebrations in 2005 and 2006, demonstrate the impact of context and its fluid relationship as much with the processes of physical appropriation of public space as with the symbolic appropriation of ethnic and religious emblems of identity construction.

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Notes

[1] See Fishman (2004) for an analysis of the concepts of performance and (re)traditionalisation within the framework of new perspectives on Folklore.

[2] As has been comprehensively argued by Artal (2004), it could be asked to what extent these practices are transgressive and question social hierarchies, or whether in fact they justify the *status quo*.

De esta forma, cabe preguntarse hasta qué punto estas prácticas son transgresoras y cuestionadoras de las jerarquías sociales o más bien legitimadoras del *statu quo*, como muy bien discute Artal (2004).

[3] See Delfino Kraft & Tella (2005) for a study of the discursive construction of insecurity in advertising discourse from an anthropological perspective.

[4] Although it is not the objective of this article, we refer to the social impact of economic policies established in the 1990s. One of the significant characteristics was the parity between the Argentine Peso and the US Dollar, formulaically designated as the 'one to one' (*uno a uno*), typical of Buenos Aires folklore.

[5] For reasons of spatial constraints, in this article we limit ourselves to highlighting some statements from the web forum <http://www.pcmasmas.com.ar>, which was consulted in 2005.

[6] One of the user statements demonstrates the complexity of the debate around identity and the legitimacy to participate in various celebrations: 'What bothers me is that, instead of continuing the traditions of our ancestors: [that is,] if you are a Catholic from a Catholic immigrant family, celebrate Christmas or the Virgin's Day, if are a descendant of Mapuche people, celebrate the Nguillantún, and so on. So why do some people celebrate St. Patrick's Day or Hallowe'en??? Because they are common, that's why. Because they ape people on TV, people in the First World, particularly Yankees, right? (Lo que me molesta es que, en vez de continuar con las tradiciones de nuestros antecesores: si sos católico de familia inmigrante católica festejá Navidad o el día de al Virgen, si sos descendiente de mapuches festejá el Nguillantún, etc. Pero porqué algunos festejan San Patricio o Hallowe'en??? Porque son de cuarta, por eso. Porque imitan a los de la tele, a los del primer mundo, en particular a los yanquies, Ta?)'.

[7] In experiencing tradition, the origin of cultural practices is irrelevant. Its authenticity is always defined within the context in which it takes place. According to Handler and Linnekin (1984), what is meant by 'tradition' is not its historical meaning or its essence, but rather it corresponds to a symbolic and arbitrary designation of the meaning assigned from the present.

[8] In this way, the cognitive representation of English as a universal language may be understood as a consequence of the current political hegemonic position of the United States (Nobía 2004).

[9] See: www.stpatricksday.ie/cms/stpatricksday_celebrations.html. On this website, the various parts of the world where festivals also take place are mentioned. such as Russia, Belgium, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, the Caribbean, London, etc., but not a single country in Africa, the Middle East or South America is mentioned.

[10] In an article in the newspaper *Clarín* entitled: 'San Patricio: sin incidentes pero con varias clausuras' (19 March 2006), it is emphasised that the ban on selling alcohol on the street was intended to prevent incidents. Therefore, 'by order of the municipal attorneys [...] a truck with over a thousand cans, and three other vans carrying alcoholic beverages, were confiscated.' The article also informs that five pubs for selling alcohol outside of their premises, for exceeding their capacity, or for allowing public dances without permission.

[11] This refers to the *Clarín* newspaper of Saturday, 19 March 2005; a year later, the information about this celebration was included on page 64 of *Clarín*, in the section 'La Ciudad' (18 March 2006).

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