

Save the village festa



A study revealed that as things stand, in 20 years' time village feasts will be extinct. That would sadly be the end of village communal life. Photo: Chris Sant Fournier

It's a long story, but for some reason or other I've been to a record number of village feasts this year. I happen to think that feasts are the best vantage points for people-watching, and perfect copy fodder, so not for a minute did I complain.

In my opinion, you can get bored in a sleek posh bar (I know, I've been) but you can never be bored at a feast. There's too much going on: the keenest villagers shouting praise in front of the statue; the village elders parading their best gold; the super-panty skirts worn by the village youngsters, the Very Serious faces of the band committee members as they walk, in sweltering heat in black suits, in front of the march, the girlfriends on high heels trotting by the side of their brass-band playing boyfriend; the sheer joy on people's faces as they eat candyfloss; and the district politicians – all craning their necks, standing in strategic spots so they're visible to all the villagers.

Village feasts are really all about tradition. They're a version of Christmas in summer. In fact, apart from Christmas Day, the Paola feast is the only other day in the year when I get to meet up with all my cousins, aunts and uncles.

I love the fact that when you walk to the square, you see the same people year in, year out: you see everyone growing old, going through the stages of life – which is what gives it all a sense of community.

And then there is the chance to enjoy waves of crowd euphoria. "I always get goosebumps when I see people running up the church steps with the San Gejtanu statue," said a friend of mine, who doesn't otherwise care much for feasts. "It's a moment when everyone shares the same anticipation, the vibe in the air is pulsating – and it reminds me of my childhood, so I find it very comforting," she said.

So, of course, I am in complete disagreement with Gordon Vassallo, the spiritual guide who wrote in Times of Malta saying that we are "getting stuck in tradition" because of "exterior celebrations and rituals that are void of substance" which "choke off real spiritual vitality".

He said: "Quite a few parish feasts' exterior celebrations have clearly exceeded all boundaries of modesty, serving as a hold on uneducated fanatics and pique lovers."

And he goes on to complain that our parish feasts' exterior celebrations have become nothing more than "a collage of extravagant and intentionally pompous exhibit of banners and lights, a line-up of food kiosks providing mostly unhealthy food, loud fireworks late at night..."

Yes. So? If you go to any clubbing venue you will find a collage of extravagant lighting, ferociously loud music and a line-up of bars selling mostly unhealthy alcohol.

They are all usually tell-tale signs of a party. And if you don't like this kind of partying, then stay away, but do not force others from joining.

As David Muscat said in a reply article, this has nothing to do with paganism, but it is all to do with the fact that "every healthy human being enjoys a good party. And what better way to celebrate something than to throw a party?"

Jesus himself went to parties, wrote Fr Muscat. He talked about parties and he loved parties enough to decide to provide superlative wine in quantity when it ran out at a party.

"To build a community one does not do it by locking oneself up in solitary spirituality [but] to share one's life with that of others, and this includes every aspect of human life, from the refined to the mundane, from the daily to the memorable... This is tradition, the

acknowledgement that the lives of our ancestors, and their tastes, culture and ideas, are as essential a part of the community," said Fr Muscat.

Last week a study funded by the European Commission under the Youth in Action programme revealed that as things stand, in 20 years' time village feasts will be extinct. That would sadly be the end of village communal life.

I wish people would stop being such snobs about feasts. And I also wish people would stop saying: "Oh I'm not religious, I'm spiritual." Which from what I can gather, simply means doing away with rituals.

But, alas, rituals are immensely important to human nature.

I wish people would stop being such snobs about feasts.

A friend was telling me the other day that he goes to Mass on Sunday because it is a ritual. "And for me, having some sort of ritual is important in my life. During Mass, I don't pray, I don't levitate, I don't solve my problems. I go over work issues, I do my shopping list in my mind, I think about sex, and I plan what I'll cook – but for that hour all is well with the world – because I'm sitting in my usual place in the pew, next to the usual people and everything is familiar and safe."

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J Degabriele · 11 days ago

Why the title? Does anyone have any doubt that the local festas are in no danger whatsoever of being on the way out? And anyway what most people object to in these so-called religious feasts are the exaggerations of the so-called celebrations.

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John Azzopoardi · 11 days ago

Totally Agree. the village feast is one of the best venues for maltese/gozitan families and friends to come together and have good clean fun. Those who keep talking about this form of entertainment are either jealous or anti catholic.

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Anthony Gaffiero · 11 days ago

The solution is simple. If, in 20 years time, people still want festas, these would still exist. If not, they will disappear. No government can force onto people the type of partying they like. I rather imagine that in 20 yes time we will have Facebook festas. We go the the town square, mobiles and tablets in hand and happily tap away on them, our gaze lowered and firmly on the screen which would have some picture of the patron.

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Louis Caruana · 11 days ago

village festa!!!! you mean idolatry-drugs-drunks-low foul language-prostiution on demand-adoration of invented characters-nothing to do with the father who abides in us all.....

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Henry S Pace · 11 days ago

Yes , the Village Festas consist of the Sunday Band marches and nothing more.

The survey should have been carried more comprehensively and not only the outside festivities.

The results leave much to be desired.

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peter barbara · 11 days ago

Kristina, for some reason or other (probably because you were too young) I doubt whether you can remember the Maltese festa of forty or fifty years ago. People still used to have a very good time then and enjoy the village feast with all its trimmings, the brand new suit (tal-festa), the special meal for all the family at mother's house, etc, ...and of course the fireworks.

the difference between then and now mainly is the exaggerations (drunks, drugs, unruliness, foul language) which often border on the vulgar when 'celebrating'

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Jesmond Micallef → peter barbara · 11 days ago

The village feasts have become exhibitions of extravagant overindulgence and dominant male competitiveness between the band clubs. Some behaviour may even be compared with that of football hooligans.

Consider San Girkor of Marsaxlokk, for instance, one of the most famous for those who stem from the southern region of the Malta. Nothing wrong at all with keeping such traditions going but when transformed into open air markets and so on, they lose the touch, they really do.

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Andy Bryant · 11 days ago

Well said Kristina!



Well said, Kristina!

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