

Finding the Sacred in the Profane: The Mardi Gras in Basile, Louisiana

Luc Guglielmi

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia, USA

lgugliel@kennesaw.edu

ABSTRACT

In Basile, a small community in Southwest Louisiana, there would not be any Mardi Gras without Ash Wednesday and vice-versa. Most of the people in Basile speak of Ash Wednesday when defining the Mardi Gras as there is a reciprocal spiritual relationship between Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday. The people from Basile, therefore, in giving equal spiritual value to these two feasts, assign a liturgical value to Mardi Gras because they need, and will admit this freely, to have a good Mardi Gras in order to enter into the sacred season of Lent.

Mardi Gras performs a function that is similar to the other religious feasts which have been established to break the monotony of the liturgical cycle. Folklorists who have studied Mardi Gras in Basile support the idea that it is the same people dancing, singing, eating and drinking that one finds at Mardi Gras who will kneel before the priest to receive their ashes (Ware 1994, Lindhal 1996a, Mire). The Church tolerates and/or accepts the Carnival as a necessity. By accepting the carnival within its liturgical time, the Church exerts better control over that time of the year.

Keywords: folklore, Mardi Gras, Southern, sacred, profane

Every year, in the small town of Basile, a small town community of officially 1,811 inhabitants (City-Data.com 2017), located in Southwest Louisiana and known for its rice fields and its Mardi Gras celebration, Mardi Gras (fat Tuesday) is practiced as a well-kept tradition brought over from Europe. During the yearly Advent season (the four weeks preceding Christmas), Basile community officials meet to prepare their version of the Mardi Gras celebration, which will consist of disguised men and women – called the Mardi Gras - parading in the city, asking for food and donations and kept in line by a ‘Capitaine’ as they perform for the growing American and international crowds. Unlike the famous carnivals in Rio, Venice, New Orleans or Nice, the Basile Mardi Gras is run by a group of beggars, and not givers (as throwing beads to the crowd for example) like in urban carnivals, performing for food and donations to prepare the Gumbo – a meal of chicken with smoked sausage stew eaten with rice- that will be shared with everyone in the evening. This celebration is directly linked to the Catholic faith and, thus, includes the presence of the local priest to bless the beggars in the morning Ash Wednesday Mass that follows Mardi Gras and formally opens the season of Lent. Hence, Mardi Gras would not exist without Ash Wednesday.

One of the most profound documentations of religion and God was put forth by Rudolf Otto. In his 1917 publication titled *Das Heilige* (The Sacred), Otto sought to explore the modalities of the religious experience (Eliade 8). This goes beyond a mere study of ideas about God and religion. Subsequently, the theologian was able to determine the specific characteristics as well as the content of religious experience. Otto acknowledged the existence of both the rational and irrational aspects of religion (Eliade 8; Otto 1). However, in *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto focused on the irrational and ignored the speculative and rational side. In *Das Heilige* Otto believed that the irrational religious experience is frightening. In this regard, he postulated that the irrational experience is characterized by a feeling of terror owing to its “awe-inspiring mystery,” “overwhelming superiority of power,” and “fascinating mystery” (Eliade 9). Since these experiences were occasioned by a revelation of aspects of divine power, Otto characterized them as being “numinous” (Eliade 9; Otto 5). These numinous experiences are far from being human or cosmic. Thus, it is only when confronted with them that human beings are likely to recognize their “nothingness.” It is also only then that human beings realize that they are mere creatures (Eliade 10).

Building upon Otto’s work, in his 1959 publication, Eliade (10) presented the notion of the sacred in all its complexity as opposed to solely highlighting the irrational side. In this pursuit, the scholar redefined the sacred postulating that “it is the opposite of the profane” (Eliade 10). This view is in agreement with the works of other scholars, key among them, Émile Durkheim, a renowned French sociologist, and Bronislaw Malinowski, the Polish anthropologist. Informed by this context, this article will explore the sacred-profane dichotomy in the context of Mardi Gras in Basile, Louisiana.

THE SACRED-PROFANE DICHOTOMY

According to Durkheim, religion is comprised of rites and beliefs representing certain behavioral manners and states of mind respectively (Bachika). Thus, relative to sacred things, religion should be interpreted as a unified system of practices and beliefs. In this regard, religion can only exist when the sacred is distinguishable from the profane. This notion is corroborated by Eliade who observes that “man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifest itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane (11).” This entails the manifestation of a phenomenon of a different order, or a reality that is foreign to the world through objects that are central parts of the natural or ‘profane’ world. Therefore, Durkheim posits that a key distinctive trait of religious thought is the fact that the world can be divided into two domains, one that contains the sacred, and the other that contains the profane. On the one hand, the sacred is a representation of such core group interests as unity. On the other hand, the profane entails mundane personal concerns.

Further, the sacred-profane dichotomy does not represent good and evil. This is because both the sacred and the profane can be either. In Basile, this translates into the Mardi Gras (the participants) who, while begging for food and donations, also perform mischievous actions, not only to entertain the crowd, but also to play out this dichotomy of their sacred and profane functions within their community. Mardi Gras will climb on top of trees, steal yard items, scare people in the crowd, all of which is part of their performance.

The sacred is not only ideal but also transcends everyday existence. It entails the things that are set apart by man and includes the religious rites, beliefs or duties as well as anything else that requires special religious attention and treatment (Davis). When appreciated from this perspective, almost anything can be sacred, including a tree, a rock, a god, the earth, the moon, a bird, a king, the cross, and an animal amongst other objects. Bachika feels that beliefs play a vital role in determining the things that are ultimately considered as being sacred. Further, beliefs determine the characteristics, nature, as well as the virtues of the chosen objects. Once established and recognized as sacred these objects become 'totems' or symbols of religious practices, sentiments, and beliefs. Totems are not only sacred but are also believed to bear divine properties. In this regard, eating a totemic plant or animal is often forbidden. The profane, on the other hand, pertains to the realm of routine experience. Thus, the profane also denotes the unholy or the ordinary and comprises the practices, ideas, as well as other items that are appreciated with an everyday attitude of familiarity, utility, and commonness. The profane refers to that which should not take precedence over or come into contact with the sacred. This is because the profane or the unholy is believed to 'contaminate' the sacred or the holy. Undeniably, the behavior and attitudes toward the profane are associated with strong taboos and charged with negative emotions. All things that are considered sacred are assumed to be superior and opposed to those that are profane. Bachika cites that the most sacred are the totemic plants and animals as well as the objects made from stone or wood into which figures are engraved or carved to represent the totemic plant or animal.

Halligan suggests that when bound together and used as a figure of speech, the term 'sacred and profane' highlights the defining variations between several oppositions (1). Notable among these include the godly and the diabolical or godless good and evil, the civilized and the savage or uncivilized, the black and white, and the worthwhile and the worthless, amongst others. It is the absolute definition of these differences relative to each other that ultimately divides the world into two. As a result, the sacred and the profane can be appreciated as the means through which the world, as it is experienced, is processed and interpreted. For instance, whatever is worthwhile is worthy of God's creation, and thus, considered a sacred endeavor, which is often viewed as healthy, ethically just, or moral. Conversely, that whatever profanes God's command is morally bankrupt, counter to the best intentions of all, and is a corrupting influence or enterprise. Overall, a dialectical relationship exists between the sacred and the profane, which can be described as the antithesis to each other.

The sacred, in some instances, is characterized by ambiguity. Bachika highlights public expiatory ceremonies and funeral rites in this case. Inherent in this argument is the assumption that religious forces are double in nature, comprising of both the pure and the impure. On the one hand, the forces may be beneficial. On the other hand, they may be harmful and dangerous. However, although the sacred and the profane are antagonistic to each other, in some way, they are related. In some cases, they are reversible. For instance, a totemic animal may be the most sacred being, but when eaten, it is likely to cause death. The only exception, in this case, is if the animal is consumed as part of a religious ceremony (Bachika). Likewise, while human corpses induce fear and are highly avoided, they later become objects of veneration and respect. The ambiguity of the sacred can be exemplified by numerous examples, which imply that both the pure and impure are of the same nature. One notable exemplification of the ambiguity of the sacred and the profane in the postmodern era is the carnival celebration that characterizes the Mardi Gras.

THE CASE OF THE MARDI GRAS

Based on the sacred-profane dichotomy, scholars have defined numerous types of festivals. In the social sciences, festivals cover a wide range of events, both sacred and profane. Falassi notes that evidently, religious festivals have secular implications. On the other hand, secular festivals often resort to metaphysics in a bid to gain sanction and solemnity for their events or their sponsors. Ultimately, four cardinal features characterize festive behavior. These are intensification, abstinence, reversal, and trespassing (Falassi). This is because, during festivals, participants are likely to partake in activities that they do not partake in during normal times; abstain from doing things that they usually do; invert the patterns of their daily social life; take to the behaviors that are often regulated by measure to the extreme. Notable festivals in this regard are those that feature conspicuous consumption. These festivals involve drinks and food, which are not only prepared in abundance but also in excess. These foods and drinks are also made generously available and are consumed solemnly in different forms of feasts. One of the most typical and frequent features of festivals is blessed food or traditional meals. This is because they offer an eloquent way of representing and enjoying abundance, prosperity, and fertility. Moreover, ritual food offers an avenue for communicating with the ancestors and the gods. This is exemplified by the presence of Christ in the sacred meal of communion in the Christian belief. Also bearing carnivalesque aspects, the Mardi Gras is characterized by this conspicuous type of consumption (Sexton).

According to Etzioni and Bloom holidays fulfill different societal roles. Based on their argument, the scholars distinguish between the holidays that use ceremonies, drama or narratives to enforce commitments to shared beliefs and those that are aimed at fulfilling the same role by releasing the tension that is a result of the close adherence to these beliefs. Etzioni and Bloom group the two kinds of holidays into recommitment holidays and tension management holidays, respectively. Holidays of recommitment are aimed at directly fostering societal integration and socialization. The holidays of tension management, on the other hand, indirectly foster societal integration. Subsequently, these holidays have a higher risk of going awry. During the holidays of tension management, the mores that are strictly upheld during the remainder of the year are put on hold so as to give room for indulgence. For instance, some forms of behavior that are normally considered disintegrative and asocial may be accepted temporarily. The Mardi Gras falls in this last category (Lindhal 1996a). During this festival, thousands of individuals are likely to expose themselves by showing their genitals (Benotsch). The Mardi Gras and other tension management holidays are aimed at indirectly contributing to the reinforcement of shared institutions and beliefs through the release of the tension that is caused by conformity to societal beliefs as well as the behavioral prescriptions that these beliefs entail. These holidays are bound by 'time limits' after which the participants are required to return to the conformist behaviors that reflect their shared societal beliefs. For example, the Mardi Gras is succeeded by a recommitment on Ash Wednesday.

The Mardi Gras is also referred to as 'Fat Tuesday' (Sexton 29). It is often considered a hedonistic celebration in which case 'more than usual' is the central theme. The Mardi Gras tradition is based on the need for individuals to get rid of all their fleshly desires so as to be fully present during the start of the Lenten season which takes place on the Ash Wednesday. Based on the sacred-profane dichotomy, the festival is, thus, an attempt to satiate the profane elements of peoples' lives so as to ensure that they do not miss the mystery that is associated with the Lenten season. Further, the Lenten season is aimed at preparing Christians pull through the Holy Week, which marks the death and resurrection of Christ, by helping them achieve the correct frame of mind to do so. During the Mardi Gras, participants take their secular desires to the extreme in a bid to obtain satisfaction. This is done through such experiences as drinking, music, dancing as well as various carnal activities.

FINDING THE SACRED IN THE PROFANE: MARDI GRAS IN BASILE, LOUISIANA

One of the locations where Mardi Gras is celebrated in the United States (U.S.) is Basile, a small community in Southwest Louisiana (Gaudet & McDonald; Kinser; Lindhal 1996b). Just like in other areas, there would not be any Mardi Gras in Basile without Ash Wednesday. In defining the Mardi Gras, residents of Basile associate the festival with Ash Wednesday. One of the overarching arguments is that the condition in which the residents begin the Lenten season is dependent on how well they celebrate Mardi Gras. One of the most common sayings, in this case, is that “If you run a good Mardi Gras, you will be ready for Lent.” There is a reciprocal spiritual relationship between Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday. Therefore, the residents of Basile, in giving an equal spiritual value to the two feasts, describe a liturgical value to the Mardi Gras. This is because they believe that for them to be fully ready for the Lenten season, a good Mardi Gras is requisite.

The Existence of Mardi Gras

The Mardi Gras performs a function similar to that of other religious feasts which have been established to break the monotony of the liturgical cycle. According to Pierre Delooz, a Belgian sociologist, the carnival provides an opportunity to escape from the insignificant. He further argues that the charm of the feast is that it is a parenthesis or a pause from the monotony of life. Further, the Mardi Gras can be considered a treasure that is transmitted from generation to generation, repeated each year, every fifty years, and every thousand years. The most important feature of the carnival is this aspect of continuity and the transmission between people in order for meaning to exist (Delooz).

All the folklorists that have studied the Mardi Gras in Basile support the idea that, often, it is the same people that are found dancing, singing, eating and drinking at Mardi Gras that will kneel before the priest to receive their ashes during Ash Wednesday (Ware 1995, Lindhal 1996b, Mire). For instance, according to Father Ted Broussard, a priest in the parish of Eunice, in the past, surviving the hardships of the Lenten season for forty days was only made possible by the debauchery of the Mardi Gras. This is because the festival gave a green light to what was utterly prohibited during Lent, as well as during the regular liturgical year. In support of Father Broussard, Le Roy Ladurie reckons that a Christian’s life during the Mardi Gras entails “Burying his pagan life, delivering himself to the ultimate pagan debauchery, before entering the forty days of the asceticism of Lent, through which the Christian will ultimately acknowledge at Easter his baptismal and spiritual rebirth” (159).

Mardi Gras and the Liturgy

As used by Ladurie, ‘burial,’ refers to the custom of burying pagan rites so that those rites can be Christianized. The Church tolerates and accepts the carnival as a necessity. In this regard, Michel Feuillet highlights the “integration and rejection” (17) of the carnival by the Church. The argument, in this case, is that by accepting the carnival in its liturgical time, the Church is likely to have better control over that time of the year. Nevertheless, Feuillet notes that:

This integration has some limits. The folly of the Saturnales¹, its inversions, its transgressions, the dissipations of the *Calendae janariae* and of the *lupercalia*² cannot be included in the practice of an authentic Christianity directed towards the salvation of the Soul through an ascetic existence of both the body and the soul (44).

Based on these sentiments, Feuillet is a believer of trying to group all of the Mardi Gras signs under the Christian signs. Thus, the Basile Mardi Gras celebration is not, as in Europe, as torn by the dichotomy of the body and the soul. For instance, “On any given Sunday, people are invited to go to mass. The church, being

1 Saturnales is a prechristian celebration (mainly celebrated by the Romans) between December 17 and 23 venerating Saturn (Larousse online).

2 Another roman feast between February 13 to 15 celebrating Faunus, god of the forest (Larousse online)

a place where everyone is welcome, and no matter his religion, is invited to come” (Feuillet 132). The Mardi Gras offers a similar invitation. Notably, the Mardi Gras offers two invitations. The first is an invitation to run the Mardi Gras. In this case, all community members can join the Mardi Gras group. The second is offered by the Mardi Gras group to the local population and to the owners of the houses who have agreed to participate in the Mardi Gras.

Sharing is yet another attribute that is common in both the Mardi Gras and the Catholic liturgy. Ladurie notes this same characteristic in the carnival of the Romans in France. In this regard, he asserts that:

The fraternity of the Holy Ghost is responsible for the distribution of food and money to the poor. On the other hand, as a remarkable phenomenon, it regroups the living and the dead. They came to eat at the confraternal feast: around the table laden with food for the community, where they were represented, one by one ... by the poor. And so, it is thanks to the Confraternity of the Holy Ghost that the artisans, the poor ... and the dead find a way to step into the street, fraternally joined (175).

The same observation is present in Basile. The Christians are invited to share their faith, their financial, as well as spiritual resources with the underprivileged. The notion of sharing is one of the bases of the Mardi Gras celebration (Sexton). For instance, besides sharing the knowledge of how to run the Mardi Gras between the more experienced participants and the novices, the group shares its belief and faith in the importance of keeping this tradition alive for both the present and future generations.

MARDI GRAS AND THE GUMBO

The Mardi Gras also offers another level of sharing; that of a meal, notably the gumbo, at night, after a full day's work. This is open not only to the group but also to the local community and their guests. The association uses the money gathered during the day to pay for expenses such as gas and musicians. Like the Church which shares its faith at several levels such as the parish, the diocese, and the world, the Mardi Gras shares at multiple levels. This is from the Mardi Gras group, members of the community to all the guests. This notion of sharing calls to mind the idea of the sacred meal. This sacred meal is the Eucharistic bread and wine served at Sunday mass, and the gumbo and beer served during the night of Mardi Gras. While there is no comparison between the consecration of the host and that of the gumbo, it is important to note that the gumbo of the Tuesday night before Ash Wednesday entails much more than a roux, some sausages, chicken, and rice. Rather, it should be viewed as a symbolic meal offered by the community, prepared by the community, and gathered by the community for everyone, irrespective of whether they are from the community or not(Sexton). The Mardi Gras can be viewed as a cultural, social and historical communion. This is because the majority of the participants are keen on celebrating the Mardi Gras festival in the same way that their fathers and grandfathers did.

Another external sign that is present in the two celebrations is the procession. Today, the Sunday mass begins and ends with a procession of the priest and his acolytes, preceded by the Bible which is read during mass. Performances of the medieval liturgy were much more active because the priest stopped to speak before the altar as well as in other sections of the church (Sexton). The Mardi Gras, on the other hand, is a day-long procession with a specific order. The priest is the captain as well as the shepherd of the tradition. He, thus, must lead by following the ancestral traditions. This captain is never alone. The only difference between the two celebrations is that in the Mardi Gras, the priests are a part of the procession and it is through them that all the ancestral traditions are perpetuated. The Captain, just like the priest, is necessary but not sufficient (Lindhal 1996a; Sexton). He is the leader of a symbolic as well as a religious event since the participants of the Mardi Gras consider their “courir,” or their Mardi Gras run, a necessity that is part of their religious life. No

one dares to miss the Mardi Gras, and some people have even quit their jobs in order to be there.

In each of these processions, the presence of songs is obligatory (Savoy). This is because in both cases, songs offer the necessary and obligatory ambiance for the feast. The songs provide an atmosphere in which the assembly is engulfed in the celebration. The mass presents its dogma through its songs just like the participants of the Mardi Gras represent who they are in their songs. The songs sung in the Mardi Gras do not talk about God directly, neither do they exclude Him. The songs characterize and represent the festival's participants. It is important for everyone to sing several times during the day because the songs are sung before a different audience each time. Many Christian values can be found in the Mardi Gras songs. For instance, the followers of Mardi Gras are not violent. Rather, "They are not evildoers; they are good people, who ask for charity" (Savoy 61). This charity is not for individual persons but rather is solely for collective profit. The goal of the songs in both cases is to unify the groups and put them on the path that is desired by their leaders as we can see in the Mardi Gras song:

Les Mardi Gras s'en vient de tout partout (Mardi Gras come from everywhere)
 Tout le tour autour du moyeu (from the neighborhood)
 Ça passe eine fois par an (once a year)
 Demander la charité (ask for charity)
 Quand même si c'est eine patate (even if it is just for a potato)
 Eine patate et des grattons (a potato and some meat)
 Les Mardi Gras sont d'sus un grand voyage (Mardi Gras travel from far)
 Tout le tour autour du moyeu (from the neighborhood)
 Ça passe eine fois par an (once a year)
 Demander la charité (to ask for charity)
 Quand même si c'est eine poule maigre (even if it is just for a small chicken)
 Et trois ou quatre cotons d'maï (and three or four corn hobs)
 Capitaine, Capitaine voyage ton flag (Captain, wave your flag)
 Allons chez l'aut' voisin (let's go next door)
 D'mander la charité (to ask for charity)
 Pour les'autres v'nez nous joindre (everyone, come with us)
 Pour les'autres vous v'nez nous joindre (everyone come with us)
 Ouais au gumbo ce soir (to the gumbo tonight) (Mamalisa, 2020)

Donations are inseparable from the two celebrations. Believers in the Catholic Church give a tithe (one-tenth of their income) to the Church. A similar approach exists in the Mardi Gras. In participating in the festivities, the residents of Basile give their money, goods and time in support of something that returns nothing to the individuals, but much to the community as a whole. Ladurie noted that the Romans also collected money and goods and redistributed these items to the poor. In this regard, he posits that "The craftsman's claim, which desires that riches be restored, is indicative of the phenomenon of class struggle. It also notes the carnivalesque theme of the collection, of the redistribution of goods from the adults to the young, and of goods from the rich to the needy" (Ladurie 127). Just like the Romans, the residents of Basile come together to celebrate the Mardi Gras and to help each other.

In response to the question I pose during my fieldwork of the reason for allowing the Mardi Gras to take place within his property, one Mardi Gras host argued that "I must, how else will they make the gumbo tonight" (participant, 2001)? It is not possible for a good man in the Basile community to turn his back on this tradition. Potic Russel, the president of the Mardi Gras Association, says that Basile is nothing without its Mardi Gras. Everyone in the community gives something. If there are givers, then there must also be

those who take what is given. In the Church, this function is taken care of by the priest and his congregation. Neither the participants nor the Church collect for themselves. With the money received, the needy can pay their necessary fees and give the rest back to the community. Just like the Mardi Gras Association, the local churches give what they collect back to the community. This is done in the form of small donations to charity organizations. In both the Church and the Mardi Gras Association, a small proportion of what is collected is kept for the functions of the organization. Potic Russel, the Mardi Gras President Association shares: “We (participants) all share what we get from the locals, it is part of doing this (the run) and when people give us money, we don’t keep it for us but share at the end of the day.”

Ritual clothing is another important aspect of the two celebrations (Ware 2001:). In the Church, the priest wears an alb as opposed to the costume and capuchon of the Mardi Gras. In both cases, the clothes designate the special status of the person that wears them. The priest and his acolytes must be present for the Eucharist, just as the local community must be present for the Mardi Gras. Just as the mass cannot take place without a priest, a Mardi Gras cannot exist without its captain. In both cases, a leader is needed by the groups. The colors of the costumes are also important. The priest’s alb changes color according to the seasons. White is reserved for Easter, red for Holy Week, blue for the Assumption and the month of May and green for ordinary time. The Mardi Gras has specific, vivid colors. According to Ancelet, the poor, during Mardi Gras, strive to look like the rich and this is achieved by wearing clothes with such bright colors such as red, green, violet and yellow. Just as the Church has clothes for the different ranks of officians, with the bishop wearing a miter, the Mardi Gras varies its costumes according the rank or the role of the participant. The participants generally wear a cone-shaped hat called a capuchon, fringed costumes and a mask (Roshto; Ware 1994). The captains are in regular working clothes but must wear a red cape and carry a whip as a symbol of their authority. The chief captain also possesses a red flag, which signals to the participants that the owner has given permission for them to access the property.

The liturgical signs present during mass allow individuals to speak directly to the spirit and the soul of the individual. The most important signs are those of the light, which are represented by the candle on the altar, which is a symbol of the presence of God and the guide of life. Others are the flowers, which are symbols of the feast taking place in the form of the Sunday celebration. In the Mardi Gras celebration, signs that provide a message that speaks to the soul and to the faith of those who still believe in the Mardi Gras and its carnival celebration are also present. Just as the sign of the flowers in a Church is not directly related to a divine symbol such as the candle, the signs present in the Mardi Gras celebration can be considered in the same light.

The first sign is that of the chicken that is chased during the Mardi Gras. Le Roy Ladurie highlights the symbolic elements of the chicken. He posits that

The Kingdom of Jacuemart, at the beginning, was the kingdom of the rooster. This animal was slaughtered during mutual combat with another rooster, or decapitated by the young in a contest of skill, or killed by a sling shot or by rocks thrown by children. The rooster is the most popular animal of the carnival in Europe. The rooster belongs to the carnival like the bull belongs to the Spanish culture. Filled with meaning to the top of his comb, the rooster proclaims virility, courage and male sexuality (Ladurie 72).

The Romans carnival presents many signs that were already in use in 1580. They are still in use today in Basile. The rooster or the chicken is a significant symbol in Basile. It is a symbol of a game and is also the trophy of the participant who caught it. The rooster also plays other roles. For instance, during the Mardi Gras, everyone becomes someone or something else.

Another sign is the bells that some participants wear at the end of the noses on their masks or the

fringes of their costumes. The Romans already used bells during the 16th century. It has been claimed that:

The bells on the feet evoke the bells of the medieval fool; and also the Rabelaisian theme, that of a gargantuan carnival and the wild ringing of the bells. Bells gave the time at the bell tower in the main square and at the Church; bells on the back in the Spanish festival; it is the bell turned upside down, bells on the feet of crazy Romans (Ladurie 126).

A certain level of continuity of these signs can be seen today. In many cases, one can relate the Roman practices to those in Basile. This is because the cultural tradition was not created at one time, but rather is an idea in evolution, changing from region to region, century to century, but still always remains part of the Mardi Gras. Thus, it is a genre of a traditional transmission (Ancelet).

The Mardi Gras is also a rite of purification and fecundity. In this case, “The carnival as a whole, at the level of myth, also implies an operation of fecundity for months to come” (Lindhal 22). The residents of Basile mark the importance of the Mardi Gras in relation to Lent. They argue that if the entry to Lent is not done properly, Lent will not be a success. The rituals and signs of fecundity are also seen in the Mardi Gras in Basile. Masks and costumes are external signs of sexuality in waiting. For instance, in a past Mardi Gras some participants were seen wearing false breasts on top of their costumes. Several masques had long noses with two bells attached underneath clearly representing the external male genitalia.

CONCLUSION

Religion should be appreciated as a unified system of practices and beliefs, in which case, it can only exist when the sacred is distinguishable from the profane. In reality, religion falls into the realm of the sacred while everyday life falls under the profane. The conceptual separation of the sacred and the profane can be explained by the continuity of the history of Christianity. For instance, in the 19th Century and first half of the 20th Century, minimal reforms were carried out. This indicates that the church is strongly embedded in tradition. To understand this connection, it is important to understand what society and religion are, as well as the relations between individuals in the society. Likewise, an understanding of the development and maintenance of institutions and how they change is necessary. Further, the socialization of individuals into the societal behavior and ways of behavior has to be considered. Numerous combinations of the sacred and the profane are possible within the religious frame of reference. These may range from cases of total sacredness to the coexistence and continuity of the two aspects or their opposition, or to the intensified awareness of the profane and decline in the sacred. The Mardi Gras is aimed at helping individuals to cater their fleshly desires in order to be fully ready for the Lenten season at the beginning of Ash Wednesday. However, viewed from the sacred-profane dichotomy, the event is an attempt at satiating the profane in individuals’ lives so as to ensure that they fully encounter the mystery that defines the Lent season. This also allows Christians to overcome the Lent season with the aim of ensuring that they achieve the right frame of mind so as to successfully make it through the Holy Week. In this regard, in the postmodern era, it is indisputable that the Mardi Gras and the Sunday celebration share numerous characteristics. Thus, their complementing each other in the liturgical year cannot be overemphasized.

WORKS CITED

- Ancelet, Barry Jean. “*Capitaine, Voyage ton Flag*”: *The Traditional Cajun Country Mardi Gras*, vol. 1. University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 1989.
- Ancelet, Barry Jean. “Mardi Gras and the Media: Who’s Fooling Whom?” *Southern Folklore*, vol. 46, no. 3, 1989, pp.

- Bachika, Reimon. "On the Sacred and the Profane." archives.bukkyo-u.ac.jp/rp-contents/DY/0065/DY00650L159.pdf. Accessed 7 April 2018.
- Benotsch, Eric G., et al. "Sexual Risk Behavior in Men Attending Mardi Gras Celebrations in New Orleans, Louisiana." *Journal of Community Health*, vol. 32, no. 5, 2007, pp. 343-356.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*. Stanford University Press, 1975.
- Delooz, Pierre. *Sociologie et Canonisations*. Collection Scientifique de la Faculté de Droit de l'Université de Liège. 1969.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Pantianos Classics, 1912.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, vol. 144. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959.
- Etzioni, Amitai, and Jared Bloom, eds. *We Are What We Celebrate: Understanding Holidays and Rituals*. NYU Press, 2004.
- Falassi, Alessandro. "Festival: Definition and Morphology." *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, 1987, pp. 1-10.
- Feuillet, Michel. *Lexique des Symboles Chrétiens*. PUF Que Sais-je, 2017.
- Gaudet, Marcia G., and James C. McDonald, eds. *Mardi Gras, Gumbo, and Zydeco: Readings in Louisiana Culture*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2003.
- Halligan, Benjamin. "The Sacred and Profane," 2011.
- Kinser, Samuel. *Carnival, American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Ladurie, Emmanuel Le Roy. *Carnival in Romans*. George Braziller, 1979.
- Lindahl, Carl, Maida Owens, and C. Renne. *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1997.
- Lindahl, Carl, and Carolyn Ware. *Cajun Mardi Gras Masks*. Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1997.
- Lindahl, Carl. "The Presence of the Past in the Cajun Country Mardi Gras." *Journal of Folklore Research*, 1996a, pp. 125-153.
- Lindahl, Carl. "Bakhtin's Carnival Laughter and the Cajun Country Mardi Gras." *Folklore*, vol. 107, no. 1-2, 1996b, pp. 57-70.
- Lindahl, Carl. *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales*. Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Lindahl, Carl. "Chaucer the Storyteller: Folkloric Patterns In The Canterbury Tales," 1981, pp. 5204-5204.
- Mamalisa. <https://www.mamalisa.com/?t=es&p=4754>, 2020.
- Mire, Pat. *Dance for a Chicken: The Cajun Mardi Gras*. LPB, 2008.
- Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. Vol. 14. Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Potic, Russel. Interview conducted by Luc Guglielmi, November 14, 1999.
- Mardi Gras. Interview. Conducted by Luc Guglielmi, February 16, 2000.
- Roshto, Ronnie E. "Georgie and Allen Manuel and Cajun Wire Screen Masks." *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, vol. 7, 1992, pp. 33-49.
- Savoy, Ann Allen, ed. *Cajun Music: a Reflection of a People*. Vol. 1. Bluebird Press, 1986.
- Schmidt Jochen, Schulz Heiko. *Religion und Irrationalität: Historisch-systematische Perspektiven* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2013, pp. 89-110.
- Sexton, Rocky L. "Ritualized Inebriation, Violence, and Social Control in Cajun Mardi Gras." *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2001, pp. 28-38.
- Ware, Carolyn E. "Making a Show for the People: Cajun Mardi Gras as Public Display." *Signifying Serpents and Mardi Gras Runners. Representing Identity in Selected Souths*, 2003, pp. 19-37.
- Ware, Carolyn E. "' I Read the Rules Backward": Women, Symbolic Inversion, and the Cajun Mardi Gras Run." *Southern Folklore*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1995, p. 137.

Ware, Carolyn. "Anything to Act Crazy: Cajun Women and Mardi Gras Disguise." *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 114, no. 452, 2001, pp. 225-247.

Ware, Carolyn Elizabeth. "Reading the Rules Backward: Women and the Rural Cajun Mardi Gras," 1994.

AUTHOR BIO

Luc Guglielmi is an Associate Professor of French in the Department of Foreign Languages and an Affiliate Associate Professor for the Gender and Women's Studies program in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Kennesaw State University. He also coordinates the French program for the Department of Foreign Languages. His research focuses on folklore and sexuality.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE CITATION

APA

Guglielmi, L. (2020). Finding the sacred in the profane: The Mardi Gras in Basile, Louisiana. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 7(1). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v7-issue-1/finding-the-sacred-in-the-profane/>

MLA

Guglielmi, Luc. Finding the Sacred in the Profane: The Mardi Gras in Basile, Louisiana. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020. <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v7-issue-1/finding-the-sacred-in-the-profane/>



All papers in *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike License. For details please go to: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.