

# *Es Forn* (the bakery) was 'my house' and 'my family'

for the first three years I lived in Deià, Mallorca. The house had been a local bakery for three generations. The mother of the family is still referred to as Mama Mena. Born in 1907, the same year as my mother, Magdalena was our landlady; she was a robust mother-of-four whose ample bosoms fed her two sons and worked overtime when her twin daughters were born. She set up the first central telephone system in her front parlour, and later became a butcher, made crochet *vanivas* (bedspreads) in her spare time as well as advising me on the values of drinking beer and eating lentils to improve my nursing milk, and baby-sitting my first-born child. She was one of the few women of her generation who could read and write to an advanced level. The letters she sent my daughter over the years were beautifully descriptive, full of knowledge and wisdom of life.

When I began to help Mama Mena's family pick olives she let me know that olive picking, once the main crop in many parts of Mallorca, was one of the activities which best highlighted the attitudes and role relations that were accepted for women until recently. She told me to "handle them carefully because *olives son dones*, olives are women. If the young green ones are handled too harshly they are scarred, if picked too soon they are bitter. The over-ripe ones fall to the ground without any help while the best ones, those who have remained on the tree and ripened last, need a bit of persuasion to fall...The over-ripe wrinkled black ones make the best oil but need time to mature and to be processed." People said that "young women are inexperienced (green), vulnerable, easily

offended and slow to forgive. Unmarried women who have been given too much freedom are easy catches (over-ripe and bruised), women who are still watched over by their parents need persuasion and are the most desirable and older (wrinkled) women have attained the ideal and idealised image of a trusted mother figure, a pure (now sexless) wholly beneficent woman, the backbone of society." Mama Mena certainly lived up to the older wrinkled woman image. As a 22-year-old bride recently settled in the village, I assumed I fell within the 'best ones' category!

For at least two centuries, olive harvests in the north-western mountains of Mallorca required more hands than those available in the villages. The large estates, *fincas* or *possessios*, brought in young women from the plains: Santa Maria, Sa Pobla, and Sineu; they stayed in simple houses where they could cook and sleep during the three to six months of harvests and processing of the oil. The young men of the village were soon on the paths to the *fincas* where they could meet the new *gallufas*, the name given to the migrant women. The term has many connotations, mostly derogatory. According to Alexander Miguel Novajra in *El Campo en la Cabeza* (2000), "at first no one was able (or wanted) to explain the significance... It was clear this term was never applied to their own women from their villages, valleys or to those of neighbouring mountain towns. Comments made it clear that everyone who comes from the mountain villages is different from those who come from outside. Those who used this term would probably not have been aware of its literal meaning - *ventosidad silencioso* (silent wind... flatulence)."

Despite these value judgements, the camaraderie during the collection of olives was spontaneous and humorous, as though the preoccupations of village and home life were left behind and everyone was on holiday. The gaily-coloured clothes, hats and scarves worn by the women and children presented a strong contrast to the more sombre clothing used in everyday village activities. Mama Mena, her sister Francisca (who we referred to as 'tietà' - 'auntie'), her daughters and Papa Toni were joined by other village girls from 5-15 years old who happily missed school during the olive harvest. The women and girls sang as they walked to the olive groves. In the fields the females spent their days bent over the earth collecting the olives that were knocked off the trees by the men who climbed up the twisted branches. Their work was complementary: they filled vast canastres (wooden containers) of ripe olives to be pressed into the oil which was the

mainstay of local life, used as an accompaniment for most meals, *pa amb oli*, *sopes amb oli*, *ail oli* (bread and oil, soup and oil, garlic mayonnaise, etc), for cooking, soap, and unguents. It had provided light and heat, was used medicinally on burns, infections and other skin ailments and was prescribed for stomach complaints. Olive oil was used in the church for the chrism of confirmation and for baptisms. The residue went to make soap. Oil was an exchange commodity traded for milk, flour, and wheat from the centre of the island.

Dances were organised in a local house on Saturday nights. The *gallufas* and local girls joined village men chaperoned by older women. At Sunday mass, there were warnings from the priest "to beware of carnal pleasures." Still, the mountain men pursued these women from the plains. Mama Mena's husband Papa Toni told me, with a twinkle in his eye, that during the olive harvest the priest would make sure all the young people had an opportunity to confess before they accumulated too many *pecats* (sins). Many marriages followed this seasonal 'courting'. Mama Mena made it clear that the children born to these families continue to be referred to as "having one foot in each camp." It usually took three generations of marriages to be a fully accepted as 'local'.

Married women combined dressmaking, hairdressing, working in shops or elsewhere with family duties. They were seldom acknowledged by these occupations, but rather as wives and mothers. I have been known over the years I have lived in the village as 'the wife of Bill', 'the mother of my daughters', and only by my first name 30 years later. More importance is given to the family-bound character of married women's lives.

Mama Mena was a multi-task woman. Her direct gaze, full figure and weighty presence assured completion of any task she took on. One of three sisters she was the only one to marry, the oldest having become a nun, while the younger, Tieta Francisca, lived and worked with the family. Mama Mena's role as manager of the household was her primary concern. She always encouraged Papa Toni to take major decisions while actually taking them herself! This confidence may well stem from the fact that by law Mallorquin women retain control of any property they own prior to marriage and of the right to dispose of it as they please.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a limit to the recognition of married women's qualities. All the metaphors used to describe them relate to reproduction and nurturing. Roles and expectations of women are articulated in references such as 'daughter of', 'wife of', 'mother of', 'widow of', culminating with 'Madonna' or 'Dona', terms of respect reserved for women who have fulfilled all of the above roles. Some have become godmothers, a few have been milk-mothers. Thus, Sa Teta was held in high esteem throughout her life by the children of large estate owners she had wet-nursed.

This agricultural past and its metaphors are now just stories. Today's olive crops are neglected by many families. They pick only what they want for personal use and collect mostly the dry black ones to turn into oil. However the olive trees, some over a thousand years old, continue to cover the mountainsides. They are a symbol of mountain peasant life, of its history, persistence, and stability. The trees remain, connected to the earth and forming the landscape of village life. Each area is owned and recognised by villagers as belonging to their friends and neighbours.

Perhaps this too can be seen as a metaphor for women's lives. They have survived droughts and storms, civil war and difficult times, growing older and bent in the process, but carrying on. They have seen the end of a dictatorship, the arrival of mass tourism, modern technology and mobility, experienced the changes in family dynamics, social relations and innumerable areas of local village life. From the mid 1960s many young men and women left villages to get away from agriculture and to work in service jobs in the rapidly developing tourist industry. By the late 1980s they pursued further education, professional qualifications, free choice of partners, co-habitation and late marriage. Divorce and same-sex marriages are now legal while some widows and widowers admit to having active sex lives. Today not every woman wants to be a virgin, a mother or a wife. More and more couples remain childless through choice or infertility.

But although women's roles have changed, their importance to home, family and society remains central. The Mallorcan anthem expresses the significance of women to the culture and nation: "La Balanguera fila, fila, La Balanguera filera". ("The weaver weaves and threads, the weaver goes on weaving...")

Modern Mallorcan mothers, women with multiple roles and life experience, are now economically, psychologically and socially freer than their mothers (or fathers) ever imagined. Mothers and mothers-in-law make this possible. Their retirement, state pensions, and family priorities allow them time to help their sons and daughters when they have children. They baby-sit, collect the toddlers from nursery, feed and care for young children while the parents are out working. Parental employment, global awareness, and increased incomes enhance family lives, comforts, activities and attitudes. Fortunately in Spain there is a well developed infrastructure of grandmothers, nursery schools and educational institutions which provide networks of childcare while mothers work. Mallorcan mothers and grandmothers today are the 'saints' and 'madonnas' of the twenty-first century.

Mama Mena's terraces of olive trees inherited from her father are interspersed with pines because no one goes to clear the earth around them. Her sons have died and her daughters are too busy enjoying comforts seldom imagined by Mama Mena. They don't really fancy climbing up the mountain, singing and laughing and bending over to pick up the olives. It is too expensive to employ pickers. If they want good local olive oil they can easily buy it from the *cooperativo* where those who still collect olives have them processed. Olives and the values associated with them are no longer the sole wealth of the mountains.

**JACQUELINE WALDREN**, an American anthropologist, has lived in Deià, Mallorca, for over 40 years. She is a research associate at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research on Women and a lecturer-tutor at Oxford University. Her book *Insiders and Outsiders: Paradise and Reality in Mallorca* was published in 1996 by Berghahn Books, Oxford.