Identity, Land and Power

Introduction

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Introduction

The success or failure of a household enterprise in a Pyrenean village community depended on strategic alliances between households in the villages. There was a large range of tasks needed to be carried out over the course of an agricultural year if a household was to succeed. The tasks were diverse and labour intensive. Before the advent of mechanization and the intensification of agriculture, *la mano de obra*, the number of bodies needed to carry out a myriad of tasks during the agricultural calendar was large. Family members knew their roles well in advance of commencement of work. Common or routine chores varied from such as the maintenance of access roads, preparing the fields for ploughing in spring and communal activities at harvest which brought families together. Though families could be large in the period before out migration to urban settings took place from the 1960s onwards, one must bear in mind that cycle of marriages and births and tragic accidents often presented households with a shortfall in adult male to ensure the continued success of the family enterprise. In this paper, I will examine the ways in which strategic alliances were formed between families in villages or across to other villages and reciprocal arrangements entered into which could last for generations. These relationships of mutual benefit did place demands on family heads to align themselves socially as well as economically and in the presentation (drawing on my own research) I will trace how social relationships in the two villages developed.

La Nave

Aquilue

Background to the villages

Two villages in El Serrablo area of Alto Aragon which are selected from my research are La Nave and Aquilue. Now with very reduced /skeleton populations but still as stated before with aspects of agriculture taking place. Today there are machines to ensure the tasks are done with minimum number of humans, which contrasts sharply with an earlier subsistence agricultural community dependent on significant human input. The need for large workforce in the villages was a constant feature up until relatively recently. Gradually the lure of opportunities from the emerging industrial urban centre of Sabinanigo, were too strong to ignore for men who had no likely prospects of inheriting a piece of viable land. Agricultural life always changes over time, gradually in most cases, but in this case due to the pressures of modernization on this peripheral agricultural community, change was dramatic and for some of the more remote villages, cataclysmic. Past vestiges of rural life continue in the villages of El Serrablo which have not been completely abandoned. In the case of the two Villages in question, one is now reduced to two all year round active household and a part time lived in house. Aquilue now still has 5-6 households with
yearly attendance. The subject of this paper is the success of these households in the traditional setting of the villages as they existed in the period leading up to modernization and intensification of agriculture. The dramatic change which has occurred in recent times is symbolized not just by the appearance of tractors and electricity for example, but with the disappearance of the requirement of households to produce number of children, especially male children, to ensure a flourishing agricultural enterprise.

**Natural setting/Geography**

The area is situated between 800 and 1,000 metres above sea level, in Alto Aragon, province of Huesca, from el puerto de Monrepos up to Sabinanigo. The landscape itself is surrounded by mixed Forests which have expanded on abandoned fields (colonization) and also to a lesser degree as a result of ill-judged afforestation by Confederation Hidrologica del Ebro (CHE), which bought extensive tracts, indeed in many cases whole villages with afforestation in mind. The area of study is subject to a combination of Mediterranean and continental climatic influences. Specifically the area of interest for us, Jacetano-Guarense, presents an area of humid and semi humid relief which explains the proliferation of Decidious/Semidecidious woodland and coniferous woodland and its ability to recuperate quickly. The abandonment of whole swathes of cultivated land since the 1950s has given rise to a Box-Oak association due to the peculiar eco niches that are found in the area. The use of timber for an assortment of village related activities from the felling of a single tree by each household to provide fuel for the winters, to extraction of the best selection of timber for the provision of Oak beams for construction. The productivity and the fertility of the land varied, but in the higher villages of Sobrepuesto (higher part of the district of El Serrablo) life was always hard and all the villages have all been abandoned. Today it is only the sound of animals or the occasional walkers which punctuates the silence of these lonely places. Winters are long and the area can be better described as more continental than Mediterranean, for the the moderating influences of either the Mediterranean Sea or Atlantic Ocean are quite far off. The comarca is drained by two rivers, the Rio Guarga/ Rio Gallego. Ultimately all the rivers in the Valley form part of the Ebro drainage basin. The Rio Gallego is harnessed for irrigation with various canals running off them to provide for cereal production.

**Case Studies**

The two villages which are presented for discussion here are Aquilue and La Nave.

**La Nave:**

On a strategic route way coming out of the Puerto de Monrepos located just above the crossing over the Rio Guarga. In present times la Nave is reduced to two households but in the period before the Civil War it had a number of smaller houses along the side of the main road which housed families of road workers with small parcels of land. Its church was destroyed during the Civil War as the village was located for a period on the front. The two households, La Casa de Carlos which has become the largest landowner buying up land of the smaller households who left after the civil war and La Casa Gella, which had to look outside for assistance when the head of the household had to flee to France when the Nationalist took over the area. He subsequently could not return and the family had to rely on help from another household in a village nearby, Latre. In the presentation, I will show how relations were built up and maintained between these different households. In the presentation I will demonstrate how without this support and connection, La Casa Gella may have been obliged to close.

**Aquilue:**

Situated on the edge of a small valley called Matriz, a subsidiary of the Rio gallego, at 690 m above sea level, Aquilue is placed between two hillsides. The main road coming from Sabinanigo to el Puerto de
Monrepos, divides the village in two. The village still retains a relatively active farming life and many of the houses are still occupied all year around. Evidence of a flourishing mixed farming economy can be seen by the large houses and the extensive network of “bordas” (outhouses, barns, refuges at distance from the village). In the presentation, I will elaborate on the alliances between certain houses in Aquilue (Casa Loren and Cleigo) and also how reciprocal ties /alliances between other households in nearby villages (San Vicente and Caldearenas) where were established.

Social networks/Tiones

*Los tiones*, younger sons of the family were/are the now the unsung heroes of the villages of El Serrablo, they where the active men who were expected to carry out onerous and necessary jobs. *Los tiones* were celibate members of the household and while never able to inherit any land, there was always an obligation to provide them with a roof over their heads and food on the table. The occurrence of celibate brothers who remained in the house after an elder brother assumed the headship of the house was experienced as well in the Catalan Pyrenees. In theory, it was their choice to remain in the house, but in reality the lack of opportunities or fear of the unknown, educational disadvantage etc, left them little in the way of any chance of personal or economic development in the outside world. Their celibate status was unquestioned; the right to have a management role in the running of farming activities was strictly limited. Access to economic benefits was not existent. In this comarca their role was often assigned to tending of the sheep and ensuring they had sufficient pasture and the correct timing of the movement and safe passage of the herds to and from fairs. At other times, they were engaged in the extraction of timber from Forested hillsides areas that the household or the village community had defined rights of extraction. *Tiones* were more often the main workers who were dispatched to help those other households when social obligations were called in. The activity of these men in maintaining social relationships between households will be an important part of the case studies presentation.
IDENTITY, LAND AND POWER

In a Pyrenean upland district

Dermot Deering 20 Aug 2013
Background

- Land abandonment from 1950s onwards and cultural implications
  - It is part of a larger study looking at land abandonment en El Serrablo Comarca and its social and cultural implications.
  - Changes in the human ecology of a Pyrenean region (El Serrablo) from agricultural subsistence to modernisation
  - Population densities
  - Agricultural activity
  - Other socio-economic activities
The natural setting

Two villages situated between 800 and 1000m above sea level (pre-Pyrenean).
The natural setting

• Climate and natural vegetation/woodlands

• How the abandoned land has influenced the extension of forestry. Does reforestation add to biodiversity? (Journal of environmental management, 2000)

• Institutional management of these resources
Case studies
Case studies

- The presentation will focus on two contrasting villages: Aquilue and Lanave.
- Populations shifts in the villages
- Familial and other connections between houses/alliances
- Traditional knowledge and cultural practices how the knowledge base was exercised in the social networks in the villages.
La Nave

- Smaller of the two villages
- Casa Gella and Casa Carlos
- Networking with houses outside the village
- Role of “Tiones”
- Inheritance
La Nave
La Nave
Aquilue

- Scale of village
- Alliances/communications created by Casa Loren
- Family relationships
- Trusts relationships
- Significance of connections with two outlying villages: San Vicente and Caldearenas
Aquilue
Pollarded oak trees
Typical house of the area
Gesera
Ordoves