

Sexuality, Networks, Social and Political Change in a Rural Society. Swiss Communities in the 18th and the 19th Century.

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1. Bovernier and the Entremont

a. The conflicts

In 1806 Nicolas Cavé, the parson of Bovernier, was forced to leave his parish, a small village of the Entremont, in the Swiss Canton of Valais.

Map 1

For about 10 years the relation between the political community and the parson had become more and more difficult: the local authorities contested the money due to the parish, tried to make themselves independent of the local clergy, to administrate autonomously the village school as well as the parish goods.

Similar conflicts took place at this time in other parishes of the region: in Bagnes similar conflicts with the Church had an even longer tradition. The events at the end of the 18th c. were clearly influenced by the French Revolution and by the creation of the Helvetic Republic in Switzerland in 1798, under

pressure from the French troops. In the sources we easily recognize Republican ideas about the role of the clergy, about education, culture, but also about issues of everyday culture, like dances.

What is interesting for us is the question of the social networks which shape the opposite groups and factions. In fact, several documents in the local archives make it possible to identify the members of the opposition against the parish. Nicolas Cavé himself mentioned his sharpest adversaries: they were

Fig. 2.

above all **Joseph Bourgeois**, métral of the hospice of Grand St-Bernard until 1797 and then member of the Republican municipality; and

J.-Léonard Bourgeois, President of the municipality from 1798 to 1806.

whom the parson describes as his sharpest opponents.

The sources written by Cavé mention several further local officers in conflict with him:

J.-Théodule Bourgeois, the communal Church goods manager in the years 1798-99

Jean-Alexis Michaud, mayor (Syndic) at the beginning of the conflict, 1796-97

Jean-Joseph Sarrasin, who held several communal offices;

J.-Antoine Sarrasin, mayor 1802-03

Maurice-Jh Sarrasin, 1800

Claude Florin,

J.-Joseph Florin, 1798

J.-Emmanuel, François-Joseph et J.-Etienne Michaud,

J.-Baptiste Terrettaz, members of the Republican municipality

I omitted some other individuals, because the degree of their implication in the struggle is not evident.

b. The Republican network

If we look at the kinship as well as at the godparenthood relations between these men and their families, we easily discover that they build a dense network around the mighty “métral” Joseph Bourgeois and Jean-Léonard Bourgeois. (According to our genealogies, the two men were not related, but the two groups seem to be socially and politically close.)

Figure 1: Relations between the Republican officers of Bovernier, 1792-1806

(Comment:) Not surprisingly, the spread of anticlericalism in the Republican era was connected with a dense personal network built on the base of kinship and spiritual kinship.

And did the anticlerical network we can observe in the Republican era influence the rise of anticlericalism and radicalism in 19th century Valais?

2. Republicanism and radicalism in the Entremont

a. Continuities 1789-1870: Republicanism, radicalism and 19th century anticlericalism.

We can observe in the village of Bovernier – like in other communities of this region - several conflicts between the communal elite and the local Church since the 2nd half of the 18th century. Several sources provide useful information about the composition and the development of an influential radical movement since de 1830s.

For the 19th century we can also rely on lists of members of the radical association “Young Switzerland” (*La Jeune Suisse*), mostly young men inspired by the ideas of the Italian agitator Giuseppe Mazzini, which allow an insight in the network structure of the movement.

In 1857 a petition signed by 70 men of the community urged the Bishop to withdraw the parson and his servant from Bovernier, threatening to look for a Protestant pastor if their wish for a better representative of the clergy would not be satisfied. The petition was successful and after a vacancy period Bovernier got a new parson.

Now, 70 persons represented an important share of the men living in the community - where we count 76 Households and 373 inhabitants in 1864 - but they did not represent all the families of the village. In this sense, we can distinguish the radical families from the (probably) less or not radical ones, which did not support the petition.

Comparing the sources quoted above, as a first step, we can analyse for every patronymic the “radical intensity”, in the sense of the members of the group participating in radical actions as a share of all men probably alive in 1857, at the time of the anticlerical petition. This is only an approximation, because the death dates are not always available, but it shows clearly that the radical intensity was very different according to the different groups.

Table 1. Radical intensity. Radical activists 1844 and 1857 as a share of all men with the same family name probably alive in 1857.

patronyme	signatures	Men alive *	rate			
			rate 1857	JS	rate 1844	Radicals
BOURGEOIS	11	13	84.62	2	15.38	50.00
REBORD	7	11	63.64	2	18.18	40.91
MICHAUD	10	19	52.63	2	10.53	31.58
ROUILLER	3	6	50.00	0	-	25.00
TERRETTAZ	2	4	50.00	0	-	25.00
DELY	5	12	41.67	0	-	20.83
FLORIN	8	23	34.78	7	30.43	32.61
PUIPPE	3	9	33.33	2	22.22	27.78
SARRASIN	8	25	32.00	4	16.00	24.00
GAY	2	8	25.00	0	-	12.50
CHAMBOVAY	1	4	25.00	0	-	12.50
ARLETTAZ	3	14	21.43	1	7.14	14.29
AUBERT	3	14	21.43	0	-	10.71
PELLAUD	1	7	14.29	0	-	7.14
CONTARD (Se)	1	1	100.00	0		50.00
Fournier	1	1	100.00	0		50.00
MORET	1	1	100.00	0		50.00

*MEN OLDER THAN 20 POTENTIALLY ALIVE IN 1857

These approximate data are interesting: we see, for instance, that the Bourgeois group – which played a leading role in the Republican era – is largely composed of clearly radical families, whereas in other very active radical groups, like the Florin or the Michaud, the share of radicals among all men of the group is clearly lower. In other branches, such as the Aubert group, radicalism is rather an exception.

For a closer analysis, however, we have to distinguish the different families and kin groups composing the patronymic group, as in Table 2.

Table 2. **Continuities: values**

Out of the 9 branches where we count at least 4 radical activists, 7 go back to a member of the Republican elite at the beginning of the 19th century.

Out of the first 7 radical families, only one had not an ancestor among the Republican elite. Once again, we can underscore the crucial role of the Bourgeois 1 and 2 groups, going back to Joseph and J.-Léonard Bourgeois at the beginning of the 19th century, as well as of the Michaud (1B and 1A) and Sarrasin 2, who played a leading role in the years 1796-1806. (partly the Florin 1 as well).

b. Long term continuities: 18th-19th c.

In my opinion, this genealogy-based analysis reveals interesting long-term continuities which have been neglected by historians, especially when we think of the continuities between the early modern and the modern period.

The neighbouring big community of Bagnes provides an interesting example: here anticlericalisms, in the sense of an opposition against the absolute power of the clergy, was an older phenomenon, going back to the 1740s.

Table X provides a comparison of selected branches mentioned in the main early 19th c. conflicts as well as similar data for the period between the local revolt of 1745 and the Republican era – 1798-1803.

The table shows that many liberal branches already belonged to the opposition faction against the local Lord, the Abbot of SM, during the 18th century. Although we cannot speak of a rigid determinism, late 18th century Republicanism was rooted in earlier conflicts with the local secular and clerical powers.

Evidence from Bagnes suggests that kin groups belonging to the same political milieu tended to form privileged alliance networks. For Bovernier, this analysis has still an exploratory character. We can try to analyse the network structure within the families of the young adherents to the radical “Young Switzerland” movement.

c. Radical networks

Tab X

In Table I listed the spouses of the radical activists, their maternal lines as well as the lines of the grandmothers: the colours help us to recognize the kinship ties between the young men.

We see that nearly all spouses from Bovernier originated from the same branches as the radical activists

Fig.2. The network of Young Switzerland

The Florin Group was evidently at the core of the organisation, with 7 links: it is the group going back to Claude Florin, who was involved in the conflict with the parson in 1806. – like the other central groups, especially the Micahud 1A-group.

Radical activists built a privileged political network.

3. Radicalism and sexuality

An interesting aspect of the republican era, however, is that some of the opponents of the parson had had problems with the Church before, especially because of their family and sexual lives. It was especially the case of

Joseph Bourgeois, the first leader of the opposition, as well as of

Jean-Alexis Michaud (in red). Jean-Alexis Michaud had been the protagonist of a local scandal, as he had an adulterine relation to his cousin Marie-Elisabeth Sarrasin. As we saw above, the two men belonged to the same Republican network: Michaud's godfather was J.-Léonard Bourgeois *junior*, Joseph Bourgeois' father,

As for Joseph Bourgeois himself, he had - according to a letter by the Bishops secretary - a « scandalous and dangerous discord with his wife in 1795 », because of which the Bishop allowed him to « divorce » (this is the term in the letter) temporarily from his wife. (APBo, H/3, 29.03.1795).

By the way, Joseph Bourgeois probably had an illegitimate daughter in 1776, but the identification in this case is not absolutely sure.

This conflict raises interesting questions: had the sexual and family lives of the local notables any influence upon their political positions? Did it influence their social and political networks?

a. Historiography

In the last decades the history of sexuality has become a very important domain of historical studies. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid, for instance, to the crucial relationship between sexual behaviour and social roles, political attitudes or religious orientations. The interplay between the political and the sexual sphere was often stressed on a general, macro-historical level or a cultural level – for example in George L. Mosse's *Nationalism and sexuality: respectability and abnormal sexuality in modern Europe* – but scarcely in a concrete historical context or within specific social networks.

Several studies, however, provided very interesting insights regarding the influence of politics on people's sexual behaviour: demographic inquiries by Ron Lesthaeghe or Susan Klepp highlighted for ex. the influence of political factors on contraceptive behaviour, but the relationship has not been clearly conceptualized.

From another point of view, historical network studies have rarely dealt with the sexual variable; even family and kinship studies based on systematic genealogical data and reconstructing kinship networks did not put sexuality in the centre of the analysis.

I am convinced that local studies exploiting genealogies on a local basis could shed a new light on the influence of kinship in the transmission of sexual attitudes on the one hand, and on the impact of sexual attitudes on the building of social networks on the other hand.

When dealing with sexuality in the past, we face an important methodological problem: we can obviously rely only on fragmentary information about the sexual lives of individuals in the past (and probably today as well). To interpret these data, we must make several assumptions, through a generalization of empirical observations. Prenuptial Conceptions and illegitimate children are then not interesting as such, but as a symptom revealing an underlying sexual attitude within the family and the kin group.

In fact, we can easily observe that illicit relations are concentrated in particular branches or kin groups, forming what Peter Laslett and Karla Osterveen called a "*bastardy-prone sub-society*".

b. Illegitimacy and kinship

We can approach the phenomenon by an analysis of patronymics: between 1700 and 1900 we count 95 different patronymics in the community, but only 33 (ca. 35%) of them had illegitimate children.

Considering only the 40 branches steadily dwelling in the village during the whole 19th century, we observe that 50% of all identified illegitimate parents (78) originated from only 8 kin groups: I counted the parents and not the children, in order to take account of the mothers and of the maternal lines as well.

Tab.3. Illicit parents and kin groups in Bovernier (1700-1900)

Nom	Code	ill<1800	ill XIX (parents)
Michaud	MCA/1A	0	8
Sarrasin	SAR/2	1	6
Bourgeois	BOURG/2	0	5
Arlettaz	ARL/1B	0	4
Bourgeois	BOURG/1	1	4
Sarrasin	SAR/4	0	4
Rouiller	ROU/1	0	4
Aubert	AUB/1	0	4
Michaud	MCA/1B	1	3
Terrettaz	TER/1A-1	0	3
Rebord	REB/ 1B	0	3
Bourgeois	BOURG/5	1	3
Chambovey	CHAMB/1	1	3
Michaud	MCA/1B	1	3
Rebord	REB/ 1A	0	3
Sarrasin	SAR/3	0	3
Florin	FLO/1A	0	2
Gay	GAY/1B	0	2
Gay	GAY/1A	0	2
Bourgeois	BOURG/3-3	0	1
Dely	DELY/1B	0	1
Pellaud	PLA/1A	0	1
Borio	BOR/1	0	1
Puippe	PUI/1B	0	1
Pellaud	PLA/1C	0	1
Rossier	RSI/	0	1
Arlettaz	ARL/1A	0	1
Sarrasin	SAR/1	0	1
Aubert	AUB/2	1	0

Cretton	CRE/1	0	0
Dely	DELY/1A	0	0
Florin	FLO/3	0	0
Pellaud	PLA/1B	0	0
Aubert	AUB/3	0	0
Florin	FLO/2-2	0	0
Gay	GAY/1C	0	0
Puippe	PUI/1A	0	0
Terrettaz	TER/1B	0	0
Terrettaz	TER/1C	0	0
Florin	FLO/1B	0	0
		7	78

only 40 kin groups steadily dwelling in Bovernier

This way we observe that the illicit relations are effectively concentrated in a few kin groups, revealing a particular pattern of sexual behaviour. These groups are not only marginal and poor ones – as P. Laslett and K. Osterveen suggested. The Bourgeois, the Michaud and the Sarrasin belonged to the village elite, they held important local offices; some of their members were notaries, mayors and presidents of the community.

In these cases, like in the neighbouring community of Bagnes, we can observe the transmission of specific sexual attitudes within the family, or the descent:

b. Concubine couples and dissident networks

In the 2nd half of the 19th century we observe in Bovernier a particular phenomenon: about 10 couples had several children before or out of marriage, living together in concubinate. Other man and women had several illegitimate children, (probably) with different partners.

Open concubinate is an extraordinary fact in this deeply Catholic region and represents a very strong act of dissent towards Catholic morality. It is possible that refusing marriage according to the rules of the Church was rooted in a widespread aversion against the local clergy: as I mentioned above, in 1856 the parson had to leave the village under pressure from the majority of the population.

Anticlericalism was widespread; anyway only a minority of the young couples lived together without the benediction of the Church. In this sense we can suppose that concubinate was a strong indicator for popular radicalism in the countryside.

In fact, the majority of the 9 concubinate mothers and fathers were closely related to core radical branches:

Table 4.

N	Nom de la mère/p	Cjt	dateill	dn	code f	code h
1	AUBERT, Marie Brigitte	GROSS, Francois	1879		ARL/1-7	0
2	AUBERT, Marie Joseph	MATHEY, Pierre Joseph	1842		ARL/1-6	0
3	AUBERT, Marie Joseph	CHAMBOVEY, Joseph Daniel	1875		ARL/1-7	CHAMB/1-3
5	BOURGEOIS, Marie Helene	DELY, Louis Emmanuel	1878	1856	BOURG/1-7	DELY/1-5
6	BOURGEOIS, Marie Ursule	MICHAUD, Jean Theodule	1850	1821	BOURG/3-5	MCA/1-6
8	GAY, Adeline	REBORD, Francois Joseph	1895		GAY/1AB-7	REB/1B-4
4	GAY, Marie Louise	BOURGEOIS, Louis Gaspard	1878	1855	GAY/mb	BOURG/2-6
9	PELLAUD, Marie Rosalie	ROUILLER, Etienne Valentin	1866		PLA/1-5	ROU/1A--5
10	TERRETTAZ, Valerie	SARRASIN, Jerome Louis	1887	d Et-Jh		
				MCA.1840	TER/1A-5	SAR/2-6

The case of the Aubert-Arlettaz women is particular, because the concubine mothers are all related with Thérèse Arlettaz (born 1789), who had an illicit relation with J-Joseph Aubert; Thérèse was the cousin of several 19th century radical men, but in the next generation – in the 2nd half of the century - the relations are not very close.

With all the concubinate couples, one of the parents was closely related with at least one radical activist: we can underscore the crucial role of the Bourgeois-group, which I have already highlighted as a core radical group; as well as the role of the Sarrasin/2 and of the Michaud 1 branches. These are all decidedly illegitimacy-prone radical groups.

In the list of concubinate parents we find direct descendants of the Republican leaders Joseph and Jean-Léonard Bourgeois as well as close relatives of members of Young Switzerland, like the Rebord brothers, Maurice Arlettaz or Charles Bourgeois. Concubinate fathers, or their brothers, signed the 1857 petition against the priest.

In other words, illegitimacy in these kin groups is not random; in the same families we find several cases of multiple illegitimacy, that is of women and men who had more children out of wedlock, with different or with unknown partners (so that we cannot speak of concubinate).

But there are always exceptions: not every concubinate mother or father originated from a radical family. The Pellaud group, for ex., had one concubine mother and several cases of repeated illegitimacy, but no apparent radical tradition. On the other hand, core radical groups like the Puipe

1B had no exponent among the concubinate parents – and do not manifest any general tendency towards illegitimacy – although we observe several illegitimacy cases round about the radical activists.

We can therefore conclude that concubinate couples represented the intersection between a radical and sexually tolerant milieu (Bourgeois, Michaud1, Sarrasin 2...) with other illegitimacy-prone families (Chambovey, Pellaud). The Arlettaz-Aubert women can be considered being at the border between the two milieus.

c. Radicalism and illegitimacy

Can we therefore affirm that illegitimacy was connected with the spread of radicalism and with political networks in Western Valais? Evidence from the neighbouring community of Bagnes suggests that the correlation is significant.

Tab. 5. Illicit relations and politics in 19th century Bagnes

Branch	Prenupt. Conc.	ill	IIRI	pol.	value
BSA/7	28	14	42	rad	20
DUM/6	25	11	36	rad	14
LUI/4	23	9	31	consv	
BSO/14	19	11	30		
COR/5	19	7	26	consv	
CAR/9	18	7	25	rad	6.5
FEL/37	16	3	19	rad	7
FEL/8	16	3	19	rad	11
MRE/10	13	5	18	rad	11
OIL/3	10	8	18	rad	5
VAU/10-3	13	5	18	rad	4
VAU/10-7	13	5	18	mixed	
VAU/10-2	12	5	17	mixed	
PER/4	15	1	16	rad	8
BRU/31	13	2	15	rad	6
CRE/2	9	5	14	consv	
MCO/5	13	0	13	rad	5
BSE/30	10	3	13	rad	5
BAI12	10	1	11		
BRU20	9	0	9	rad	7
ALT5	6	2	8	rad	1
BRU/4	5	3	8		
BSE/32	5	3	8		
BOV1	5	2	7	rad	10.5
TRO/5	6	0	6	rad	11

Among the 26 families with the highest number of visible illicit relations (i.e. illegitimate children and prenuptial conceptions), at least 17 are core radical families, and some otherwise are politically mixed)

The 19 groups we can consider radical are responsible for over 63% of all illegitimate births in 19th century Bagnes.

The data for Bovernier are less exhaustive, because we have not been able to exploit the prenuptial conceptions yet. But the picture we can propose is interesting.

Table. 6.

For the 40 interesting kin-groups I counted all events related to an illicit sexual relation: for every group I seized all parents of illegitimate children and counted additionally all mentions of concubinate parents and women or men who had more than one illegitimate child. We see that the relationship appears clearly:

Out of the 10 groups with the highest number of illicit relations, at least 7 can be considered core radical families. As I mentioned above, the case of the Arlettaz women is a particular one; the relation with radical elements is less close than in the other branches.

Other core radical groups, like the Florin 1A or the Sarrasin 3, have not got so many illegitimate children; but what is interesting are the red numbers, i.e. the close kinship relations between illicit parents and radical activists (up to the 2nd degree). This means that most radicals of Young Switzerland, for example, had illegitimate children in their close kin group, often even in their own families. The relation is evident in the cases of Maurice-François Sarrasin, Joseph-Antoine and Louis Rebord, Louis Bourgeois, Jean-Antoine and Valentin Michaud. The few exceptions can be explained by methodological difficulties, since the genealogy is uncertain.

Moreover, most of these families had an ancestor in the Republican elite at the end of the 18th century. This highlights the structurally central role of sexual attitudes within particular familial traditions, especially within the leading kin-groups of the Republican era, namely the Bourgeois 1 and 2, the Michaud 1 and the Sarrasin 2,

These groups seem to be the social basis of anticlericalism and political dissent throughout the late 18th and the 19th century.

The continuity between Republican, anticlerical and radical attitudes in 19th century Bovernier was largely rooted in a particular attitude toward sexuality and family in a part of the village society.

Most illegitimate births took place after 1844, that means after the period of sharp political polarization. This fact suggests that the young activists did not become radicals because of a somehow marginal situation of their families. On the contrary, a loosening of the sexual discipline went hand in hand with the radicalization of political and religious positions within the liberal-radical milieu.

4. Conclusion: Sexual Cultures and Milieus

As you see, my presentation is more concerned with the persistence or the transformation of social and political networks of the time than with the network structure. Nevertheless, I think that this partly exploratory analysis opens interesting paths of reflection.

The genealogy-based analysis underscores the crucial role of familiar cultures: it highlights, for instance, the central function of the Bourgeois or the Michaud group from the late 18th to the end of the 19th century within the Republican and radical networks.

The link between 18th century Republicanism and 19th century liberalism and radicalism seems evident. Moreover, the example of Bagnes shows that Republicanism at the end of the 18th century had even deeper roots in the conflicts fought in the precedent decades against the local Church. These continuities shed a new light on long-term political evolutions from the Ancien Régime to the 19th and sometimes up to the early 20th century which in my opinion remain largely neglected by the classical political studies.

In most families of the radical faction, the Republican, anticlerical and radical tradition was coupled with a clear tendency towards illicit sexual relations, which partly becomes visible as concubinate or as repeated illegitimacy in the second half of the 19th century. Tolerant sexual attitudes – or sexual cultures - became the common ground on which privileged political networks among anticlerical or radical families were built.

In most cases we can in fact observe a clear tendency towards endogamous political networks: most wives of young radicals are women who belong to the same radical milieu, and often to similar “bastardy-prone” groups.

In the big community of Bagnes, the families belonging to an active radical minority tended to build a privileged “milieu”, a network characterized by privileged social relations and similar social and

political values. This milieu was often connected with innovative economic activities, especially in the tourism sector.

In the smaller village of Bovernier, the radicals became the majority in the 2nd half of the 19th century, and the radical milieu represented the major part of the village. This milieu seems to have developed before 1850 around the sexually tolerant families of the Republican elite who fought against the Church at the beginning of the century.