

CONDITIONS OF EXISTENCE IN A CASTILIAN VILLAGE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY IN HISTORICAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

by

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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HOYALES:

WINE, ART, LAMB

(The expatriate
view of village
life. Drawing by
Félix San Martín,
1978.)

This is a study, in historical, geographical and political perspective, of the material conditions of life of the people of Hoyales, a minifundist agricultural community in the district of Roa, province of Burgos, region of Old Castile, as I saw them between 1975 and 1978, when traditional structures were developing a crisis at all levels of Spanish society.

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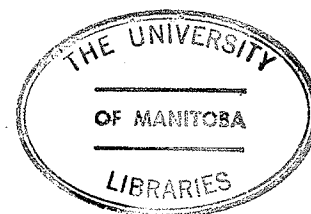
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." (Karl Marx: Preface to The Critique.)

This thesis is based on two periods of field-work totalling about one and half years, between 1975 and 1978, in a medium sized minifundist village in Old Castile, Spain. I gratefully thank my wife's parents for lodging and feeding us.

Fieldwork

In spite of what might appear to be an overly critical description of Hoyales and its inhabitants, I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in the village, and would be happy of a possibility to settle there--so long as I could earn a living some other way than farming! I do not possess the ideology required for the back-breaking work, insecure profits, and continual aggressive defense of besieged interests. In an attempt to understand these basic facts of a farmer's existence, I occasionally gave some villagers an unskilled and feeble helping hand. This sort of 'field' work is hard, but fun--for anyone not facing the prospect of having to do it every day for fifty years with never a vacation.

The experience was furthermore useful by helping break down barriers to communication, and giving me experience and interests in

common with the villagers. On the other hand, as a foreigner, my interests were not in conflict with theirs, nor was I a prying government agent. Nevertheless, Castilian villagers are very closed and suspicious people, and I was certainly not inundated with would-be informants. Curiously, I was better accepted by most villagers when I returned for a second stay in Hoyales, after sixteen months' absence.

Very few villagers understood what I was there for, or seemed to care. My thanks to those who volunteered information and help, and answered my questions. The young mayor, José-Félix, was especially kind and knowledgeable. All the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, at every level from village to provincial capital, were most correct and helpful. I apologize to all my informants for the voluminous data which is not directly used in this report, but assure them that without it I could not have strived for depth and perspective and an understanding of their culture.

Most of whatever understanding of the culture I have, however, came indirectly, by incidental participation in work and leisure, when conversation and behaviour tend to be less guarded, especially as I rarely asked direct questions or took notes in public. Residing with my in-laws, I was also lucky enough to be offered a glimpse of intimate family life, admittedly subjective; but this was of course my only opportunity to observe a generationally and sexually composite group.

As few urban professionals reside any longer in the village, I was spared over-exposure to views which have probably biased many an ethnographic study, as most members of this class have a surprising lack of understanding of rural conditions in Spain, considering many

of them are of peasant origin. This class is the most indoctrinated by the numbing dominant ideology, which is symbolized by a monstrous statue in the north of Burgos province, dedicated to The Shepherd--a cynical hoax pretending to honour the poorest class of Spaniards. The sentimental and paternalistic prose of the 'professionals' glorifying the noble peasant contrasts with their unjust criticism of so-called apathetic, traditionalist farmers (Aceves, 1974:45).

As for the peasants, though they modestly defer to their 'educated' urban relatives and have only a subjective view of their own and national cultures, they are usually not as mystified by reality. Indeed, for a country so full of myths as Spain, where only the use and abuse of power is not mystified, many peasants are amazingly cynical in their awareness of reality.

The anthropological researcher is therefore obviously going to receive wildly varying information, according to the class, education and interests of the source. Not that there is usually a deliberate intent by informants to misinform. However, the history of Spain has given any information a disproportionate value, related to power and fear. Any information which could possibly implicate an informant will always be hidden or doctored. I had difficulties finding out for instance about the Republic and the Civil War, and not necessarily because of failing memories. In Spain, The Truth is relative, or even irrelevant. Amazingly, I cannot recall many other ethnographers admitting to these difficulties in Spain, although every researcher does comment on the inadequacy of Spanish statistics: their drawback is that their compilers seem unaware of their purpose

and attempt to balance the figures as though they were account books.

I did in fact have some additional difficulties in the collection of data. Official sources were often dispersed, incomplete, and even contradicted or duplicated each other with different results. Fernando Molinero kindly helped me in this respect by allowing me to copy some of his data compiled from official sources. Dr. Michael Kenny and Dr. Oriol Pi-Sunyer gave me help with bibliographic sources, almost indispensable because of the wide variety and enormous quantity of these. This massive volume of data was actually a serious difficulty. Furthermore, in 'complex' societies, non-ethnographic literature and the press must be taken into consideration.

As for the reticence of most villagers to impart all sorts of information, this is of course understandable. But on the innumerable occasions when I was allowed to participate in unguarded conversations, I must admit to not always understanding the villagers' frames of reference. Their conversations often assume an intimate knowledge of the territory and its inhabitants: over 500 persons, 100 houses and 5000 fields. Although embarrassingly descriptive nicknames are common, an individual is invariably described in terms of his property, usually his residence, and his kinship. This makes good sense within the village framework, as the household unit actually is the nuclear family with its productive property, or at least was so in traditional society.

But the village was too large for me as a newcomer suddenly to absorb all this knowledge by which every individual is classified. Though the great majority of villagers are agriculturalists, the

ideology of each lies on a continuum between the conditions of traditional peasantry and modern commercial farming. My generalizations occasionally fail to distinguish these important differences between individuals, and this should be borne in mind whenever I describe any behaviour as 'typical' of the majority of villagers of Hoyales, or indeed of Castile, or even of Spain, thus ignoring regional and class differences, following the lax example of most social scientists writing about Spain since Kant in 1800.

Nevertheless, and in spite of my difficulties, I eventually accumulated a massive and complex volume of data, so vast that it determined my method for analyzing and writing up my research. Incapable of taking too many factors into account at a time, I decided to avoid referring to the published anthropological literature dealing with Spain, until a first draft of the thesis was complete.

Although the data and analysis were almost entirely original, a comparison between my draft thesis and the published literature on Spain soon revealed that my description of the culture of a minifundist village and the problems caused by modernization was amazingly similar to the great majority of the published ethnographical literature on Spain. Incredibly, most of the problems, values, behaviour, etc., were similar, regardless of regional and structural differences. These accounted for minor changes within the general pattern; for example, differences in ecology or inheritance rules, or communal property promoting solidarity.

Spanish Ethnology: A Brief Critique

Of course, every single formal anthropological study on Spain

has been published in the last twenty-five years, coinciding exactly in time with the present rural 'crisis'. Since the 1954 publication of the first study of a Spanish village (by Pitt-Rivers), the anthropological literature, mostly Anglophone, has gradually grown to voluminous proportions. At least thirteen community studies have been published so far in English in monograph form, nine of these within the present decade; and more monographs are probably in press. Furthermore, within the past two decades, over fifty articles on rural Spain have appeared in established anthropological journals, or in conjunction with other reports on European or Mediterranean peasantry. In addition, from a list drawn up by Kenny (1972b) of U.S. university researchers in Spain, more than twenty have, so far as I am aware, not yet published their results.

With respect to anthropological research published in Spanish, during the long, dark period of "academic arteriosclerosis" (Caro 1974:11), which lasted from the Civil War until the 1960 s, Caro Baroja was the lone Spanish social scientist. The first of the new generation of Spanish anthropologists had to go for their training to the U.S. or Britain (e.g. Lisón-Tolosana), until Esteva succeeded in opening the first school of anthropological studies in Madrid (Kenny 1972b:82). Pérez-Díaz, a rural sociologist, published a well-researched study of a Castilian village in 1966. I am aware of only three anthropological monographs published in Spanish during the present decade. However, the Centro de Etnología Peninsular of the University of Barcelona has been publishing a specialized journal, Ethnica, since 1971.

This recent renaissance in research and field-work in the humanities led to my coinciding with three other researchers, all doing field-work in the same district simultaneously with me. They were: Fernando Molinero of the University of Valladolid (Human Geography), José-David Sacristán of the University of Barcelona (Archaeology), and Manolo Cantera from the Universidad Complutense in Madrid (Cultural Anthropology: Housing and settlement patterns). The findings of these excellent colleagues will be referred to throughout this report, wherever relevant. It is curious that the first-ever serious research in the area should have been carried out by so many people simultaneously. The only previous academic work on the district is a 'History' of famous persons by Zamora (1965), commissioned by the local and provincial authorities.

There is thus a vast and growing body of anthropological literature on rural Spain, much of it of excellent descriptive quality. The situation and problems, life-style and ritual, values and behaviour, family and corporate organization, modernization and migration, individualism and patronage, egalitarianism and envy, and of course, honour and shame, virginity, and bars, and tourism--all these and many other topics have been fully and elegantly described. However, the relevance of many of these subjects, the focuses of some of the studies, and much of the analysis, should all be critically examined.

It would seem that unfortunately, many of the models and methods employed by the majority of anthropologists for dealing with complex societies are inadequate, lacking in perspective, and usually unable to offer any empirical explanation for what is reported.

As Freeman suggests: "...many of our village studies to date terminate where they do for reasons of expediency rather than analytic closure " (1973:748). "It is hardly surprising that no European community has been thoroughly analyzed with reference to more than a fraction of the sources concerning it," for "we are faced with a staggering richness of material" (Freeman 1973:744). Kenny suggests team work as a possible solution to the methodological dilemma of marrying "the highly intensive studies of small units with data from secondary sources of larger levels of the society" (1972a:32). Terrades suggests the creation of a new methodology for studying peasant societies, to replace the one developed for the study of "primitive" cultures (1972:220).

Many of the findings and conclusions, and even some descriptions, in the anthropological literature on Spain are gradually coming under attack and reinterpretation by anthropologists themselves.

Barrett (1972) believes that the concepts of interclass intimacy and equality have been confused in the literature on Spain (e.g. by Pitt-Rivers and Kenny), suggesting instead that "it is precisely the fact that Spanish society has been so highly stratified that has permitted such a high degree of interclass intimacy" (p. 387).

Aceves (1974) contends that the individualism of the Spaniard as commonly depicted in the literature (e.g. Lisón-Tolosana, etc.) is merely defensive role playing. Individualism is in fact a powerful myth about themselves promoted by Spaniards to explain their behavior and their own share of their problems. This so-called individualism would be better described as "familial particularism" (Pérez-Díaz 1976:125).

'Familial particularism' would, incidentally, be a less prejudicial expression than Banfield's notorious term, 'Amoral familism'. Banfield, who worked in neighbouring Italy, believes that a set of values, which he called 'amoral familism', impede economic progress. Another model to explain peasant behaviour is the Image of Limited Good, developed by Foster, who was incidentally the first North American anthropologist to do research in Spain.

Limited Good and familism (or individualism) may be generally accurate descriptions of peasant values and behaviour. However, they account only for the symptoms, rather than the causes. Even as idealistic analyses they fall short by ethnocentrically failing to take into account that these aspects of peasant behaviour may be shared with the dominant elite. To paraphrase Marx, the values of the dominant class are the dominant values--the model for behaviour. Several monographs on Spanish ethnography (Aceves 1971a; Terrades 1973; Brandes 1975a) have attempted to analyze their good descriptive data using Foster's and Banfield's concepts.

Other analytical constructs commonly used in the anthropological literature on Mediterranean peasantries are Honour and Shame (especially Pitt-Rivers 1971), and Patron-Client relations (Kenny 1966; Barrett 1974). Again, these are explanations of behaviour by value-systems. These values are indeed still relevant (though less so with increasing modernization), but I do not believe they are determining factors in behaviour. Rather, as discussed further on, they can perhaps be better understood as indicators of status and wealth.

These idealistic methods of analysis by value-systems unfortunately

tend to magnify ideology out of all proportion, to more important that it is in reality. A major problem of analyzing data on the basis of existing anthropological literature is the very real danger of perpetuating established interests and interpretations. A great many monographs (e.g. Lisón 1966; Barrett 1974; Luque 1974) seem to waiver between a materialist and an idealist analysis, finally taking the latter direction, perhaps because of the influence of dominant anthropological theory, to the body of which their research is expected to contribute.

On the other hand, many researchers using idealistic analysis have tended to underestimate the relevance and importance of observable social reality, if this reality is rejected or denied by official or even by folk ideology. An example of this contradiction, noted by Barrett (1974:16-17), concerns social differences and stratification. The ideology of the culture of most villages in the northern half of Spain is strongly egalitarian, supposedly overriding even wealth differences. Barrett eventually managed to prove that villagers do in fact behave towards others following a subconscious system of social stratification.

Although formal class divisions are not really applicable within the peasant class, and the family is the unit of solidarity, I found in Hoyales evidence of social stratification and discrimination; however, this was always disguised and rarely admitted. Nevertheless, almost all anglophone anthropologists deny the existence of analytically definable intra-communal social divisions (c.f. Aceves 1971a; Brandes 1975a; Douglass 1969; Freeman 1970; Kenny 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1971).

Many other researchers are simply not concerned about peasant stratification (Christian 1978; Aguilera 1978; Terrades 1973; Foster 1953; Kasdan 1965; de Miguel 1969; Caro Baroja 1968) which is their privilege--though this lack of concern is itself a statement. It would in fact be easier to mention the few anthropologists who have taken into consideration the social stratification in rural Spain: Lisón (1966), Moreno (1972a), Hansen (1969), Barret (1974), and Gilmore in all his publications.

Gilmore has in fact published (1976) a scathing criticism of the analytical models used by most other anthropologists in Spain:

Similar findings and conclusions have led to the construction of models of social dynamics which stress community cohesion and integration.... We suggest that a failure to consider the variables of class consciousness and class conflict in Spain is responsible for the inadequacy of these generalizations. (Gilmore 1976:89)

He shows the irrelevance for his Andalusian agro-town of three of the 'sacred cows' of Iberian ethnology, which are claimed to fortify communal solidarity. Disagreeing with Pitt-Rivers and Kenny, Gilmore claims that patronage "buttresses" (p. 96) social stratification and separation. He opposes the "disintegrative role of religion" (p. 97) in his stratified village to Freeman's (1968 a & b) model of 'religious-territorial corporacy'. And he believes (pp. 98-99) that social divisions overshadow the community spirit, or 'sociocentrism', which Caro Baroja, Kenny, Christian and others believe to be of importance.

In support of Gilmore, my own data from a minifundist village would seem to back his criticism of these models. However, my supporting data would invalidate his explanation for the differences between his data and the findings of other anthropologists. He

generously assumes these differences to be due to the dominant focus by anthropologists on Redfieldian 'little-folk-peasant-communities': "Twenty-six of the twenty-seven studies for which we have published data take place in relatively small rural communities" (Gilmore 1976:89). Freeman also suggests that size of population is a determinant of the structure (1968b:477).

Gilmore claims that, "As a result of the small-village focus, twenty one studies take place in the egalitarian North of the peninsula, where land is evenly distributed,... Twenty two studies take place in the marginal 'sierras'" (1976:101). Gilmore cannot be faulted for having obviously been wildly misled by the literature on small villages. Though the inequality of social reality is far less blatant and exaggerated in minifundist villages than in the agro-towns of Andalucia, I would hazard the claim that social stratification and unequal distribution of land existed in some relevant degree in all the Spanish villages in the literature, at the time of their study by anthropologists. Differences may be along a continuum rather than sharply divided, but are observable--especially between the two extremes of the continuum--in certain social relations, e.g. marriage alliances.

The choice by so many anthropologists of marginal mountain villages ought to be explained by them in methodological terms, which has never to my knowledge been the case. The only two reasons occurring to me would appear to indicate a disturbingly deliberate choice of un-typical villages fitting an idealized model. Sierra villages are more isolated from modernization and the influence of the centralizing nation-state. Also, they often display more communal