

Revisiting ethnographic data: bridging the boundaries between discourse and reality

The strategies and stances of a woman in the field

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Summary: this article deals with the stance and the ethics of the ethnographer in the field. It is written by an ethnographer reflecting on the fieldwork she conducted in an Andalusian village ten years ago and by a linguist who criticizes the stance the young woman ethnographer adopted and the impact it had on the interpretation of native discourses compared to the reality observed. After presenting the context of the place and the methodology used, this article provides some results from the study of intimate gendered relationships in two generations before and after Franco. We then revisit the ethnographic data through a mirrored discussion.

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Introduction

Whatever the subject of their study, all researchers in Social and Management Science, using ethnographic methodology, aim for scientific objectivity. They aspire to an in-depth understanding of human reality, by the rigorous use of techniques, such as the comparison between discourse and reality. However, Descola (1993: 436), focusing on the ethnologist, reminds us that s/he is also an interpreter who inevitably introduces an element of subjectivity. *“Ethnologists are as much inventors as story-tellers, and even if the habits and discourse of the people whose lives they have shared are generally correctly transcribed and, as far as possible, correctly rendered, the way they present them and interpret them remains their personal responsibility.”* This question of objectivity *versus* subjectivity is all the more relevant for a researcher working on a personal subject such as intimate gendered relationships. To apprehend reality objectively, must the ethnographer be a simple observer, participant observer, or observing participant (Mendès-Leite and De Busscher 2000: 90-92)? For Winkin (2001: 160) participation goes farther for American anthropology than for French anthropology. He states: *“one can study the other’s language, their habits and even their emotions but one cannot participate ‘intimately’”*, a stance which is nevertheless recommended by the American feminist Newton (2006), who talks about *“the erotic equation in fieldwork”*. Does that mean that the French researcher is less able to understand intimate reality? Are these limitations to participation not the necessary distance imposed by the researcher to obtain more objectivity? Or do they correspond to the ethical position the ethnographer adopts in the field?

In this article, we provide some answers to these questions, basing our arguments on an ethnographic study of gendered intimate relationships conducted in an Andalusian village¹. After presenting the context of the study and the methodology used, we will discuss our results regarding the changes in the couple’s sexuality over two generations, one having grown up under Franco’s regime and the other under parliamentary democracy. We do not wish to fall into the trap Scheper Hughes identified (1992: 28): *“Still others engage in an obsessive, self reflexive hermeneutics in which the self, not the other, becomes the subject of anthropological inquiry.”* However, we will discuss to what extent the stance adopted and the strategies used impact on the results. What gaps are there between the public discourse and reality provoked by the informants’ representation of the ethnographer’s identity (Warren 2003)? How is the participants’ experience expressed and transformed by discursive practice (Katila and Meriläinen 1999; Gibbon 1999) or by symbolic representation? We will write from two perspectives, that of the young woman who carried out the original ethnographic empirical research and analysis and of an older linguist, also a woman. These mirrored views reflect the multiple, changing realities, both of the informants and of the analysts themselves.

The context of the study: Cuelda’s social structure and its development

Cuelda² is an Eastern Andalusian village of about 6000 inhabitants, which has had a democratic local council since 1979, after forty years of Franquist dictatorship. Until the 1960s, Cuelda’s economic development was based mainly on agriculture, with day workers, tenant farmers, small and large landowners making up the major part of the labour force.

¹ The data on which this article is based were collected between 1991 and 2002. They are thus relevant for a specific time and place.

² This is a pseudonym.

Between the 1960s and 70s, agricultural mechanization led to massive rural migration. In the 70s, the establishment of textile and wood factories, and the development of the service industry allowed the labour surplus to be absorbed. The level of education has notably increased from Francoism until now. According to the 1991 census, only 3 % of the population over fifty had attended school after the age of fourteen (the legal school leaving age at that time) and just 1 %, quasi exclusively men, went on to Higher Education. Nowadays, almost all children go to school until the age of sixteen and 26 % go on to Higher Education, with an equal distribution between girls and boys at each level of education.

Nowadays, education for girls is more a question of obtaining diplomas to enter the work market and to achieve economic independence than to be prepared for marriage. However, this goal is not reached by all. In Cuelda in 1991, the percentage of women in paid work was 21,3 %³ compared to 26 %⁴ for Spain, with only a small minority in work corresponding to their level of education and their aspirations. Nevertheless, the women of the “Young generation” have had more access to knowledge and suffered less discrimination than their elders (Sommier 2006: 33-45). For instance, in school books, jobs are no longer only represented in the masculine form as they were during Franco's regime: we can now see “*el médico, la médica*” (doctor), “*el / la albañil*” (bricklayer). There are also pictures of men cooking or laying the table in children's colouring books. Furthermore, both girls and boys receive sex education – a subject which was totally taboo during the dictatorship – in the form of information about the male and female reproductive organs for the younger students and debates about contraception and AIDS for the older ones.

Many things changed with the wide adoption of television in the 1970s and the introduction of new programmes like American TV films. Effectively, this provided access to images of another way of life, with urban heroes who seemed to be free to manage their own lives and to choose their spouse. Nowadays, international programmes are more common, and TV has a huge influence on issues of physical appearance and the couple, especially for women, who like watching *telenovelas* and programmes about stars. Gendered relationships in this kind of programme are varied: unfaithfulness, divorce, unmarried mothers, sexuality especially in teenagers, married women working outside the home. The Cueldenses have gone from a traditional model of the couple to a less discriminatory one, where only love can legitimate a marriage, rather than economic interest which was the norm until 1960-1970 (Sommier 2006: 81-96).

This new model of the couple is nevertheless counterbalanced by the great influence still exercised by the Catholic Church on the Cueldenses, beginning with their catechism classes. A Church wedding, chosen by 96% of couples, is preceded by a week of premarital classes, which the vast majority follow without question. These classes transmit a model of a submissive wife, where contraception is restricted to the rhythm or temperature – the only ones authorized by the Church – and where divorce and abortion are totally banned.

Methodology

To understand gendered relationships, we used ethnographic methodology, with seven periods of fieldwork between 1991 and 2002. In the field, we combined archive/documentary research with interviews and participant observation. Particular attention was paid to census documents, the archives of the Franquist period and, civilian and parish records of births, marriages and divorces. Personal, in-depth interviews were conducted, including people from two generations, which we called “Old” and “Young generations”. Twenty interviews were conducted with people born between 1930 and 1940. Nineteen interviews concerned people born from 1960-1970. For the sake of diversity, we questioned the same number of men and

³ *Censo de población de Andalucía 1991. Provincia de Jaén, I.E.A. 1993.*

⁴ In 1991, according to M.T. Pérez Picazo et G. Lemeunier (1994: 168).

women from different social backgrounds. We let people talk about their lives in an open way. According to the elements mentioned, or not, in this non-directive part, we asked them semistructured questions about their life path. Then we asked the interviewees what they thought had changed most in Cuelda, which would sometimes lead them to talk about gendered relationships.

These “general” questions often allowed us to relativize the words said at the beginning. It should be borne in mind that the people studied often guess what ethnographers are looking for and especially what they would like to hear. The informants’ ability to adjust, which forces the ethnographer to remain permanently vigilant should never be underestimated. Since this adjustment is more easily achieved through words than through actions, it makes participant observation essential. The slightest fact, the least important word, which could be highly important during analysis, must be recorded in the field notebook. By settling in the village, we took part in all the moments of everyday life. Living with a family for a long time and sharing many moments with the family who was renting us a flat, provided privileged access to family and couple relationships. Since we were part of a *pandilla*⁵, we had a special place to observe friendships. We stayed in the field for a long time, but we also left it to achieve some distance and to start analyzing the first data collected. We then returned to the field to go further into some points (Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry 1989). Content analysis, where all the data collected were triangulated, was carried out. The vertical and horizontal analysis of interviews was then compared with the data from participant observation, in order to detect the gaps that can exist between discourse and facts.

Intimate gender relationships

We studied intimate gender relationships on three levels: the gendered division of labour, communication within the couple and sexuality. In this paper, we will focus our attention on sexuality, because it is generally more difficult to understand and because it implies reflection about the stance the ethnographer has to adopt in the field, which will be discussed in detail in the final section. Observations of the other two levels of intimate gender relationships provide a context which can enrich our understanding of the third level. In terms of gendered division of labour, in spite of the changes in the village context, the married women of both generations carry out all the tasks related to reproduction, whereas the men reserve for themselves the socially valued tasks associated with production. This gendered division of labour fosters relationships of dependency and solidarity, which remain surprisingly unaffected by the generation difference. Communication within the couple is inseparable from the free time or time for exchange - allowed to each member. For the “Old generation”, only the husbands were granted a socially legitimized right to have any free time, which was spent with their friends in bars. Conversation between husbands and wives was thus very limited, the men preferring to talk to their friends, whereas the women confided more in the female members of their family. The beginning of love marriages as social norm for the “Young generation” changed the official discourse: couples, particularly the women, claim that they share everything. Reality, however, proves to be different: generally, husbands and wives still spend their free time separately. This does not encourage intimate dialogue, particularly in a society which teaches men self-control as opposed to the easy display of feelings reserved to women.

“Old generation”, sexuality of instinct or sacrifice

For the “Old generation”, we can only really talk about intimacy after the union of marriage. The division and lack of equality between spouses of this generation is shown in

⁵ Mixed group of friends of between 20 to 30 people and ending with marriage.

their intimate relationships. If, in most cases, sexual relations began with marriage in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic church, there were nonetheless exceptions. Firstly, the phenomenon of elopement (*llevarse la novia* -literally kidnapping the fiancée) was associated with loss of virginity and, after a festive meal the “Old generation” sometimes told stories of sexual relations between an engaged couple. Secondly, a comparison between the dates of birth and dates of marriage in the Births and Marriages register from 1961 gives us an idea of premarital sexual activity. Out of 121 babies, 4 were conceived out of wedlock (3 %). These figures are approximate, as they only concern one year and should be increased, as some children could have been registered in 1961 but born before and all sexual relations do not imply conception. Some informants from the “Old generation” assured us that non-respect of the Catholic principle of virginity at marriage was also a reality for couples who had followed the ‘normal’ stages of *noviazgo* (engagement). Young people, like Urbano, were more forthcoming, and told us that, during village festivals, young men would encourage their mothers or other chaperones to drink alcohol so they could escape from their supervision with their fiancée. According to Paulo, in certain cases, parents were deliberately lax. “They let things happen to make sure that there was a wedding”, the only solution to avoid the dishonour inherent in all pregnancy before marriage.

Contrary to the men, the women were not prepared for their first sexual intercourse. At most their parents or the priest had told them to be wary of men, but with no further explanation. If there was any preparation, it was more terrifying than reassuring. The following report from a forty-nine year-old informant shows how young women were kept in ignorance and fear of sex: “In my home we had never talked about it, you learned from experience. [...] You live and learn - when I got married, he was the first, and I don’t know how we managed to understand each other.” She remembered her first sexual relations with bitterness. “I was a virgin when I got married and remained one three days after the wedding night, for we couldn’t do anything before, it was impossible! It hurt too much and I was afraid. Luckily, he didn’t force things and we waited. [...] Even though an aunt had said to me before the wedding night: ‘You have to relax as much as possible’, it was impossible!” These reports show the highly negative effects on women of maintaining such ignorance about sexuality. This discourse also highlights the inequality between women who were total novices and men who had usually been initiated by a prostitute.

Indeed, this inequality was found between most of the couples of the “Old generation” throughout their lives: the man was the knowledgeable one and therefore the active one in terms of sexuality and the woman had to submit to him. The expression “*te tomo, te mato*” (‘I take you, I kill you’) used by a number of informants to refer to the sexual act is highly eloquent. Firstly, it is taken for granted that the words are pronounced by the active man to the passive woman. Secondly, the use of the verb ‘to kill’ is open to several interpretations. For the Cueldenses, it means ‘to impregnate’, as the “Old generation” used to believe, and some still believe, that one sexual act is enough for a woman to get pregnant, sperm being seen as all-powerful. Why use the word ‘kill’ to refer to an act purported to create new life? Perhaps because as well as taking a woman’s virginity and marking her body indelibly, the man who makes her pregnant destroys all hope of freedom and makes her dependant on him for economic and moral survival. Behind the violence of this expression, one can also imagine that only the man’s desire is important and that of women, considered in Andalusia as sexually insatiable (Driessen 1991), must be entirely annihilated by so-called superior male strength.

Inequality regarding the sexual act remains between man and wife of the “Old generation”. As one woman confided: “I know when he wants to, he starts by touching my hand and here we go, get onto your back! Sometimes I want to, but not always.” Then, as if she wanted to give an impression of docility, she concluded: “Well, I can’t always say ‘no’ to him. So sometimes: ‘OK, let’s go’”. Her tone of voice showed both disgust at the sexual act performed without desire and the resignation of a wife doing her marital duty. From this

discourse we can conclude that sexual pleasure is the domain of the husband, as was stated by Antonio de la Granda, a doctor and Work Inspector under Franco: “*Compared to the egotistical male sex, the female sex is totally altruistic, because if man looks for pleasure, then woman really only finds sacrifice.*” (Otero 1999: 40)

Certainly we should not forget the frustration felt by the man at his wife’s refusal to make love, but is this refusal as frequent as we could think when listening to this interlocutor? Probably not, for as well as marital duty, fear of the husband’s infidelity determines the behaviour of the women of this generation. One of our interlocutors felt that refusing to have sex with her husband when he wished to would push him to: “look elsewhere”. Rather than experiencing such shame, women generally prefer to submit to the wishes of their husband. Besides, husbands know how to use this threat. For example, once when we were having lunch with seven members of the same family and there was talk of what people wear to bed, a man boasted of sleeping in the nude, even in winter, and then exclaimed: “Not like my wife who sleeps with her socks and pullover on.” One can suppose that by this statement he was justifying what all the family knew and what I had been told by a distant relative, namely that he had had an affair with a married woman from the village.

Women of the “Old generation” who refused to submit to their husband’s sexual demands also ran the risk of being battered. As Ursula put it: “In the old days, there was a lot of marital violence; for less than adultery a man would beat his wife. She had to obey, work and keep quiet.” This is not only a thing of the past, as women who are victims of marital violence are now encouraged to speak up and the social worker knows: “battered women of my age, or younger or older and from all social classes. And, through fear of what people might say, or economic dependence or a wish to keep the social status acquired by marriage, they keep quiet or find pretexts, such as ‘I fell down the stairs.’”

This female attitude is inseparable from how the Andalusians represent male sexuality, translated by expressions sometimes used by women to describe men, such as *basto*, *burro* (rustic, ignorant) and *macho*. Male sexuality is instinctive, like an animal’s. It cannot be contained and if a man feels desire, it should be satisfied without constraint. Given this, we were scarcely surprised, when waiting for a night train at a station in the middle of the country, to hear a female informant cry: “Lock the doors, there’s a car with two men in it coming!” She was expressing her fear of rape which is inherent in such an image of male sexuality. D. Gilmore supports this view in a chapter of *Agresividad y comunidad* (1995: 230) about Andalusian machism: “A macho is thus an insatiable reproducer [...] he obeys without question what is dictated by his *cojones*⁶. [...] No unmarried woman going out alone is safe from him, as his sexual instincts are uncontrollable.” This image explains why wives usually end up submitting to their husband’s demands like we submit to the laws of nature which cannot be changed.

Sexual pleasure for the women of the “Old generation” can be destroyed when machism is incompatible with the use of certain methods of contraception, such as the condom. One woman confided the worry that she would fall pregnant again with each sexual act and when we asked her if she couldn’t get her husband to use condoms, which were easily procured in Cuelva, she replied: “My husband never wants to use that, never.” This categorical refusal is inherent in the image of male sexuality as animal, where this type of artifice which may diminish male sexual pleasure cannot be tolerated. However, we cannot conclude that there is total inequality between men and women in terms of sexual pleasure. For example, the same informant’s anxiety did not convince her to use the pill or to be surgically sterilized, as suggested by her doctor, after her fifth confinement when she was over forty. She told us that she had taken the pill at the beginning of her marriage, but it was a *coñazo*⁷ to have to take a

⁶ Familiar and often used word meaning testicles.

⁷ Slang word used to mean “bother, a constraint” and which is particularly interesting in such a context. *Coñazo* is a version of *coño* which means the female sexual organs. Does this mean that this woman unconsciously associates the pill with alienation, alteration and denigration of the female sex organs?

tablet every day at the same time and she often forgot and so reduced the effectiveness of the medication. As to the second solution, she explained “You had to have the husband and wife’s signature. He agreed, obviously! ”Me too, at the beginning, but I couldn’t wait to get out of the clinic after the birth, and now I’m scared!” Couldn’t the refusal to use the most effective contraceptives show an unexpressed wish to reduce the ardour of a husband, who no doubt does not want a new mouth to feed, and thus to have sex at times which are really chosen by the two partners? Furthermore, one cannot consider the man as the only beneficiary of sexual pleasure without barriers. In fact, the withdrawal method is the contraceptive method the most frequently used by the “Old generation”. This does not remove all fear of the woman falling pregnant but is also a barrier to total masculine pleasure.

“Young generation”, still sexual inequality

Today, sexual relations begin before marriage, and virginity on the wedding night is a rare occurrence. As one engaged woman put it: “I have a friend whose parents are really old-fashioned. Her fiancé only came to her house on Sunday, like in the old days, under supervision of her parents. So they could never kiss nor speak to each other properly and when she went out in the street she was always accompanied by her sister. So she could never know the man who is now her husband when they were engaged. And when they got married she was really scared of being alone with her husband for the first time, especially on her wedding night! What was going to happen? So when I went to her house, she asked me questions. At the time, three or four years ago, I couldn’t give her any more information.” This verbatim, from 1997, when she had been going out with her boyfriend for six years, provides us with two other pieces of information. Firstly, the use of a euphemism to describe sexual relations (to *know*, in the Biblical sense, the man who is now her husband) which shows there is still a taboo which can only be hinted at. Secondly, the fact that, three or four years before, this young woman could not inform her friend about the wedding night tells us that she only had sexual relations after being engaged for two or three years. This is in fact a characteristic of the vast majority of people born between 1960 and 1970: sexual relations no longer start with marriage but still within an institutional framework, that of the engagement. In other words, it is only after several months or several years, when the engagement takes on a quasi-official status, that the relationship becomes sexual as well as sentimental.

The main reason for this change between the two generations is the generalised use of contraception. According to Paulo: “The condom is used the most [...]. The pill is only used by married couples.” Why don’t engaged couples use the pill, which is more reliable than the condom? Urbano reported that the control exercised by parents stopped young engaged couples from having regular sexual relations. So, as Alba told us, as the pill requires being taken continuously with the risk of side effects, young women prefer to use condoms. It is as if they thought the risk of falling pregnant when using a condom less than the risk of side effects from the pill. Furthermore, both Maria and Matilde feel that what stops engaged couples from using the pill is the fear their mother will find out. In fact, the mother could well be surprised at her daughter’s frequent visits to the doctor’s, especially if it is a gynaecologist, for in Cuelda only married women are supposed to consult the specialist: the village mentality associates visits to the gynaecologist with being sexually active which is not allowed for a young single woman. It can also be difficult to hide the pills from a mother who is used to cleaning her daughter’s bedroom from top to bottom.

All this proves that if sexual relations before marriage are a reality for young people, this situation is not accepted by their parents. The family link is important because, although we never heard approbation concerning pre-marital sex from the “Old generation”, we noticed a kind of tolerance when some of them talked about other young people. For instance, Raquel when describing the situation of her daughter Justa in Granada, said: She shares the flat with three other girls. One of the three has moved her fiancé in. Consequently this guy has invaded

the girls' privacy. I accept that he sleeps with his fiancée. [...] But, well, the other day, one of these girls said that she heard them having sex! Can you imagine, there's no privacy!" Raquel seems to accept the sexual relationship between this flat-mate and her fiancé; what she seems in fact to be criticizing is the influence that such a couple can have on her daughter. One can thus surmise that she would refuse this situation if her daughter were the protagonist.

In fact, this refusal on the part of the parents comes from the fact that they include in sexuality the notion of honour and its female version, shame (*vergüenza*) (Pitt-Rivers 1971: 110-114). Not to have sexual relations before marriage is to be a virtuous woman who has escaped from the dishonour inherent in becoming pregnant before marriage. Sonia told us about her mother's words, two days before her wedding: "I'm relieved, as you're getting married without falling pregnant during your engagement, which would have been a dishonour for us." This definition of dishonour has been very effectively interiorised by the "Young generation". According to Manuela, nothing has changed: "I think that dishonour for a woman is the same today as yesterday: it's shameful to have a child by your fiancé. Besides, I think that in terms of what people might say it'll always be the same."

In fact, there is a paradox experienced by most of the young women of Cuelda: they are worried that if their parents find their contraceptive pills, which prove they are sexually active, they will be afraid that they will get pregnant before marriage. However, by using condoms, which have the advantage of being bought and kept by men, who are no longer criticised for being sexually active before marriage, they are at more of a risk of pregnancy than with the pill. In other words, by the very act of keeping up appearances they are putting themselves more at risk.

One could consider, however, that being engaged for several years before having sexual relations could compensate for the risk of great dishonour. In such situations, pregnancy is not seen as dramatic but the couple will be obliged to get married earlier to avoid public shame. There is no other alternative, as Cristina points out: "Our *pandilla* broke up when I was sixteen, as two friends from the group got married: she was pregnant (*se casó dependencia*). In fact, you don't have an alternative". The exact expression used in the village, meaning "she got married dependent", clearly expresses the woman's absence of choice in such a situation: she is a subordinate and must be completely under the influence of the man who made her pregnant if she wishes to escape from dishonour. There is no such commitment if the couple is recently formed and the woman gets pregnant. In this case, there is more risk of the man abandoning her and leaving her in a situation of extreme social and moral distress.

Can we estimate how many women are pregnant when they marry? A comparison between the dates of birth and marriage in the Births and Marriages register from 1991, shows that about 10% of children were conceived before marriage. The rise in this figure from 1961 gives more evidence of increased sexual activity before marriage and the figures can again be increased for the reasons stated above.

In terms of the image of male sexuality, very little has changed: men's sexual desire is still considered as being uncontrollable. According to Manuel, visiting a brothel by married men, young or otherwise, is considered as normal and totally sociably acceptable: "Here, most people think that a man who has sexual impulses must be able to fulfil them immediately". This opinion is not only held by men, for Justa considered that: "I think that if husbands go there it's because they don't find what they need at home." The choice of the word "need" is very explicit, placing male sexuality on the side of nature: it must be satiated like the need to drink. The consequence of such a representation is that women cannot reject their future husband's advances for long and that once they have accepted a sexual relationship, it must be fuelled as often as possible within the confines of parental control. Knowing that pregnancy before marriage means dishonour, one can imagine the anxiety with which young women experience their sexuality, particularly if the condom is used badly or not at all. For the fear of pregnancy is essentially the concern of women, who generally have to take responsibility for it. The following statement is from a woman who generalises for all the women of her

generation: “As your parents don’t know if you have had relations with your fiancé, what you are afraid of is getting pregnant.” – “Yes but there are methods of contraception.” – “Yes, but with a condom it’s not safe, it can break. I remember once, my period was very late. I felt really bad. I told my fiancé, but I couldn’t confide in my mother! So it was harder to bear.” Another young woman used much stronger language: Yes, we use condoms, but it terrifies me, it scares me, for this is something that I wouldn’t want to do to my parents, come in and say to them ‘I’m pregnant’. Of course they- wouldn’t kill me! But, well, I have to behave properly. So it traumatises me [...]”. In such conditions, sexual pleasure is considerably compromised. Not only for women, it is true, as feelings about restraint were confirmed by one young man. Nevertheless, the woman being the one where “sin” can be read on her body, she is more exposed to this fear which can reduce pleasure.

Finally, there is another limit to sexual pleasure inherent in the places where intimacy can take place. As parents do not accept that their children have sexual relations with their fiancé(e), this cannot be under their roof. Other places, such as a student flat must be found. However, for the vast majority, only the car or the olive field can provide the setting for premarital sexual relations. In other words, public places where the lack of comfort and the risk of discovery hardly allow the development of a serene intimate relationship. Moreover, they are places associated with males. Indeed, for most couples, it is the man who has the car and the driving licence, which reflects the active role expected from him in the sexual relationship. He is the one who holds both the mechanical and sexual power.

In this context, can there be any room for women’s sexual pleasure? This is even more doubtful when this first masculine space represented by the car generally moves out of the protected territory of the village, where moral codes exist, towards a space, also considered as masculine, associated with nature, the animal world and danger, that of the fields. In fact, during these ‘hidden’ sexual relations, the fiancée is in a doubly masculine space which is also doubly ‘other’ for her. These different conditions constitute a barrier to spontaneity and to the expression of women’s sexual pleasure, while they are less unfavourable for men.

Does marriage bring any changes, particularly in terms of pleasure? One of the changes noted is the use of the pill, instead of the condom. The main explanation for this is the legitimization of sexual relations afforded by life as a couple, but also that village morality allows a married woman to consult a gynaecologist, to be prescribed an oral contraceptive. These two factors mean that there is less fear of pregnancy. This would imply that sexual pleasure, particularly for women, can develop freely. However, the notion of marital duty is still present, as we see in the following revelation made at the end of an interview by a female informant: “About abortion, you know I had an abortion about four years ago. At the time my husband was working away, and as we only saw each other at the weekend we used the condom. Well, one weekend he arrived at there weren’t any condoms in the house. So I said to myself, too bad, I’ll use the rhythm method and I had calculated that my period had finished just ten days before, so it was the period when I was not supposed to be fertile. Well, no, I got pregnant. It was awful! I really didn’t want another child and I even became depressed, I was in a bad way, a really bad way.”

This example could illustrate, on the one hand, the fact that this woman wanted sexual relations, or she would have remembered that ten days after her period she had every chance of being fertile. On the other hand, one can suppose that she agreed to have sexual relations after pressure from her husband, for she insisted that she didn’t want any more children. She knew that she ran more risk by using the rhythm method than by using a condom. Without talking about obedience to her husband, let us say she gave in because she considered that male sexual desire should be fulfilled immediately. Since this episode, this informant confided that she now uses the coil. In any case, this example shows that, even today, women do not use all the means at their disposal to experience their sexuality without worry. Why didn’t this informant ask her husband to wait until he had bought some condoms? Was she afraid that he would be unfaithful or violent? Without giving an answer in this particular case

let us not forget, as the social worker and Urbano reminded us, that violence in marriage is still a reality for the “Young generation”.

If we now make a comparison between the sexuality of couples of the “Old” and “Young generations” it is tempting to talk about change. In fact, the end of the dictatorship corresponded to the generalisation of premarital sex and the use of the condom. Moreover, today’s young women are more knowledgeable about sexuality and therefore less naïve and less afraid than their mothers when they have their first sexual relations. Indeed, the media and the school have provided them with some information which compensates for the warnings given by their parents. The inequality between men and women in terms of information about sex has thus been slightly modified. Nevertheless, all fears and constraints are far from having disappeared. On the one hand, parental control over young, unmarried women continues to play a fundamental role, to the extent that it cancels out what freedom they could have gained. It stops them from taking contraceptives, like the pill, which have been authorized since the advent of democracy (1978) and threatens them with the dishonour common to both generations: that of pregnancy before marriage. On the other hand, there are many obstacles to female sexual pleasure during engagement or marriage for both the “Old” and “New generations”. The image that women have of the pill being a restrictive contraceptive explains the fact that they have sex with fear in their hearts; this vision of masculine sexuality as animal and instinctive, still supports the notion of marital duty and the “huge confidence trick” which, according to Tabet (2004) characterises this unequal sexual exchange between men and women, whether they are engaged or married.

Conclusion and discussion

Two main conclusions, which it is important to put into perspective by taking into account the situation of the study and the position of the young woman ethnographer, emerge from our discussion of the sexuality of couples of the “Old” and “Young” generations. Firstly, we can note that, contrary to what can be observed during other social interactions between men and women, where the former are associated with culture and production (with the superiority which is inherent to them in our societies⁸) and the latter to nature and reproduction (Mathieu 1973; Katila et Merilainen 1999; Sommier 2006), in terms of sexuality, it is men who are placed on the side of nature. However, the association of male sexuality with nature and animality does not result in male subordination. Thus, whether he is situated in the natural or the cultural sphere, the male remains dominant and the female dominated. This demonstrates, if there was a need to do this, the arbitrary nature of justifications of superiority versus inferiority, based on so-called biological elements. In reality, they are merely “biologicalised” social constructions, in order to: *“legitimise a relationship of domination by attributing it to biological nature, when it is itself a naturalised social construction.”* (Bourdieu 1998: 29).

Secondly, our analysis shows that it is more pertinent to speak of continuity than change in the sexuality of the two generations. In spite of the changes in context and the spread of love matches, the representations and roles of men and women remain basically unchanged. Three factors explain this stability. One is geographical, and is connected with the social control exercised all over the village by gossip, which obliges people to conform to the norms and representations of the greatest number. The second is historical. National-Catholicism contributed in reinforcing a model of male/female relationships which existed before Franco’s regime. This was carried out with such force, that it was able to reduce the influence that socioeconomic and socio-cultural changes could and can have on couples in Cuelda. One can thus conclude, with S. Brandes (1980: 212) that, without forty years of Franquist ideology, deep changes towards greater equality in men/women relationships could have been observed.

⁸ Cf. Descola (2005)

The last factor leading to stability is social: sex education transmitted by the parents of the “Old generation” keeps girls in ignorance and fear while allowing boys freedom and initiative (Sommier 2006: 246-251).

It seems most appropriate to use the word “stability” to describe the developments in intimate relationships between men and women, whereas there is change in the political, economic and cultural context. This difference shows us that changes in social structures occur more quickly than in sexuality. In other words, in a context where “*boundaries of femininities and masculinities are continuously created*” (Priola 2004: 422), male domination always manages to adopt “*small innovating adjustments*” (Héritier 1996) in order to preserve itself.

These results can take on a new dimension in the light of an analysis of the conditions in the field and the stance adopted by the ethnographer to understand intimate gendered relationships. In the following section, we carry out a reflexive analysis of our ethnographic work, followed by a friendly criticism of our fieldwork.

A young woman ethnographer studying gendered relationships over two generations

To carry out this reflexive work, it seems important to distinguish between what Fournier (2006) calls the “external characteristics” of the researcher that cannot be modified, such as age, gender, or the fact of being foreign, from other characteristics such as physical appearance, behaviour, discourse which can be changed. In terms of “external characteristics”, I was obviously a young woman, as my fieldwork was carried out between the age of 19 and 30 and I was 24 when I moved alone to Cuelda for a 7-month period of fieldwork. In accordance with what Fournier (2006: 14) describes, my youth, associated by many of the informants with my inexperience, undoubtedly helped me to obtain information. Three informants, two of them whose house I lived in for several months, the other who was my neighbour when I rented a flat - who considered me as a kind of “adopted daughter” - felt they wanted to complete my education but also told me more, as they were freed from the veil of modesty, particularly concerning sex, which is drawn over the traditional parent-daughter relationship. I encountered the same wish to educate me from Paulo, a man who was six years my senior and intending to become a teacher. This love of transmitting information made him a privileged informant. The fact that I was a woman also made intimate information about women more easily accessible. The men in Cuelda did not supply me with very much information about male sexuality, but more than I expected. Those who were the most forthcoming about the subject, such as Paulo or Manuel, were members of the “Young generation”. This could be explained by the fact that, although we were not of the same gender, we were from the same generation, one which had seen the beginning of male/female friendships in Cuelda (Sommier 2006: 81-96). As we had been friends for several years and also because we each had a partner, it seemed natural that we could talk about sex in an unambiguous way. Nevertheless, Paulo explained that he used different, more refined vocabulary when he talked to me than when he talked to other men.

Although I had a good command of Spanish, I had to learn Andalusian expressions, although I did not acquire the accent. This linguistic particularity, along with the Cueldenses’ knowledge of my nationality, led to me being called *La Francesa* (the French girl). This term of reference symbolizing “*the ethnocultural gap*” (Althabe 1992: 252) between the people we talked to and ourselves proved very useful. I had been visiting the village for several years and had built up friendships and therefore benefited from the “*familiarity*” referred to by P. Bourdieu (1993: 1392-1399) making it possible to establish “*non violent communication*” and allowing the respondent to open up with confidence. At the same time, as *La Francesa*, I was still seen as foreign and therefore there was less risk of my gossiping when people confided in me. In fact, I managed to find a happy medium between “*both proximate and intimate*” and “*forever distant and unknowably ‘other’*” (Scheper-Hughes 1992: XII).

The fact that I was a young French woman student had an influence on the discourse content. Thus, I noted that for some Cueldenses, especially young women, there was a gap between what they told me concerning their everyday life with their husband and what I could directly observe in their relationship. In general, their discourse made their lives sound more attractive for the young French woman ethnographer than they really were. When they talked about their couple in interviews, they tended to talk about an ideal situation: they loved each other, shared everything and were equal. This was possibly because they felt this description was more in phase with what they perceived as my vision of the couple. For the older women, I may have been perceived as a subversive influence, something which was shown symbolically by Ursula. I had offered to take her to Granada to see her daughter, but she had had a distressing dream. She was trying to get home before her husband, to cook his lunch, but she could not, because stones were stopping her from moving. After telling me this, she refused to come with me, leading me to the conclusion that her unconscious had transformed me into stone, preventing her from doing her duty as a wife.

Concerning the characteristics of the researcher which can be modified, we will focus on physical appearance. As I was interested in male/female intimate relationships in a society which I perceived as highly male-dominated, I decided to adopt the most discrete appearance and behaviour possible. I did not take with me any, even slightly, provocative clothing and wore trousers, long skirts and wide t-shirts and pullovers. I did, however, take care to make an effort when I went to parties to conform to local habits, for example by wearing a white blouse, so I did not take the risk of pleasing by what could be seen as exotic. I did not wear any make-up nor elaborate hairstyles. When I went out to discothèques with my group of friends, I made sure my dancing was very restrained. In this way, I tried to block out all possibility of seduction, no doubt aided by the fact that, according to my best female friend in the village, my physical appearance did not correspond to what the Cueldenses found attractive in a woman. In my speech, I did not systematically criticise statements or situations which shocked me, although I did do this with people that I knew well, like Alba, Paulo, Ursula or the two presidents of the Women's Association. Finally, to try to stop any attempt at seduction, I repeated constantly that I had a boyfriend in Paris to whom I was faithful. I was particularly adamant about this, as occasionally I was told: "So what! A boyfriend in Paris, another one here."

My choice in the field could be seen as taking on and accepting the role expected from a woman in Cuelda society, a role characterised by submission to the rules defined by men. In my opinion, even if this position can be criticised, as we will see later, as it goes along with masculine domination, it can nevertheless be seen as a means of becoming part of and being accepted by a society in order to better decipher its mechanisms. In fact, through some of my external characteristics, such as being French and living alone, I was already inevitably making a statement about the difference between my identity and the women of Cuelda: greater autonomy and freedom (Handman 1983: 15). If I had also had exactly the same appearance and behaviour as I do in France, I think I would have had less of a welcome, would not have gained such confidence and would no doubt have observed less. As an ethnographer, my aim was to resemble as much as possible the people of the community, or at least women who were students of about twenty years old like myself- to try to feel closely what they experienced. In fact, I adopted what Peneff calls a "*chameleon type adjustment*" (2009: 207). This is why I share the insight of Scheper-Hughes, who states: "*Anthropological work, if it is to be in the nature of an ethical and a radical project, is one that is transformative of the self but not (and here is the rub) transformative of the other.*" (1992: 24), even if for any human interaction, the influence, however small, of the ethnographer on the people s/he meets is undeniable. I could finally only retrieve my real identity when I was back in France as an ethnologist, carrying out my analysis and writing it up. It is also as an ethnologist that I included a moral dimension in my work which consisted of denouncing the

role allocated to women in Cuelda, for I consider, with Scheper-Hughes that: “*Anthropological writing can be a site of resistance.*” (1992: 25)

In spite of the criticism which can be made of the position I adopted as an ethnographer, it did allow me to collect information about intimate relationships within the couple from both men and women without any particular difficulty. Only two young men found flimsy excuses not to come to their interview, but as one of them was sufficiently forthcoming during informal discussion speech I was satisfied with that.

A friendly criticism by an older woman linguist

As we have said, Béatrice’s objective was to adapt to the field in order to understand the reality of the two generations of Cueldenses, an ethical position which Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe and Worthington (2007: 520) call “radical”. To do this, she became a chameleon, adopting her version of the community’s definition of a young woman in her behaviour and speech. However, at the same time, in her wish to gain people’s confidence about an intimate subject, she removed all the trappings of seduction, leading one young male informant to describe her as the “Virgin Mary”. In this way, as a very young woman, she attempted to become as invisible as possible, something which is easily acquired over time, if we are to believe Germaine Greer, who states that, after the menopause, women can choose between being a harridan or: “*fade out of sight and hearing*” (Greer, 1991: 286). This position has been adopted by other female ethnographers, such as Conaway, who wore “*odd-looking, loose-fitting clothing, no makeup and flat-soled shoes*” to avoid local men getting the wrong idea (1986, cited in Newton, 2006). Béatrice thus surrounded herself with what Golde described as “*symbolic chaperones*” (1970: 7, cited in Newton, 2006), mirroring the real-life chaperones present even with the “Young generation” of Cueldenses women. Even thus protected, she still aroused fears in some informants, particularly in the woman who saw her symbolically as a stone, a silent impediment. What kind of threat would she have represented if she had revealed her true opinions?

This objective could of course be interpreted as submissive or as a strategy of manipulation. There is clearly an irony inherent in a position which aspires to give women a voice, by remaining partially silent oneself. Without going so far as to use the “*erotic equation*”, as suggested by Newton (2006), Béatrice could have retained more of the expression of her “real identity” which she had left behind in Paris. However, the fact that she poses the question of her positioning is already an important step, perhaps more readily taken by women. As Newton (2006) points out, with a few notable exceptions, straight men do not generally explore how their gender or sexuality impacts on their informants and male heterosexuality is posited as the cultural given.

Whatever we ultimately think of the strategies used, they clearly led to remarkable revelations from some men and many women.⁹ However, the results themselves also symbolise the outsider/insider dilemma. For instance, the analysis of such terms as “*te tomo, te mato*” or “*coñazo*” carried out by “*la Francesa*” both reveal meanings hidden to the native speaker, but add connotations which have been lost over time, remaining apparent only to the foreigner (Gourvès-Hayward 2004). This observation demonstrates the role of the cultural and linguistic dimension in reflexive analysis, an aspect which had not been previously explored by the young ethnographer. Revisiting the data in this way highlights the importance of interdisciplinary, mirrored views, in order to deal with changing perspectives and to provide another bridge between discourse and reality.

⁹ We can note that the vast majority of verbatims quoted in this article are from women. With the exception of Paulo, the men’s accounts seem more factual, whereas the women explore their feelings, in accordance with Béatrice’s analysis of gendered communication differences in Cuelda.

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