



Democracy and **E**thnography

Constructing Identities
in Multicultural
Liberal States

edited by Carol J. Greenhouse
with Roshanak Kheshti

provincia propia" (In Madrid they called me Galician because of my accent. It's not that I am Galician or that I would mind being one. Everyone is what one is, and I belong to León. We like everything that is Galician, we feel drawn by it, our customs are Galician, or the Galicians copied them from us. Who knows? It's not that this could be Galicia. Villafranca was once itself a province.).

In another conversation, in response to my question as to whether they were Galician or Leonese, I was told "Somos gallegos, tenemos la misma lengua, la misma forma de comer, las mismas costumbres. Yo estudié en una escuela de Madrú y había varios gallegos, pero El Gallego era yo, mi padre era de la Rúa, vino aquí de 10 ó 12 años y casó con una villafranquina. Yo nací aquí. Si nos preguntan ya decimos que somos gallegos" (We are Galician, we speak the same language, eat the same foods, follow the same customs. I studied in Madrid, along with some Galicians, but among them, I was "The Galician" because my father came from Rúa [a village nearby in Galicia]. He came here about ten or twelve years ago and married a woman from Villafranca. I was born here. When asked, I always say, we are Galician.).

Did he mind, I insisted on asking, being called Galician in Madrid: "No me molesta nada que me llemen gallego porque ma había de molestar; si preguntan más o se habla, se explica que somos leoneses, pero si no para que explicar tanto" (I do not mind at all being called Galician. Why should I? If the conversation goes on, we might end up explaining that we are Leonese, but if it does not, why bother?).

When, in a third round of questions with this same informant, I asked about Bierzo's political party, he replied "En realidad sabemos que esto es un snob, que nosotros *somos* leoneses, que llevamos siglos y no va a cambiar" (In fact, we know that this is nothing but snobism, we *are* Leonese, we've been here for centuries and that's not about to change). Afterwards, he went on to say "Yo hablo castellano en casa, hablamos lo que somos, pero también sé hablar gallego" (I speak Castilian at home, we speak what we are, but I also know how to speak Galician). The principle of identity shifts back and forth until in the end, at one and the same time, they seem to be asserting that they both *are* and *are not*.

THE CAMPOSOS

In more detailed fashion, I will now look at a particular case of identity in this zone, a case that offers a special shading to this sociocultural analysis of contradictory terms. The case concerns a Bierzo township whose lands form part of the boundary with Galicia. Its people, the Camposos, are viewed

in the area as quite singular, living in two different places over the course of the year. In the winter they live in the valley of *Aira da Pedra* and live the rest of the year in *Campo del Agua*, up a steep track about five kilometers away. To be sure, others from nearby villages also graze their stock in summer grasslands known as "alzas" where there is relatively flat, arable land. In their summer houses, by accumulating manure, they were able to fertilize the nearby fields. Up on the mountainside, there were fewer houses than below and only some of the members of the family spent the summer there. "Los camposos" held hardly any land in the valley, most of it being up in the mountains. So almost all the inhabitants went up and down constantly, spending most of the year cultivating their lands and only taking refuge to *Aira de Pedra* during the worst of the winter. Each family would load up their cart with farm tools, kitchen equipment, and even furniture, along with the hens and pigs.

Even bearing in mind the extreme characteristics of the area, for the anthropologist, there is one outstanding feature: each village has its own church, patron saint, a local holiday, and its own cemetery. So we have two different villages for the same inhabitants whose identity is distanced as they go up or down the mountains according to the season. This village, with a double life, preserves an origin myth that explains this.³⁰ The villages are considered to be as different as night and day by the inhabitants themselves. Their topography, house styles, and climate are markedly different from each other. Furthermore, for them, the customs of the upper village were much more Galician than those of the lower one. "*Aira da Pedra* no tira tanto para Galicia como *Campo del Agua*" (*Aira da Pedra* is not drawn so much by Galicia as *Campo del Agua*).

Campo del Agua is closer to the Galician border. The *Camposo* shepherds live with those from the Galician villages in the summer pastures. Most of the houses in *Campo del Agua* are thatched while in the bottom of the valley, they are slate roofed. In *Campo del Agua*, there are several "horreos" (granaries) but in *Aira da Pedra* there are none. In *Campo del Agua* people slept in straw spread on wooden platforms in almost promiscuous proximity to the animals, while in *Aira da Pedra*, they slept in bedrooms. In this way the *Camposos* moved each year from being more Galician to being less Galician and vice versa, materially dramatizing the stretching of the *Berziano* spirit. To be Gallego or to be Leones are two opposing realities, but they themselves live by going up and down between the two.

Let us now return to the general analysis of identity in *El Bierzo*. Undoubtedly, a fundamental component of the ambiguity in identity in the western rural area is the fact that Galician is spoken in spite of the fact that the area belongs administratively to León. Although it would be difficult to

NOTES

1. *Associaçom Galega de Língua (AGAL)*, 1983.

2. English speakers refer to Castilian as Spanish.

3. At the present time, as a result of Conservative party policy decisions, the number of hours per week of Galician language and literature now matches those devoted to Spanish in all primary and secondary schools. Moreover, it is now also compulsory to use Galician to teach other subjects, in particular those connected with social issues, where language is so important. Official documents, as well as bureaucratic forms are usually always written in Galician, although forms in Spanish are handed out if they are expressly requested. In a minority of cases, the forms are written in both Spanish and Galician. Generally speaking, politicians and official authorities speak Galician in public and their subordinates are encouraged to do likewise. There is a great deal of campaigning in favor of the standardization of Galician. Programs on the local Galician television channel are normally broadcast in Galician.

4. These corrective measures included, in particular, special concessions to Catalonia and the Basque Country, both with strong nationalist traditions. These areas were also highly industrialized and, therefore, powerful regions in comparison with the rest of the country. In the case of the Basque Country, there was also the added threat of the nationalist terrorist group, ETA. One of the main arguments used in defense of the ethnicity and cultures of these two regions was the fact that they both possessed languages that are different from Castilian.

5. Of course, this does not win the approval of the more extreme Galician nationalist political forces. Although the content of the decisions is very often in accord with the political ideologies of these minorities, they consider it all as a strategy to put a brake on the authentic Galician nationalist movement. In this way, decisions which, if taken by them, would be highly acceptable can become extremely dangerous precisely because they are taken by the opposition.

6. *Associaçom Galega de Língua (AGAL)*, 1983.

7. *Instituto da Língua Galega—Real Academia Galega*, 1982.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Formerly, the two villages were entirely separate, a fact which is proved for them by each having its own church and cemetery and their being a boundary stone halfway up the track marking the boundary between the two municipal districts. The top village, the larger of the two, once contained two hundred houses and a population of 1,300, while the lower one had only 70. A plague wiped out the district, leaving just five survivors in the high village and three below. They decided to join forces as one village, spending the summer in *Campo del Agua* and the winter in *Aira de Pedra*.

Democracy and ethnography: Constructing Identities in Multicultural Liberal States
Autor Carol J. Greenhouse, Roshanak Kheshti
Colaborador Carol J. Greenhouse, Roshanak Kheshti
Publicado por State University of New York Press, 1998
ISBN 079143964X, 9780791439647
305 páginas
Traducido en Septiembre 2009 por espines con ayuda de WorldLingo

THE CAMPOSOS

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LOS CAMPOSOS

De forma más detallada, ahora miraré una identidad particular del caso en esta zona, un caso que ofrece algo especial a este análisis sociocultural de términos contradictorios. El caso se refiere a un municipio del Bierzo que limita con Galicia. Su gente, los Camposos, son absolutamente singulares, viviendo en dos lugares diferentes durante el curso del año. En el invierno viven en el valle de Aira da Pedra y el resto del año en Campo del Agua, encima de una pista escarpada sobre kilómetros. Para ser ciertos, otras aldeas próximas también pastan su ganado en prados durante el verano llamaos “alzadas”, donde hay tierra de labrantío relativamente plana. En sus casas de verano, acumulando el abono, podían fertilizar los campos próximos. Arriba en la montaña, hay menos casas que abajo y solamente algunos de los miembros de la familia pasan el verano allí, “Los Camposos” cultivan duramente cualquier tierra en el valle, aunque la mayor parte de ellas están arriba en las montañas. Es por eso que todos los habitantes van de arriba a abajo constantemente, pasando la mayor parte del año cultivando sus tierras y pasando solamente lo peor del invierno en Aira da Pedra. Cada familia carga encima de su carro con las herramientas de la granja, el equipo de la cocina, e incluso los muebles, junto con las gallinas y los cerdos.

Incluso considerando las características extremas del área, para el antropólogo, esto es una característica excepcional: cada aldea tiene su propia iglesia, su santo patrón, un día de fiesta local, y su propio cementerio. Tenemos dos aldeas diferentes para los mismos habitantes cuya identidad se distancia de la misma forma con la que bajan o suben a las montañas según la estación. Estas aldeas son tan diferentes como la noche y el día para sus mismos habitantes. La topografía, estilo de las casas y clima, son marcadamente diferentes entre ellas. Además, para ellos, las costumbres de Campo del Agua son mucho más gallegas que las de Aira da Pedra: *“Aira da Pedra no tira tanto para Galicia como Campo del Agua”*.

Campo del Agua está más cerca de la frontera con Galicia. Los pastores Camposos viven con los de las aldeas gallegas durante los pastos del verano. La mayor parte de las casas en Campo del Agua se cubren con paja mientras que en el fondo del valle, se cubren con pizarra. En Campo del Agua, hay varios “horreos” (graneros), mientras que en Aira da Pedra no hay ninguno. En Campo del Agua la gente duerme encima de la paja extendida sobre plataformas de madera promiscuamente cerca de los animales, mientras que en Aira da Pedra duermen en dormitorios. De esta manera, los Camposos cada año pasan de ser más gallegos a ser menos gallegos y viceversa: la esencia de la flexibilidad del espíritu Berziano. Ser Gallego o ser Leones son dos realidades opuestas, pero ellos mismos viven yendo hacia arriba y hacia abajo entre las dos.