

**Household organization
as an indicator of individual well-being
from a gender perspective in the Western Pyrenees**

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Abstract:

How much does the study of household structure in the Western Pyrenees help to measure gender well-being within the family house, in the pervasive practices of the stem family and of the house systems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Rural families in the Western Pyrenees, and the Basque Country in particular, have until today perpetuated a household organization, the stem family system, which has secured continuity to the family house (the Pyrenean House system) and well-being to its dwellers. As the Pyrenean stem family traditions imposed, two married couples (one at each generation: parents and one married child) and their respective unmarried children lived together under the same roof. The goal is to allow one child to marry comfortably into the family house, secure in this manner the full transmission of the house and land to one child, and provide retirement for the elderly parents who live in the house until death (and perhaps for the unmarried siblings living with them as well). As practices show, families have indeed guaranteed the well-being of the elderly (caring for them until death in the family house), but they have also provided for the children by settling some of them rather comfortably within and outside the family house, generally securing them stability through marriage (homogamy). Yet, some children have sometimes been sacrificed, excluded from inheritance, and encouraged to accept celibacy, which thus could endanger their well-being. It appears that men and women did not always have equal chance to well-being, despite families' attempt to provide for women and men equally and make up for unequal economic and professional opportunities outside the home. Indeed, as family size has increased overtime, families have secured well-being to aging parents, the heir or heiress and his/her family but they have had difficulty settling all their children comfortably, sacrificing some of their children sometimes, especially women, unable to secure them as equal living conditions and well-being as the heir or heiress.

To what extent does the study of the Western Pyrenean household structures and their evolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries help to measure the well-being of the men and women who dwelled in the same house (parents, heirs, and their siblings living together in the family house)? In the same line, how much does household structure tell about living conditions, family strategies for well-being, and individual destinies from a gender perspective? The study of household structure seems to bring out families' gendered-differentiated strategies to secure men's and women's well-being. Does the observation of family practices through the study of the life-cycle evolution of the Basque stem family system highlight gender inequalities to well-being in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

Keywords:

Household structures, the stem family system, the *house* system, gendered-differentiated strategies, retirement, marriage strategies, celibacy, living conditions, emigration.

Household organization as an indicator of individual well-being from a gender perspective in the Western Pyrenees

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Household organization in the Pyrenees in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the stem family system, will be here analyzed as a way to provide indicators to socio-economic and cultural changes in the way families have secured the well-being of all their members, men and women, over time. Traditionally, family or household organization has affected, determined, and also shaped individuals', families' and communities' well-being. The analysis of family practices and household structures over time can then give a clear picture of how families have dealt with individual well-being from a gendered perspective. Thus, this study on the evolution of household structures in the Pyrenees in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is one possible way to analyze socio-economic changes and new developments of family practices and gender treatment overtime. We will here see how household structures reflect family practices and more particularly how they have shaped and determined individuals' well-being, men and women, over time.

The traditional household structure of the Pyrenees in the past was the stem family structure.¹ It involves the full transmission of the inherited assets (the house and the land) to one child from one generation to the next and the cohabitation of two married couples and their respective unmarried children in the same house. This system results from the traditional Pyrenean "house system" which, since the Middle Ages at least², has given priority to the family house and protected its interests over individual interests through centuries.

¹On the Pyrenean stem family system, see some of Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux' contributions : "The stem family, demography and inheritance", in *The European Peasant Family and Economy*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1995, pp. 86-113 & "Les frontières de l'autorégulation paysanne: croissance et famille-souche", *Revue de la bibliothèque nationale*, 50, 1993, pp. 38-47 & "Household forms and living standards in preindustrial France: from models to realities", *Journal of Family History*, 18, 2, 1993, pp. 135-156 & "Le fonctionnement de la famille-souche dans les Baronnies des Pyrénées avant 1914", *Annales de démographie historique*, 1987, pp. 241-262 & "Les structures familiales au Royaume des familles-souches : Esparros", *Annales ESC*, 3, 1984, pp. 514-528. See also Agnès Fine-Souriac, "La famille-souche pyrénéenne au XIXe siècle. Quelques réflexions de méthode", *Annales ESC*, 3, 1987, pp. 478-487 ; Emmanuelle Le Roy Ladurie, "Système de la coutume. Structures familiales et coutumes d'héritage en France au XVIe siècle", *Annales ESC*, 4-5, 1972, pp. 825-846. Enfin, Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux & Emiko Ochiai (eds.), *Maison et famille souche : perspectives eurasiennes*, Kyoto (Japon), International Research for Japanese Studies, 1998 (to be published with Peter Lang).

² It appears that these stem family practices and more particularly the house system has existed in the Pyrenees as early as the Middle Ages (and perhaps before, since the Romans for the Basques), practices which were written down in the Early Modern period in the form of Customs or written laws. The Customs were the written format of family practices in the matter of inheritance, household structures, and other individual, family and community laws which aimed at protecting the house, hence the "house system".

Individual well-being was not ignored but secondary to the well-being of the house because ancient practices clearly valued the house, the family, and the lineage over individuals, men and women.³ In essence, the system first guaranteed the continuity of the family house and therefore the lineage, secondly the well-being of those who dwelt in it (the parents and the single heir and his or her family), and finally, the well-being of those who eventually departed from the house with a dowry in order to marry away. The system however did not systematically provide for all children equally, especially when families were large. Some children, more often women than men, were sometimes sacrificed for the well-being of the house (rather than their own). They were excluded as they were not all endowed and had to find their own resources for survival.⁴ The study of the stem family household system is thus being used here as an indicator of traditional family behavior to secure the well-being of family members, men and women. The focus of our analysis will be here on the nature of the well-being of those who resided in the family house, the older parents, the selected child and his or her family over time. Though, statistically, the stem family system was not the most common form of household structures in the Pyrenees in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of rapid demographic growth and urbanization,⁵ it was culturally the most common practice as it prevailed among Pyrenean propertied families in particular, many of whom have transmitted the family house and farm or business intact from one generation to the next since the early nineteenth century despite the Civil code and therefore parents' obligation to partition their assets equally between their children.⁶

³ Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, "The stem family in the French Basque Country: Sare in the nineteenth century", *Journal of Family History*, 1, pp. 50-69.

⁴ Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, "Succession strategies in the Pyrenees in the 19th century. The Basque case", *The History of the Family: an International Quarterly* (USA), edited by Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga & Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, Vol. 10, n° 3, 2005, pp. 271-292 ; "Pyrenean marriage strategies in the nineteenth century: the Basque case", *IRSH* 50 (2005), pp. 93-122; "Basque women and urban migration in the nineteenth century", *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly*, 10, 2, 2005, pp. 99-117.

⁵ See works by Peter Laslett on this issue. Peter Laslett, "Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in pre-industrial Europe: a consideration of the "nuclear-hardship" hypothesis", *Continuity and Change*, 3, 2, 1988, pp. 153-175; "Family and household as work group and kin group: areas of traditional Europe compared", in Laslett, P. & Wall, R. & Robin, J. (eds.), *Family Forms in Historical Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 513-561; "Characteristics of the western family considered over time", *Journal of Family History*, 2, 1977, pp. 89-115; "La famille et le ménage: approches historiques", *Annales E.S.C.*, 1972, 4-5, pp. 847-872; "Introduction: the History of the family", in Laslett, P. & Wall, R. (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time. Comparative studies in the size and structure of the domestic group over the last three centuries*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 1-73; Peter Laslett, Richard Wall, J. Robin (eds.), *Family Forms in Historical Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; Peter Laslett, Richard Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time. Comparative studies in the size and structure of the domestic group over the last three centuries*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

⁶ L. K. Berkner, "The use and misuse of census data for the historical analysis of family structure", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5, 1975, pp. 721-738 & "The stem-family and the developmental cycle of the peasant household: an eighteenth-century Austrian example", *American Historical Review*, 1972, 77, 2, pp. 398-418.

The questions which we will address here will concern the men and women who reside in the family house together and the way traditional family practices have evolved to secure the well-being of everyone of the residents over time since the French Revolution. We will explain how, in the past, the stem family system aimed at securing the well-being of the house, the family, and the lineage through single inheritance. Though individual well-being came second, individuals were provided for: retirement for parents and ownership to the single child (single heir or heiress). The system thus secured economic stability to the house as well as to the family and the community. In more recent years, however, the system has changed concerns. It has primarily secured individual well-being, for parents and to a lesser extent to the single child, rather than the well-being of the family house, property and business. The purpose of this demonstration is thus to show how and why the stem family system still exists today and is therefore an indicator of socio-economic and cultural continuity. Why has it in recent years evolved in a way to secure parents' well-being, a decent old age life for them, more so than the well-being of younger individuals, and more so than perhaps the well-being of the family house and business?

For this demonstration, we shall use the historiography and the data on Pyrenean household structures and families in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which I have accumulated in the course of many years of research. Most of the data are aggregated demographic data as well as family reconstitutions or genealogies on rural Pyrenean families in the past two hundred years. Using these macro and micro data, I will demonstrate that in the past the stem family system and the house system were indeed vital systems to perpetuate and maintain families' and communities' economic development over time while securing the well-being of those who dwelt in the house. Indeed, parents secured the well-being of the house, family and lineage through single impartible inheritance or the transmission of the family house and land to a single heir or heiress (heiresses more preferably over time⁷) while single heirs secured parents' well-being in the family house until death. This system is said to have declined in the course of the twentieth century as a result of demographic growth, greater individualism, and the national retirement system, most particularly after the post World War II baby boom period. Yet in more recent years and perhaps more in the future, the system might be used to secure the well-being of the growing aging population who, because of the small availability and the cost of retirement homes as well as declining old-age pension,

⁷ Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, "Les héritières de la maison au Pays Basque au XIXe siècle", *Lapurdum*, VII, pp. 35-55 & "Female primogeniture in the French Basque Country", in Emiko Ochiai (ed.), *The Logic of Female Succession: Rethinking Patriarchy and Patrilineality in Global and Historical Perspective*, Kyoto (Japan), International Research Center of Japanese Studies, pp. 31-52.

can only live a decent old age life with the help of their children and perhaps in their children's home. Parents' well-being is no longer one child's concern but all children's. Yet only one child often secures food and lodging to the surviving parent or parents, a responsibility which has increasingly fallen upon daughters rather than sons. Thus women have been perhaps advantaged and received an extra share of their parents' property not so much to continue the family business and secure longevity to the house, family business, and lineage, but to secure parents' retirement and make sure that they are well taken care of, sometimes in their daughters' homes until death. While in the past, in most Pyrenean communities, this was sons' responsibility, sons being generally chosen as single heirs, recently it has become more often daughters' responsibility, no matter families' social, professional, and regional backgrounds. Why did these changes occur and how? Is the study of household structures indeed the proper way to analyze these changes?

The stem family system in the Pyrenees in past times

In the nineteenth century, Frédéric Le Play was the first one to identify the stem family system in the Pyrenees, to measure it, to value it, so much so that he considered that the well-being and the development of families, communities, and also the nation depended upon its survival overtime.⁸ He called upon national leaders to make laws so that the stem family system may live, in the name of economic progress, national leadership, and racial superiority.⁹ Ignoring his political and racial arguments (which are hard to sustain), we may argue that Le Play was right to highlight the importance of the stem family system as a household form and the preeminence of the house system as a system to secure the livelihood, the well-being and the survival of families and communities. Indeed, the eco-demographic equilibrium of communities depended on the survival of the stem-family and of the house system in the Pyrenees over time. This process required single inheritance, cohabitation, and the exclusion of the excess population (Le Roy Ladurie, 1972). Only in these cases could family businesses survive over time. Single inheritance protected the interests of the house (the house system) and therefore of families. As over time family businesses were not

⁸ Frédéric Le Play, *L'Organisation de la famille selon le vrai modèle signalé par l'histoire de toutes les races et de tous les pays*, Paris, Tequi, 1871 & *La Réforme sociale en France déduit de l'observation comparée des peuples européens*, Paris, Dentu, 1878. Par ailleurs, Alain Chenu a rassemblé des textes dont un de Frédéric Le Play dans un ouvrage intitulé *Les Mélouga, une famille pyrénéenne au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Nathan, 1994 (new edition).

⁹ According to Frédéric Le Play, as early as the nineteenth century, the stem family system and therefore the house system was a vital system for Pyrenean families to survive over time as the system secured the economic stability and therefore the well-being of families and communities. The economic aspects of the system also guaranteed the well of the economy of the nation. Indeed, the house system secured progress to the nation. This progress was positive for the future of the nation and its people, and the preservation of the blood of the nation.

destabilized as a result of partition and successions (thanks to single inheritance), the number of family businesses in the community remained constant (unchanged), family properties seem to have never risked partition and the excluded children accepted to settle elsewhere, never endangering the economic stability of both families and communities.

Partible inheritance, as it was imposed by the Civil code of 1804, forced the partition of property assets between all the children, all equal heirs now entitled to an equal share of the inheritance. As a result, all heirs were in a position to demand their shares and to force families to sell property to secure equal partition, risking in the process to endanger the future of the house and cause the bankruptcy of the house, the death of the stem family, and the end of the house system. This division of property in areas of small ownership, as it was the case in the Pyrenees, threatened the eco-demographic equilibrium of communities. Indeed equal partible inheritance caused the partition of land so that a larger and larger population could legally have access to it but, as time went by, this growing population had to survive on smaller and smaller properties. The new law thus encouraged population growth and settlement in the community but its implementation brought greater poverty as time went by. Single impartible inheritance, the system which sustained the house system and therefore the stem family system, which secured household members well-being over time (older and younger heirs through generations) was then perceived by Frédéric Le Play and by Pyrenean families as the only way to guarantee the survival of the family house, business, and lineage despite the Civil code. This was indeed an unequal system because it secured the well-being of the dwellers: parents and the single child and his or her family but it excluded the others. At best, the non-inheriting children received a dowry to marry away or emigrate. Occasionally, they received nothing and were forced to celibacy at home, in cities or overseas (Arrizabalaga, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). Yet for those who resided in the family house, the system (though illegal if implemented as described in the customs) guaranteed their well-being from birth until death (Arrizabalaga, 1996, 1997).

The stem family system before and after the Civil code has definitely secured the well-being of the family house and therefore protected the house system and the interests of the house, family and lineage. It has also secured and protected the well-being and the interests of its dwellers: parents and the single heir. Despite the Civil code, parents have enjoyed all the benefits of the system.¹⁰ They have been holding ownership rights through life, they had one

¹⁰ In the Pyrenees, the customs have secured the management of the family house and land to the heir (as *co-seigneurs*) in the Old Regime. With the Civil code, heirs have become owners, in charge of managing the house alone indeed but also with the right to dispose of it, a right which was limited in the Old Regime as heirs could

child help them to make the family business viable and perhaps prosper (whether it was a farming or a craft business), and they were secured care, a decent livelihood, and a peaceful retirement until death. In the nineteenth century, parents enjoyed these rights and privileges better when they selected their heirs among their daughters, more submissive and obedient than sons, and perhaps more yielding than sons (Arrizabalaga, 2002). Indeed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite primogeniture traditions in the Pyrenean customs,¹¹ families changed their inheritance practices in order to favor daughters rather than sons, selecting their single heir among first-born or younger daughters rather than among first-born or younger sons. Traditionally, inheritance customs in the Basque Country, Barèges, and Lavedan imposed male or female primogeniture and therefore attributed all inheritance rights to the first-born son or daughter.¹² In Bearn and Baronies, inheritance customs imposed male primogeniture or the full inheritance of family property to the first-born son.¹³ In French Catalonia, any son could inherit the family house and land or business.¹⁴ In the nineteenth century, however, practices across the Pyrenees seem to have changed. The historiography has shown that women, first-born or younger, inherited more often than men in the Basque Country (almost 60% heiresses against about 40% heirs) and that in Bearn and Baronies, women inherited more often than in the past (still granting greater rights to men, two thirds of whom inherited the house and land in these two provinces in the nineteenth century).¹⁵ Were women selected as heiresses more often in the nineteenth century and even so in the twentieth century because they were better entitled to secure the longevity

not dispose of the house and land without the approval of everyone else in the family. Then they were not sole owners, just in charge of managing it and transmitting it intact or in a better shape to the next generation.

¹¹ Anne Zink, *L'Héritier de la maison. Géographie coutumière du Sud-Ouest de la France sous l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, EHESS, 1993.

¹² Alain Cordier, *Le Droit de famille aux Pyrénées: Barège, Lavedan, Béarn et Pays Basque*. Paris: Auguste Durand, 1859 ; Maïte Lafourcade, *Mariages en Labourd sous l'Ancien Régime. Les contrats de mariage du pays de Labourd sous le règne de Louis XVI*, Bilbao, Universidad del País Vasco, 1989.

¹³ Jacques Poumarède, "Famille et tenure dans les Pyrénées du Moyen Age au XIXe siècle", *Annales de démographie historique*, 1979, pp. 347-360. Jacques Poumarède, *Les Successions dans le Sud-Ouest de la France au Moyen Age*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1972. Alain Fougères, *Les Droits de famille et les successions au Pays Basque et en Béarn d'après les anciens textes*, Bergerac, H. Trillaud, 1938. Isaac Chiva & Joseph Goy, *Les Baronies des Pyrénées. Maisons, mode de vie, société*, Tome I, Paris, Editions EHESS, 1981 (see articles by Rolande Bonnain et Georges Augustins). Isaac Chiva & Joseph Goy, *Les Baronies des Pyrénées. Maisons, espace, famille*, Tome II, Paris, Editions EHESS, 1986.

¹⁴ Louis Assier-Andrieu, *Coutume et rapports sociaux. Etude anthropologique des communautés paysannes du Capcir*, Paris, Editions du CRNS, 1981.

¹⁵ On the Basque Country, see earlier cited articles by Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga on female inheritance. On the Baronies, see articles by Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, "Le rôle des femmes dans la transmission des biens en France", in C. Dessureault, J. Dickinson, J. Goy (eds.), *Famille et marché (XVIe-XXe siècles)*, Sillery (Québec), Septentrion, 2003, pp. 245-260. Antoinette-Fauve-Chamoux, "Strategies of household continuity in a Stem-Family Society: from heirship to headship", in R. Derosas, M. Oris (eds.), *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 121-139. On Bearn, see book by Christine Lacanette-Pommel, *La famille dans les Pyrénées. De la coutume au code Napoléon*, Estadens, PyréGraph, 2003.

of the family house and business or were they increasingly selected as heiresses because they were more apt to secure the well-being of aging parents, or both?

The stem family and individual well-being

As the house system and the stem family system imposed the cohabitation of two generations of blood-related couples (parents and the single heir) in the same house, all needed to be done to make sure that this cohabitation went smoothly, that relations remained stable, and that no conflict disturbed the well-being of the house and its dwellers. Women seemed to be the stabilizing factor of the system. The proof is that daughters were more and more often selected not so much for the well-being of the family business which sons-in-law could secure as well but instead, for the well-being of the parents and the peaceful cohabitation between two generations. Thus as time went by, it appears that behavior and practices have evolved so much so that families have become preoccupied with individual well-being rather than collective well-being, and women seemed to be the determining factor to this change. Men were not excluded by choice. They had other options (out-marriages, emigration) and seemed to do better than their sisters outside the home, many experiencing upward social mobility more often than their sisters.¹⁶

Though women as submissive and obedient successors of the family house were more often selected as heiresses and accepted to assume headship powers and decision power after parents died, they had rights and eventually inherited their parents' assets and later became household heads and owners of the family house and business. Yet they then had to share their authority over the house with their husband, expecting as their parents had that they would transmit the house and land to one child who in turn would secure them well-being by taking care of them and securing them a decent livelihood and retirement in the family house. The new strategies which families had to elaborate in order to secure parents' and heirs' well-being (especially daughters) at home despite the Civil code were complex. Heirs and heiresses received one-quarter extra share of the family assets as single heirs and then their legal share of the assets. By the time of marriage, they could at best hope to control half of the assets, another quarter being later acquired with the spouse's dowry (a son-in-law generally who then became co-owner of one quarter share of the assets), another quarter to be acquired together during their marriage life. Women were probably more willing to make the above concessions. They were single heiresses indeed but no longer controlled the family assets in the way heirs and heiresses had in the Old Regime. Besides, they had to house and

¹⁶ Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, "Pyrenean marriage strategies in the nineteenth century: the Basque case", *IRSH* 50 (2005), pp. 93-122

feed one or two unmarried siblings residing with them in the family house. Unmarried siblings who never received their share of the inheritance, who sometimes lived in the family house with parents and the single heir (or heiress generally) and who in exchange of their share were provided well-being (care, livelihood, retirement) in the house until death. The more prosperous the family businesses were, the greater the number of unmarried siblings residing in the house. The stem family system and therefore the house system in the nineteenth century guaranteed the well-being of parents, heirs or heiresses and their family, and unmarried siblings living in the house.

Aging parents were the ones who best benefited from the stem family system in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. They owned the family assets until death. Besides, they had one child and his or her spouse fulfilling the chores around the house to make the family business prosper. Parents had a secured retirement plan, being fed and taken care of by the younger heir or heiress and his or her spouse until they died. The younger couple was later secured full ownership of the house and land, after serving the aging parents and taking good care of them through life. When parents died, the young couple generally owned three quarters of the assets (one quarter *préciput* share donated to the heir or heiress upon marriage) as part of the marriage contract; one quarter share acquired with the spouse's dowry (equivalent to the *préciput*), and finally, 19 to 25% as part of each child's legal share of the inheritance upon parents' death (25% with three children and 19% with four children). The younger couple only needed to buy the remaining shares from siblings to reconstitute the entire holding. The stem family system therefore secured the well-being of the family house and business and it secured also the well-being of aging parents and finally, younger heirs. It seems that the system satisfied everyone's interests: collective and individual economic and social interests more particularly. For the system to work, celibacy among excluded siblings was encouraged. Unmarried siblings could live in the family house as well. They thus allowed the heir or heiress to acquire an extra share of the inheritance for free in exchange of taking care of them at home. Unmarried siblings in cities or abroad also sacrificed their shares of the inheritance, donating it to the heir or heiress for the sake of the family house and the well-being of its dwellers. Thus the well-being of the family house, as the stem family system imposed, depended on the well-being of its dwellers and the sacrifice of those who remained single in the house or left the house (as single or married individuals) with smaller or perhaps no compensation.

From this system, a great deal was at stake for families. Indeed there depended the family's wealth, status, and economic and social stability in the community. Besides,

communities' economic well-being also depended on it. In this context, individual interests and well-being were rather secondary. They came after those of the house as they served the interest of the house and the system. Individual decisions could not contradict the larger interests of the house. In any case, beyond the house, the first priority was given to parents and their concern for a comfortable retirement. The priority was first given to succession matters or the transmission of the assets to a single heir or heiress, second to aging parents' well-being and later, to the younger heir's or heiress' well-being. All decisions on the behalf of the heir or heiress were taken only to serve the interests of the house, its full transmission, and its longevity over time. The co-ownership of the house and business was a necessary stage to secure the family survival. It secured a comfortable residence first, a decent retirement then and finally, a peaceful death in the family house to the two older parents equally, men and women (heirs, heiresses and their spouses). Authority however was unequally distributed between men and women. As heiresses, women had to share decision-making with their husband who enjoyed the status of co-owner as a result of their contribution to the house with their dowry. Heirs' wives did not enjoy this status, though contributing to the house in the same way with the dowry. Definitely, women (as heiresses or heirs' spouses) did not share exactly the same rights and privileges as men (heirs or heiresses' spouses), though they inherited the house and land. They only did inherit more often under the condition to relinquish some of the traditional rights and powers in favor of their aging parents and their spouse. In any case, they enjoyed the same residence and retirement privileges as men. As for their well-being (residence, retirement, and death), they enjoyed the same treatment as men. At each generation, the older heir or heiress and his or her spouse benefited from the same rights and privileges as long as the house remained intact and undivided. Hence individual well-being in the house continued to depend on the well-being of the house.

While among propertied families in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the house system has prevailed until today, among non-propertied families, cohabitation was rare and consequently non-propertied families have never imposed the stem family and the house system upon their children. They had no house and no land to transmit. They rented farms and could have reproduced the same stem family system and caring strategies as renters. But, they did not because farm contracts were short-lived and single family contacts. Therefore, among sharecroppers, older parents' well-being, their care and their retirement until death was not so systematic. It was only voluntary. Older parents lived alone, in a separate household, probably not very far from where one of the children resided, yet they lived separately and

independently. Their house and property was probably too small to occupy and feed a traditional stem family household with two couples and their unmarried children. Only when incapacitated, it seems, did the surviving parent move to one of the children's house and die there. Cohabitation among non-propertied families therefore was uncommon, short-lived (by the end of life), voluntary and rather rare. There was no economic implication in the cohabitation but only a social and a moral one, to secure the well-being of aging parents, their care during their late retirement, and their accompaniment before death. Yet, propertied and non propertied families' behavior and practices have considerably evolved in the course of the twentieth century.

Recent changes and new practices resulting from demographic growth

In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Pyrenees have experienced an unparalleled population growth in the demographic history of this region.¹⁷ As a result of lower infant mortality and longer life expectancy mainly due to a better diet, a younger marriage age, and a lower celibacy rate in the course of the twentieth century in particular, families have grown larger and larger causing population growth with a rapid increase until the mid-nineteenth century, followed by a more moderate growth in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, then halted as result of the two world wars, but caught up again with the subsequent baby boom of the post-world-war-II period until the 1970s so that now the population is rather stable, still slightly on the growing side. Hence, since the early nineteenth century, Pyrenean population has grown more or less rapidly, some parts more than others (especially in isolated, mountain areas), yet generally on the growing side everywhere. Similar to other regions in France during the same period, the Pyrenean *départements* have thus experienced a moderate population growth not so much because of lower birth rates, higher mortality rate, and higher marriage age, but because of emigration, some regions being affected by massive emigration benefiting regional cities and Paris (urban migration) and America (overseas emigration)¹⁸. This emigration was thus due to better and greater professional and economic opportunities in cities and overseas but also to limited resources and opportunities in the Pyrenean mountain areas where few had access to property, could find jobs, and survive decently.

¹⁷Claude Gégot, *La Population française aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Paris, Ophrys, 1989. *Histoire de la population française de 1789 à 1914*. Vol. 3. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988.

¹⁸ Michel Chevalier, *La Vie humaine dans les Pyrénées ariégeoises*, Paris, Éditions Genin, 1956. André Etchelecou, *Transition démographique et système coutumier dans les Pyrénées-Occidentales*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1991. Théodore Lefebvre, *Les Modes de vie dans les Pyrénées Orientales*, Paris, Imprimerie Armand Colin, 1933.

The house system is partly responsible for this situation because it has remained prevalent across the Pyrenees, in different forms perhaps but everywhere, it seems, and over time, until today. One child has generally been given the ownership of the house, another has married an heir or heiress, and the others have been excluded as they have departed from the village or remained single in the family house or nearby. Hence a growing population in the Pyrenees indeed but limited by massive emigration and a population concentrated around towns and cities. Few families have forced partition, as the law allows. Many have been content with a “decent” compensation for their share of the inheritance, if at all. They accepted sometimes to give up their inheritance shares for the survival of the house, the longevity of the house system, the persistence of the family lineage in the community and the well-being of aging parents as heirs living in the house. As adults, married or single, non-inheriting men and women have departed from the family house to find employment, leaving one of the siblings to take over the family house and business, often a sister who could not find employment as easily and as good as men in cities or overseas. Men have often received a compensation for their share of the inheritance, smaller perhaps than their legal share but in advance of their inheritance, enough to start life with. Upon departure (overseas or to cities), they have signed legal documents acknowledging that they have indeed received an early compensation for their share of the inheritance with which they have been satisfied and for which they have agreed that they would demand no additional compensation upon their parents’ death.¹⁹

Family practices have encouraged emigration for the survival of the traditional house system over time, thus securing parents’ well-being in the family house with one child taking care of them through life and maintaining family ties and economic stability in the community. Parents have been taken care of, one child assuming the responsibility (often a daughter), the latter being assured that he or she would inherit the family house and assets upon the two parents’ death as a reward. The stem family system has thus perpetuated ancient family practices over time until the twentieth century, through the two world wars, and until the baby boom of the post war period when the population grew so much that most households structured as single family households, one sibling taking care of parents in the family house only and the others raising their own families elsewhere.

¹⁹ Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, “Succession strategies in the Pyrenees in the 19th century. The Basque case”, *The History of the Family: an International Quarterly* (USA), edited by Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga & Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, Vol. 10, n° 3, 2005, pp. 271-292 and “Basque women and urban migration in the nineteenth century”, *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly*, 10, 2, 2005, pp. 99-117.

It is in the post second world war period that behavior and practices have begun to change considerably. As a result of demographic growth, better economic opportunities, and changing social trends (the social security system securing health care to everyone through life and the compulsory retirement system securing income through retirement and until death), family members no longer need the mutual care and assistance for survival and retirement which they needed in the past. Hence new behavior towards more distant family relations, lesser care between generations, and therefore scarcer family ties, each household being able to take care of its members (parents and unmarried children), not having to worry about older parents who live in separate houses or married children who inevitably move away from the family house. Since the war, retirement plans have made it possible for now retiring couples to make ends meet and to survive without anyone's help. Indeed, the French social security system has been providing for the health coverage which people have been needing and for everyone, fewer and fewer families now taking care of aging parents, especially in towns and cities, and others using retirement homes to take care of aging parents. With children's greater mobility and parents' isolation over time, it has become more difficult for children to take care of their parents themselves and to secure their well-being at home.²⁰ The government has been providing for those who could afford and for those who have been needing help. Yet, with the baby boom population, now aging, though healthy upon retirement, the government faces major problems to be dealt with in the near future (in the next twenty, thirty, and forty years). How will families and governments provide for the well-being of the coming aging population who no longer lives as stem families and who needs to be taken care of, often isolated and alone, away from their children residing in distant towns and cities sometimes? Will stem family household structures have to grow again in order to satisfy the needs of the future aging population and secure its well-being? What will be necessary to secure the well-being of the larger aging population of the future?

The future of the stem family system in the Pyrenees?

With the number of retired people increasing over time to the point that within 40 years a smaller part of the population will work so that the larger part of the population can receive retirement pension, governments indeed face major problems to guarantee for the retirement and the well-being of this growing aging population. Besides, with the French government's policy towards less government intervention in social and economic decisions

²⁰ Though the trend has been for retired people residing in towns and cities to envision death in a retirement home, the most common trend in rural areas is still to take care of aging parents at home, as well as unmarried aunt and uncles in the house sometimes.

and programs (a global phenomenon indeed today), to disengage in all social programs in particular (health and retirement programs most importantly), there are many worries to make for the well-being of this larger population. Hospitalization costs are growing too high. Health coverage is declining. Retirement homes are too few and expensive. Retirement pension are declining and will continue to decline in the future as a result of a smaller proportion of the population working for a larger proportion of retired people. Fewer and fewer individuals will be able to afford a decent retirement and the adequate old age pension necessary to secure their own well-being. Now, the government indeed refuses to secure full and free care to all aging persons. As long as couples secure their mutual well-being, problems are dealt with. The 2003 heat wave was an example for future problems to deal with. Individuals, families and government officials have since then acknowledged the need for greater solidarity and assistance. They have learnt how to anticipate future problems with many aging people living alone and isolated, sometimes abandoned by their children. Can a modern society afford and pride such a situation? The heat wave has forced individuals, families, and communities to discuss these issues and to deal with them perhaps in advance. It has also taught everyone to anticipate future problems and planning old age. Can families afford remaining unaffected and indifferent to the problem of aging parents as more and more of them are no longer taken care of by their children and less and less by government institutions? Very serious problems arise when parents get too old to provide for themselves or when one surviving parents is too old to secure his own, or generally her own well-being. what are then their options?

In retirement homes, individuals must pay for the high cost of care (a higher and higher cost indeed, especially in private institutions), yet most wait until they can no longer take care of themselves at home and alone to enter a home. If the aging person cannot afford the cost with his or her retirement pension, his or her children are responsible for the payment of the share which the aging person cannot afford. Only if parents and children are indigent, or when the aging person is childless, the government assumes the extra cost. When a person has property however the government and retirement homes finance the cost of retirement with the property before children claim their inheritance. In the rural Pyrenees, the issue does not apply because children have assumed all responsibility for aging parents, as in the past, in order to avoid the sale of the family house to pay for a retirement home. One child, the heir, until today, has claimed the responsibility. In towns and cities, however, many families have sent aging parents to retirement homes, something that future generations might not be able to afford.

The more recent trend has been for families, communities, and the government to find solutions to avoid that children pay for their parents' well-being in retirement homes and the sale of property. Government officials propose specific solutions. To avoid the high cost of retirement in private homes, coupled with future declining retirement pension and greater government disengagement, families have had to discuss the issue and adopt solutions. The most common solution is of course for one child (generally a daughter) to take care of the aging parents at home or nearby (living one next to the other or in the same house). In that case, that child may be advantaged upon succession. Indeed the caring child might enjoy benefits as a result of his or her care for parents. As in the past, he or she might inherit the *préciput* share or the extra share which can be donated to one child, as propertied families used to do in the past. Yet what would happen among poorer families, those who cannot afford to pay for their parents in retirement homes? We saw earlier that these practices were and are still most common among propertied families as a way to perpetuate the house system. They are now becoming more common among non-propertied families as well because they cannot afford the cost of retirement homes. Therefore, the stem family system has recently appeared among non-propertied families. They now take care of aging parents at home in order to avoid having to pay for a retirement home for their parents. The stem family system thus has a future to avoid families' impoverishment and indebtedness, and to make up for government disengagement on the matter.

Besides, more and more aging parents wish to remain in their home until death and would like to have it in a way that they can indeed live alone or with a child through life. Many dislike the idea of a retirement home and view it as too destabilizing, uncomfortable, or as the place of death.²¹ The wealthy can certainly afford individual care at home, but what is available for the average Pyrenean and the indigents who wish to live in their home until death? Many possibilities exist for both the wealthy and the poorer families. Indeed, disabled old people may be brought meals at home provided by city services, the wealthier having to pay for them and the poorer for free (public social services assuming the cost of it). Besides, old people may have a city social worker helping in the house several times a week. Again, for all these public services, the wealthier have to pay for them entirely while the poorer have to pay a symbolic sum, one euro an hour. Thus, whether poor or rich, everyone is entitled to

²¹ Aging people dislike the idea of a retirement home as it is the place where incapacitated people live and where those who are invalid and about to die spend their last months before death. Retirement homes have therefore a negative image where many die within a few months after settlement sometimes. As long as they stay home, they believe that everything is fine. They just need extra help to make life easier.

these public services, which have considerably developed in recent years and which are bound to develop further in the future.

Problems arise when aging parents are ill and incapacitated and when they need larger medical attendance and care. Hospitalization may be then required despite the cost yet it may not last as the government refuses to assume the cost of long-term hospitalization. It thus provides additional services at home, for those who wish to be cared for at home. Doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists are all government subsidized services to attend aging people at home²². In the same way as the healthy aging persons discussed above, they may also receive help from the city and the region, getting daily meals at home and a social worker to help around the house. Everyone is entitled to these services, whether rich or poor. Yet, these services are to be paid for by individuals fully (if wealthy), partially (if moderately wealthy), or minimally (for the poorer people), depending on people's retirement pension, revenues, and wealth. The wealthy pay for all costs while the poorer enjoy these services for free, or almost.

In the most extreme cases (Alzheimer's disease or the final stage of cancer for instance), when aging parents need intensive medical attendance and care, they can still be taken care of at home, rather than in hospital. The regional government provides for a PAC program, providing the one child taking care of sick parents with a monthly payment to take care of them, to provide the necessary medical and daily needs and attendance. Again when families are poor, the cost is assumed by the government. When families have property, the cost is to be later paid for upon succession before descendants get their inheritance share. In the context of the stem family, the above government services have encouraged it, supporting the re-formation of stem families to take care of aging parents, as in the past, and no matter families' socio-economic backgrounds, thus limiting the cost of hospitalization and the construction of retirement homes. We are no longer concerned with the well-being of the house system, the survival of the family house, and lineage as a priority but now, the basic well-being needs to which aging people are entitled as human beings.

With the re-birth of the stem family system, on the rise indeed in recent years in order to take care of aging parents, new problems have arose. Social and health services have accounted for a serious concern of their own, the growing number of ill-treatment cases

²² In such cases, sick aging people get full health coverage and doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists get their services paid directly by the social security offices (the government). Thus, aging people do not have to pay for home health services in advance, as everyone else, and then get reimbursed. Doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists deal with the financial aspect of home care directly with government officials responsible for health.

among aging people, some 800 000 cases in 2004, 70% of which took place within families. They have noted that many old people suffer from psychological, physical, and financial abuses on the part of the family members taking care of them. This is indeed a serious issue, but a taboo one as well, now being brought up to the public and discussed. It is indeed an indicator of the quality of well-being among aging people and of future problems perhaps. The stem family system might be the household structure of the future to secure basic well-being to aging people but individuals must think about the conditions of multi-generational cohabitation.

With the number of retired persons growing in the next twenty, thirty, and forty years and declining retirement pensions, as the trend seems to grow, and families anticipating having to pay for their parents' care until death, what solutions will families adopt: the stem family as the most affordable solution, retirement homes as a costly solution for families or hospitalization as a costly solution for governments? The first solution might be the solution of the future, the necessary or required solution, hence a possible return to older family practices, those which were said to have been abandoned in the second half of the twentieth century, yet still prevalent today and possibly on a growing trend. But will the system secure the well-being of aging people indeed?

Conclusion

The stem family system and its practices in the Pyrenees in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have been in the past and today indicators of families' attitudes to secure the well-being of their members and more particularly of their aging persons. While in the past, it was a strategy elaborated by propertied families to secure well-being to everyone, transmitting all the assets, the house and the land, to one child, who then was in charge of the family business and of taking care of aging parents and single aunts, uncles, and siblings still residing in the family house while endowing several other children more or less equally to help them to settle as comfortably as possible in the early years of adulthood and marriage, today, it is a strategy that the poorer families envision as a way to secure a decent retirement and death to their parents, taking it as a moral obligation and responsibility to do so. Indeed, the stem family system is an old system imagined and adopted by propertied families to secure property transmission, the survival of the house system in the Pyrenees, and the survival of the family blood and lineage in the community, while securing the well-being of the aging parents, the heir or heiress, and the other siblings as well. This system is said to have disappeared in the twentieth century, which it probably did not. Yet today, the system

might be the necessary system to envision for the well-being of the majority of the aging population especially when families hesitate to see their parents die alone in hospitals or retirement homes. Such options may be necessary especially for very sick people, yet in most cases, retirement may be envisioned at home, an option encouraged by the government today in an attempt to reduce health and retirement costs. While wealthy families can afford comfortable retirement homes (still too few today to satisfy the demand) or full care at home, poorer people may have to adopt the stem family solution to limit costs (to be paid by the children after parents' death). The stem family system was thus a solution of status, wealth, lineage, comfort, and well-being. It is now becoming the solution to secure basic needs and well-being among the poorer people as long as ill-treatment does not appear as a natural outgrowth of these changes. If we open the discussion to the larger poorer population, the stem family system might be envisioned to help single mothers and the unemployed (as a temporary solution generally) in order to avoid poverty and desolation. This might be indeed the solution to greater government disengagement as the trend is to reduce social programs and services, largely provided for earlier but suffering government cuts today.

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