

In No-Man's Land. Community, Identities and Moral Lives in Depopulated Settings in the North of Spain

Angel Paniagua

IPP-CCHS-CSIC, Madrid, Spain.

Email: angel.paniagua@cchs.csic.es

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The purpose of this article is to study the different ways depopulation is reflected from moral or ethical perspectives of geographical thinking. The objective here is to determine how moral lives (that reflect different opinions about the situational justice, spatial-environmental identity, affective morality and individual trajectory) are maintained in depopulated regions. It has been acknowledged that socio-cultural traditions in each space orientate the moral construction of depopulation, both in relation to socio-ecological repercussions, and also to construction of the community, or in processes of intra or extra-area socio-political negotiation. Some case studies are presented which have been analysed from a qualitative methodological approach, which considers residence in the area, systematic observations and semi-structured interviews.

Keywords: Depopulation, Identities, Moral Lives, Spain

Introduction

Depopulation is an old phenomenon that goes back more than one hundred years in international geographical studies and appears simultaneously with other debates, such as the urban-rural relationship. Since it first appeared it has been tackled from different approaches in the geographical literature. Since it is considered to be a geographical occurrence, it can be tackled from positivist approaches—the most frequent—and also from cultural, and even moral approaches. Through these latest tendencies it is possible to reformulate the phenomenon, classically perceived negatively and associated with a loss of population from a given space—often to favour an urban environment—together with a loss of the traditional lifestyle, and to substitute these for more positive and enriching perceptions, such as the creation of new cultural types and moral lives in spaces that have a certain tradition of depopulation.

From the beginning of the Nineties, geographical approaches clearly started to pay heed to the lost, missing or disperse social groups, in an attempt to call attention to communities or lifestyles undergoing evident transformation processes (Little, 1999). Depopulation is one of the processes that significantly affects rural communities and individuals living in rural areas, and is commonly associated with significant social, environmental, spatial and cultural changes (Carson et al., 2011). The purpose of this paper is to make a comparative study of depopulated sociocultural settings as manifest from a moral perspective, and the dynamics of change in the constitution of different classes of individuals, creating parallel moral lives at the level of the microspace (that reveal different points of view about issues such as situational justice, spatial-environmental identity, affective morality and the individual trajectory) in depopulated and remote areas. This process has given rise to some of the major debates in Geography, associated with the spatial-society (community), individual-society (community) and individual-culture relationships.

Space, Community, Identity and Moral Lives in Depopulated Settings.

Community, identity and marginal space(s). Reflections on

community, identity, culture or moral lives are quite frequent in the field of Geography and there is no clear consensus about how they should be applied. Here, these concepts are associated with “marginal spaces” (Shields, 1991) linked to depopulated sociocultural and remote settings as a category that permits the creation of more open, flexible and even alternative frames of reference, making it possible to advance from the moral perspective in critical geographies that singles out the odd ones out, or those who are different or excluded. From a spatial perspective these refer to marginal or excluded spaces, not only from the perspective of urban spaces, but also in relation to other spaces not affected by a loss of population in rural areas. Therefore, the position of these areas in a space largely determines, not only its material conditions linked to a small population, but also the existence of certain social classes and immaterial identities, often constructed from this spatial position that is perceived, or may be perceived, as discriminatory (Paniagua, 2009; Carson et al., 2011).

Binary associations in the study of space have been relatively common in modern geography (Cloke et al., 2005), especially in relation to processes that associate dynamics linked to space with global dynamics. There has been a degree of controversy about studying marginal spaces from this perspective (Sibley, 1998). According to some of the more recent approaches the concept of marginal, in geographical terms in remote areas, does not exist. This would be considered an anachronism today (Nyseth, 2009:1), since these same marginal spaces have the ability to organize themselves and many people live in these areas because they want to (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001:225). From other perspectives, one common approach is to distinguish between geographical or spatial margin and remote areas (Shields, 1991). Not all marginal spaces are remote or peripheral (Brown & Hall, 2000), but this concept is linked to the existence of centres (of power or finance) (Conradson & Pawson, 2009) and concerns several positive characteristics that include: financial marginalization linked to agricultural decline, a reduced population, an elderly population, relatively few services and infrastructures, significant distance from centres of decision-making, resulting in a lack of power, a rural and remote character, and often the existence of exalted scenic values. In any case, all these

material characteristics are regarded differently, in their immaterial attributes, by different social groups and individuals (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Consequently, these kinds of spaces do not have a strictly topographical or geographical virtuality, but should instead be perceived as more of a cultural or moral attribute, constructed both by the communities and the individuals living in the areas, and also by the individuals or social groups these areas attract; even by people or social groups who do not live there but who may hold an opinion or image about the area.

Culture is a complex concept. As Castree (2005) suggests, in a geographical framework it is linked to a transformation of the material world into a world of symbols that acquire different values or dimensions from different people or communities. Consequently, culture or cultural processes mediate all or nearly all aspects of social life. In any case, as Agnew points out (1993: 262), experience in life is not acquired in the context of an abstract space, but rather as an interaction with a reduced number of people. Daily life delimits and endows with contents a social life conditioned by social groups of reference. According to Morris (2004), culture in geographical studies (rural) can be understood in two ways, either more associated with the life trajectory, mediated by beliefs and values, or characterised by the social group to which someone belongs. Both types of analysis are valid in the present work, since the former would be more associated with the different lifestyles that are embodied in the different discourses that compete or complement each other in depopulated sociocultural settings, while the latter would be linked to a discourse that concerns everyone—the community—who lives in a given depopulated sociocultural setting, determined by a reduced population. In other words, the former would be more associated with “lifestyles” in the area, while the latter would be determined by the distinction of the community in relation to its immediate and more remote context. According to Smith (2000), the community constitutes an association between locality and morality, and all the debates that associate community with morality usually do this in the context of a place. In the context of rural geography in rural spaces, a cultural change is more associated with aspects of rural life and rural spaces and places. There is a shift away from a concern for a material life, and a greater interest for the immaterial dimensions of the social life (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2004). One dimension of this change in geographical studies corresponds to the so-called ‘politics of place’, which can generate conflicts and restrictions in some rural areas and, consequently, condition different positions of communities, social groups or individuals in a given space or place, resulting in some disadvantaged situations compared to others (Philo, 1992; for depopulated areas Paniagua, 2009). Hence, marginalization processes relate to a given dimension of the others (Philo, 1992), and would be practiced on a daily basis but would not always have a clearly material substrate. Individual marginality has subjective foundations and is associated with a differential perception. Identification of the differences between morally significant people or groups within a community is a key issue in the study of processes or territorial justice. This shows that identities and discourses which are in a process of constitution, rearticulation and contestation around different issues that affect and can generate conflicts in depopulated rural areas “on the margin” constitute an important point of interest from a fluid or hybrid perspective. Here, they converge and questions are required that reflect the place they live in (Whatmore, 2002), together with a past cultural perspective, based on a view of the past in the present, linked to an undermining or change in tradi-

tional values and the loss of past lifestyles. From this perspective, attention to, or reinterpretation of, new materialities becomes significant based on the process of population loss, such as lost spaces, alternative spaces, constructed closed spaces or new materialities that function seasonally in depopulated areas. To some extent, depopulated sociocultural settings would reveal, in an extreme way, some of the issues of interest arising from the cultural transformation of Geography.

Place, Moral Lives and Rural Individual Microidentities

Very recently, Woods (2011) showed that the adoption of representation as a perspective in rural studies can reveal, not only the association between the material world and the discursive world, but also the individual and his daily activities—used here in the moral sense of the term—and can incorporate emotions that are often difficult to represent. Similarly, representation of rural daily life can help us to establish different perspectives from different types of individuals characterized, largely by their precedence (local, seasonal returners, newcomers) and their occupation, but also by their microposition in the place and the existence or not of a family structure. Sack (1980) describes how place is essentially a moral concept and should be analysed from a complex perspective, interrelated with the self and dominated by moral concerns (Sack, 1997). Individuals and social organisations in a given place interact and, consequently, produce specific spatial manifestations that generate a spatial segmentation of daily life (Sack, 1997), a perspective at least partially maintained by Holloway (2002).

In depopulated settings, it is important to capture individual’s daily lives. Consequently, moral or ethical approaches that go one step further than cultural approaches assume a greater significance, from the normalisation of daily lives in depopulated sociocultural settings to the emergence of alternative lifestyles in depopulated areas. Hence, we return again to the association between marginality and rural otherness (Philo, 1992). As Cloke indicates (2002), moral geographies relate to individual assumptions about matters of justice or injustice, referring to different issues in a given place and population. The place is conditioned by the moral positions of the different individuals living there (Sack, 1992). These individual judgments are composed of spatial and environmental issues, and also issues associated with the people of the community, and together constitute a moral perspective that conditions daily life, personal decisions and even professional conduct. From a post-modern outlook, debates on moral geography have focused on marginalised populations and places, which develop their existence in extreme conditions obliging them to confront moral dilemmas, which can be largely irrelevant for local populations (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001:245). Depopulated regions or marginal spaces may show, not only the perspective of “the others”, but also the wide range of perspectives or values that coexist in a given place or space (Little, 1999), resulting from a disparate decoding and value of daily life in marginal spaces with a reduced population. Ultimately, a given view of life and the conditions of this life may be shown in (material) conditions that are often associated with adversity (Sibley, 1995) and daily strategies to tackle these conditions (Pile, 1997). This results in a plurality of parallel moral lives, linked by unequal points of view about the cultural and material conditions of the place where they coexist, associated with ideas of justice, inequality, expectations and position in the community (moral relationships) etc., but also to an unequal and parallel experimentation of matters

difficult to represent, such as emotions, habits, experiences or expectations (Woods, 2011). In other words, different spatial existences can be experienced in each place, resulting from unequal sociocultural and material affinities (Bondi, Davidson, & Smith, 2005; Valentine, 2008). Part of the exclusion processes, especially the most extreme socio-spatial ones, are associated with different experiences of them, partly through the emotions (Sibley, 1995). This has already been shown in relation to marginalization processes affecting some individuals compared to others (Little, 1999), but is still being manifest within rural studies from a Geographical perspective.

This more moral perspective can reveal individual perspectives in relation to collective discourses, or discourses related to power in spatial identities, so can facilitate progress in the microanalysis of a place and of rural populations. Hence, it can help to establish greater levels of complexity in microrural studies, by enabling two levels to be set up, one associated with the construction of structural spaces that would be reflected in the identities (Lawrence, 1999), and another associated with moral lives that coexist in relation to competence, interaction and complementarity. Lee and Smith (2004) show that the moral values relate to specific populations (defined above in relation to precedence and employment), in specific places and which, consequently, are significantly affected by local circumstances. Some authors have considered this moral or situational relationship as a central axis around which an individual's identity is formed, and also to re-examine professional practices (Riley, 2011) in the form of lifescapes (Convery, et al., 2005). Hence, there is a certain plurality of moralities, which in the present text we refer to as "moral lives" in each place, and which interact in a permanent re-equilibrium under the influence of intrinsic forces that give rise to different interpretations of the concept of difference.

In this context, this paper aims to reveal, comparatively, the coexistence in different depopulated spaces (places) of various collective or community microidentities constructed in competition (situational) and collaboration with others, but also with collective expectations, upon which there have been superimposed a multiplicity of parallel moral lives, which reflect different points of view about situational justice, spatial-environmental identity, affective morality etc. Consequently, it aims to unite social, cultural and moral study approaches, interpreted as progression.

Methodology and Study Areas

Cultural and moral geographies are usually associated with qualitative methodologies (Crang, 2002), but for the present paper, the case study ground system (Creswell, 1998) has been developed. This technique aims to find an equivalence between the permanence of the researcher in the area (knowledge, emotions, interaction), occasional (events) and systematic observations (cultural dynamics) and the semi-structured interview about the individual's (moral) position in the area. This technique aims to increase the consistency of using the semi-structured interview alone, and to give an ethnographic character to the research, by enabling the researcher to "observe" and "experiment" with certain findings, judgments or emotions that are expressed in the interviews. It also permits a degree of ethical or political implication in the research work (Crang, 2005).

The selection of interviewees responded to a specific profile, or type, that was considered to be representative of the area, based on the experience of staying in the area and analysing interviews with local leaders. Several individuals were inter-

viewed within each profile in an attempt to reveal all the possible past and present moral perspectives of people living in the area (Leyshon & Bull, 2011). Memory was used, not only in reconstruction of the place but also in reconstruction of the interviewee's life until the present day (Jones, 2005). Therefore, the number of individuals interviewed depended on the complexity expected.

Interviews were designed as structured narratives in blocks and aimed to reveal, as shown before, an individual's perspective about the past, in other words, to place the trajectory of the individual in the trajectory of the place (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Attempts were also made to define aspects of life that were difficult to represent, such as emotions, feelings, perceptions about the future (Woods, 2011) and, ultimately, feelings that support a complex degree of contingency with the place (Davies & Dwyer, 2007). Hence, the intention was to reveal, in a special way, the variable value of the positionality of a given place (Doel, 2010). The blocks considered were: the individuals own perception of the spatial and environmental context, in relation to personal position, the perception of scale, linked to the position of place in a broader context, the identity of this position, the social-environmental substrate, and characteristics of the marginality and depopulation in the context of significant change, the value of the sociocultural setting, linked to the perception of authenticity and local cultural identity and associations between authenticity, identity and marginality, in an attempt to situate the value of the depopulation in the identity, perception of the alternatives, expectations for the future and relationships of power.

The study was carried out in two phases: the first in 2009, by field work consisting in staying in the area and contacting key informants with a position in the community and, secondly, between April and June 2010, by interviewing individuals with typical moral lifestyles representative of the area. The number of interviews of different types of people depended on the plurality, and continued until the categories established had been saturated (Creswell, 1998).

In order to develop a comparative perspective, two depopulated border areas were selected, far away from any significant urban nucleus, that were characterised as marginal areas (Figure 1): 1) The first study area corresponds to the Valderredible valley (Cantabria); and 2) the second study area corresponds to the Sedano valley (Castile and Leon), both areas are in the region of the Highland Ebro river, situated in the North of Spain between Cantabria and Castile and Leon (Collantes, 2009). They are two neighbouring depopulated and remote valleys, but with

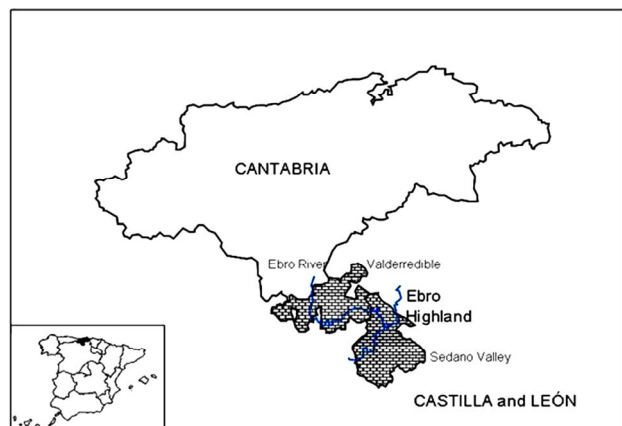


Figure 1.
Localization study area.

different socioeconomic and geographical characteristics. A total of 48 recorded interviews were carried out during 2009 and 2010, with duration of between 30 and 60 minutes and an extended stay with each interviewee.

Results and Discussion: Culture, Community and Moral Lives in a Comparative Situational Perspective.

As mentioned previously, the objective of this work is to study, from a comparative perspective, how community micro identities in different depopulated settings based on a situational co-construction, either in collaboration or competitively, are revealed and how moral views of the place are structured that reflect different perspectives linked to ideas associated with spatial justice, self-identity or relationships with the community.

Residents could have different perspectives related to different factors, such as their precedence—work premises, if they were descendents of villagers, immigrants—and also their type of work. Taking into account these two factors, different types of micro discourses can be established relating to lifestyles and moral lives and issues relating to spatial identity, nature, the community, the family and individual or group expectations for the future.

Case Study 1. The Valderredible Valley. Cantabria. Spain

The Valderredible valley is near the edge of the Cantabria province in the North of Spain and shares a border with the Castile and Leon province. It is a depopulated valley within a densely populated region. Since the Nineteen Forties its population has dropped from 8000 to around 1200 inhabitants, of whom only 700 spend the winter there. This has also resulted in it decreasing in importance in the provincial context, and to a degree of spatial marginalization. This decrease in population has been accompanied by a reduction in the area of cultivated land and a transformation of cattle farming systems, together with a timid appearance of tourism activities. It is one of the largest municipalities in Spain, with around 52 population nuclei (Map 1).

Types of Moral Discourses

Cattle and Arable Farmers

Valley Farmers, the exodus has resulted in a concentration of the remaining farms, resulting in few large farms of more than 100 hectares. This trend started after the mass rural exodus, at the end of the Eighties, by farmers renting or purchasing smaller properties from other farmers who retired or left the area. Arable farms are rare in a mainly cattle farming area and are basically dedicated to growing quality potato crops. Since the activity first started, it has improved greatly owing to mechanization, but still has a low profitability. There are only 6 farmers in the entire valley. It is very difficult to start this type of farming at present because of the large investment it requires and the only access to this profession is through family inheritance. On the whole, regional authorities tend to look after these farming areas, and the farming activity is only profitable because of subsidies.

Continuing in the farming activity is often regarded in the context of giving the children an opportunity to carry on the farm, consideration of the farming profession as worthwhile, and a degree of anti-urban sentiment “I couldn’t stand going to the city every day for just 700 euros etc.” (Merche & Ruerrero, April 2010). In any case, now the farmer is regarded with little

social value, in the context of a deteriorated sense of community and a largely mobile population.

Retired farmers. Some retired farmers still participate in the farming activity and tend to keep on the same property. They often describe themselves as almost the only ones left after the mass exodus. In social terms, life before the exodus was lively. There was a feeling of community. People left the area because there were few resources. After the exodus, there was often only one farmer left in each village. There are few of us left, but the farms now are bigger than before, around 10 - 14 hectares. “The ones who had to stay, have stayed behind” (Isi & Sobrepeña, April 2010). The farm is often cared for and maintained as a possible employment for returning descendants who emigrated to the cities. Keeping on the farm and the existence of descendants are regarded as a kind of refuge. If the farm is dismantled they won’t be able to return to the valley because of the huge investments needed to start the activity again. There is also a dependency on subsidies. When there are no descendants everything takes on a tragic air: “I’m alone here, there’s no-one left. I will leave everything behind me, I haven’t sold anything, I don’t even know if the farms will carry on. All the villages will disappear ...” (Mar & sobrepeñilla, April 2010).

However, now people acknowledge that they live better than they used to, they live as well as people do in “the city”. Although, the lifestyle is conditioned by the permanent residents. The summer festivities have stopped, the feeling of community doesn’t exist any more. If village life is to be maintained, it is also necessary to keep on the village committees, and for these be managed by the permanent residents. “Those who have left the village only come back for a month, or a month and a half, in the summer. Those of us from the village are okay, but the ones coming from outside are the worst, they don’t integrate with the locals ...” (Mar & sobrepeñilla, April 2010).

Mixed cattle and arable farmers in the valley. Most of these inherited the activity from their parents, and are sad to see their brothers emigrate from the region. They never thought they’d stay there for their whole lives, it was more of a gradual process, and then they realised that they could do this for a living. Now, life is on a par to life in the city, and cattle and arable farming is a common profession in the valley. There haven’t arisen many conflicts as those who stayed behind kept the land and the rights of those who left. Because of this concentration process, it is very difficult now for anyone to start farming unless they inherit a farm. Now the cattle farmers in the area are also the landowners, given that a viable cattle farm needs at least 100 cattle and each farmer needs at least 200 hectares of pasture. Before the exodus, there were around 40 cattle farmers in each village, and now there are between one and three. What these cattle farmers have now has been earned over a whole lifetime. In any case, at present, cattle farmers are just members of the community and their social recognition is linked to their receiving subsidies. The cattle farmers are the ones with the most interest in continuing the village committees, because of the grazing rights of each village.

Their future is linked to subsidies, from which they obtain 60 to 70 percent of their income, since production levels are exceeded by costs. This has resulted in a gradual concentration and selection of farmers.

Commuter farmers are professional farmers from the valley who live in the urban nucleus—the provincial town—and travel to the farm every day, about one hour away. Some of these have returned from industrial areas, they never totally lost contact with the village and started with a small family property. With the passing years the property and grazing rights have

increased by 10 or 12 fold and they now keep around 120 heads of cattle. They describe how their farms have changed greatly: there has been a shift from dairy to beef cattle farming, because of the grants, costs and reduced workload. Nowadays, you can only start up with a large farm. Everything has become concentrated and this is one of the main reasons why it's difficult to start up a farm: because of the huge investments you have to make. All the new cattle farmers inherit their parents' farm. Also, because of the grazing rights there is usually only one cattle farmer in each village, if another one appears in a village then conflicts can arise. They depend up to 60 per cent on grants and financial assistance. Moreover, cattle farmers do not tend to carry out other complementary activities, they refer to themselves as "pure cattle farmers", suggesting a degree of symbolism for their self-identity as a group. A cattle farmer is a common profession in the valley, there are about a dozen of them, but being a cattle farmer is still an idiosyncrasy, because of their association with the land: there is no urban-rural distinction, but there is certainly a distinction between the cattle farmers and the rest.

Opinions about social organisation tend to have a sectorial perspective in most cases, based on the land and grazing rights of the village committees. They express the existence of some problems with the seasonal inhabitants visiting in the summer.

Cattle farmers from the higher villages have always lived in the region and stay there because of family roots, tradition and lifestyle. They don't contemplate another kind of life and each day revolves around work and the cattle. In these cases, there are usually three or four cattle farmers who share the rights in one municipality, in a traditional manner, but with relatively poor land. It is very complicated now to start farming activity in these areas, owing to the high investment required and the low prices. The sectorial administration does not support this lifestyle but resorts to applying rules which are often difficult to comply with on a daily basis, especially those related to sanitation. Today, this is one of the reasons some farmers give up the farm.

Life changes from one season to the next. In summer, many of those who emigrated, or their descendents, return to the area. They tend to integrate well with the permanent inhabitants, although there is no real feeling of community as they live parallel lives. A frequent complaint is that there are less and less people and the population is getting older all the time. But to some extent they are used to living like that, with few people. "We're used to living in this way. The city also has its problems, not only the villages ..." (Fer & rubanales, April 2010). They rarely leave the village, only occasionally for some formality or other. They consider their job as cattle farmers to be linked to their ancestors and their roots, and regard this as something special, not only to do with material benefits. They often describe the village committees as being "for the cattle farmers' affairs", and associate this micro government of the space with a given lifestyle and activity. "The committees should be kept going, with the cattle farmers ..." (Fer & rubanales, April 2010). On the whole, the cattle farmers have lost some of their social prestige and strength because of the subsidies they receive.

Isolated cattle farmers are cattle farmers in the higher villages and are often the only inhabitant left in the village in winter. On the whole, they have always lived in the village. Some of them experienced a short period of emigration, coinciding with the urban-industrial exodus of the Sixties, but when they didn't find the right atmosphere for their personal development, "it wasn't for me", they longed to return to their homeland. The farms are a family inheritance and are mainly mixed farms,

and their management has been simplified and converted into cattle farming, in order to adapt to personal characteristics of the owners.

In these villages, there is a certain degree of identification with the environment "Where am I to go at my age. It's my world and my lifestyle, there's no-one to talk to here. But I can't remember Bilbao at all, although I did have a good time there..." (Fel & Renedo, April 2010). This is combined with a significant professional identity: "You are a cattle farmer by vocation, for the freedom of it, to be your own boss (...). In these villages (the higher ones) there's only one cattle farmer in each village, we're close to the border. When we pack up, weeds will grow over everywhere and it'll be like it was a long time ago. The Ministries don't realize this. Nobody wants it to happen. It's impossible to carry on this type of work, it's getting more difficult every day. Farmers have been abandoned (Fel & Renedo, April 2010)". Death of the parents and brothers or sisters has led to loneliness in every case.

Within the sectorial discourse bureaucratic problems are important, such as senseless red tape and/or the numerous requirements to be able to receive a subsidy and, worst of all, having to live off subsidies, being dependent on others. They also mention complications associated with the farming activity itself, such as permanent dedication for 365 days a year.

Daily life in the village is extreme and is characterized by loneliness on a daily basis: 'you go out to the street and there's no one to say hello to. None of the houses are open except for the summer when a few are, especially those of the retired people who come back seasonally. There is more social life in the summer, but the feeling of belonging to a community has disappeared. Their presence keeps the councils open and maintains the village rights.

New Activities in the Area

Recreational activities were initially associated with returning migrants and more recently with newcomers, both with different discourses. In the case of those returning to the area, this return was motivated by nostalgia, of feelings for the area. Opening a business means investing savings made in the city, but businesses have suffered because of the reduced population and the seasonality of tourism. They acknowledge that winter is difficult, and very lonely. They compare daily life to that in the city, even considering it to be of better quality, but largely dependent on having their own vehicle.

In the case of newcomers, their location in the valley is determined more by chance and they come from metropolitan areas. Their arrival is often based on the decision to improve their conditions of family life and bringing up the children. They fit well into the area, especially because of the small population, but also experience problems with the seasonality of business and valley life. They have often had to look for extra work to supplement their income, as their business plans are not completely fulfilled. Many maintain links with their place of origin. They are resigned to a neighbourhood feeling of passiveness: "there is no feeling of belonging to a community, it's every man for himself".

New Businesses are usually started by newcomers, who stay an average of 5 - 6 years, and are centred around doing up old village properties. In their incorporation to this rural life they value the environment and the possibility of being their own boss. They also value the setting for having a family and bringing up their children, and for the absence of disputes or squabbles in the valley.

Retired People

Seasonal retirement. These are retired people who share their

lives between the place they emigrated to when young and their village of origin in the Valderredible valley. Because of this, in Winter the village may only have two inhabitants and in the summer it can have up to 20. These seasonal retired people emigrated from the area to go to the cities at the end of the Fifties. There was a great feeling of sadness when they left, “we all abandoned the area”. From then until now, life has changed greatly “before, people had nothing, and now they’ve got their own cars, they come and go …” (ubal & serna, June 2009). The return to their place of origin is often motivated by their love of the area, or a wish to return to their origin and roots. They also value the community. During their time there they often grow vegetables and tend a few fruit trees. They describe how “people don’t meet up any more. The people in La Serna come and go, and mostly get together in August. The rest of the year, there’s no-one here. It’s essential to have a vehicle …” (ubal & serna, June 2009).

Permanent retired residents. These are retired people who have always lived in the valley. They remember a very difficult life when they were very young and then they recall working in the country. Living conditions were very bad and the village had around 50 inhabitants, we didn’t even have a road. During the Fifties there was a mass emigration. The ones who stayed behind did so because of work opportunities, they inherited properties or because they wanted to carry on living in the countryside. With the appearance of the tractor, farming tasks were made a lot easier: “the tractor did the work. In any case, until the end of the Sixties there was no mains water or electricity. Now, there are around 6 or 7 permanent retired inhabitants”.

Partially retired inhabitants are people who take early retirement but have never left the area and like life in the countryside. They regarded the exodus with mixed feelings of pity and envy, but then later their expectations were fulfilled by staying behind. “Those who left don’t live half as well as I do. We live very well in the villages (…). Some of those who have left really miss that. Now, we live better here than in the city …” (Osor & Hito, April 2010). They consider that to do well in the village you need to be able to adapt to changes and to have certain values or self-confidence that not everyone has. Nowadays, these people tend to feel that their quality of life is better than in the city, they have more freedom, a better place to bring up a family. Also, you need less money to live. However, they do acknowledge that you need relatives there to be able to settle down in the area, since most of the cattle farms are inherited. Now only a few of the young people want to leave. The farms have been passed down to the children, especially the cattle farms.

Case Study 2. The Sedano Valley. Burgos. Castile and Leon. Spain

This is a large valley located around the centre of the Castile and Leon province, which shares a border with the previous area. It has also been affected by depopulation processes which have reduced the population to around 400 inhabitants. It has been one municipality since 1978, when the 11 traditional municipalities of the valley were united under one council (Map 1).

Types of Moral Lives

Immigrants

Recent immigrants are those who arrived in the valley over the past five years by chance and have taken the opportunity of buying a house in the area and transforming it into a business. Their arrival in the countryside is a result of factors that have expelled them from the city and others that have attracted them

to the rural setting: the former include hard working conditions and the latter include the desire to make a living in which they can run their own business and be their own boss, and the fact that they consider the village to be an ideal place to bring up a family. This has resulted in a degree of separation from the urban world they have come from, which is often embodied and symbolised by the sale of their urban goods, such as their house or flat. They describe how they have similar possessions or properties to those they had in the city, but have freely chosen a new location and way of life. In spite of this, they still refer to a feeling of remoteness, of “being far away from everything”, which leads to negative feelings about insufficient access to essential services, or is expressed positively in its more social or moral dimensions. None of these expressed a feeling of isolation, but instead a mobile life based on a dependence on their own car for many aspects of life.

They often express a difficulty becoming truly integrated, since “the local community in the village and the valley don’t really welcome newcomers…” (Iñk & Val, May 2010). Sometimes they only feel settled in the area after having been there for several years.

The main problem they have living and running a business in these areas is getting through the winter months, when the population and all activity are greatly reduced. The population not only fluctuates seasonally, but also weekly. “There’s no-one around during the week, only at weekends or holiday weekends and the summer holidays”. This entire fluctuating population, “the invisible inhabitants”, cause problems for the permanent inhabitants, as they are not officially recorded on the census but increase the real demand for services.

The hippies are older immigrants to the area. They mainly arrived during the Seventies and saw the depopulation process as a chance for them to live an alternative lifestyle. Their reasons for leaving the towns and cities included not conforming to the lifestyle and idealising the rural way of life that was coming to an end, especially in areas suffering a pronounced depopulation process, and also a desire to be in contact with nature. Their choice of the area and almost-abandoned villages in the most peripheral and isolated regions of the valley was largely accidental. They arrived in tents and purchased “real ruins” of houses in very bad conditions. During the first two years they didn’t even have a car and travelled into the village by donkey, they had no electricity or mains water, but stayed there because they liked the way of life. Those who managed to survive the first three or four years have nearly all stayed. But, “… the truth began to sink in after a few years. At first we wanted to live like the local people, from cattle and arable farming, but then we began to find other ways of making a living. Some made candles, another had a restaurant, others made handicrafts. Cattle farming was a very hard and enslaving way of making a living. It was difficult to give up this idea. But then we didn’t have any worries because we didn’t own anything …” (Pac & Orbaneja, May 2010). They were referred to as “the hippies”. Now they have become integrated, many have had children and feel like any other member of the community. Today, they have restaurant and tourism businesses, and small companies dedicated to restoring property or making handicrafts. They consider that newcomers arriving in the rural areas now come for other reasons, they no longer share the romantic visions or feeling of personal exploration that they had: “When I arrived there was no-one here …”. For years now people don’t live off the land and trees and shrubs are taking over the farmland, but the services are much better and daily life is easier. “We have a different lifestyle to city life, we have better living conditions and

feel privileged” (Gal & escalada, June 2010).

The future is regarded as uncertain because of the natural limitations of the area and the seasonality, but they express a feeling of being satisfied with their lives, now people aren't leaving the area and the children have also put roots down. They acknowledge a feeling of community, although this is affected by conflicting interests of the permanent and seasonal populations in the area. The role of the authorities is regarded negatively, associated with too much regulation and paperwork.

Returned immigrants come back to the village to look for their own employment after experiencing work-related problems in the city. They have a different discourse that has a personal aspect as they have family roots in the area “now I wouldn't change this for anything in the world, I feel happy here ...”. For these inhabitants the area provides a refuge and an ideal environment to bring up the family. However, their discourse is also tainted with a degree of resignation and sometimes pessimism about the economic outlook for the future, “this region hasn't got enough for many more people” (Sus & Quin, April 2010), associated with a feeling that the valley is somehow going backwards, in relation to its tourism attractions and quality. This has created a feeling of uncertainty for the future. The main obstacles are the seasonality of the area and a shortage of dynamic activities. On the other hand, the authorities' environmental protection initiatives are also regarded as a threat to the local population. Decisions are made without consulting the local inhabitants.

Retired new comers are people who take early retirement in the city and discover the area without having had any previous contact with it. They are a minority group and the choice of location has been made after systematically looking around the region. The final choice is usually motivated by the depopulation, the relative proximity to the capital and the landscape. It often takes them a long time to settle in the area owing to the numerous administrative licenses and permits they need to apply for. This excess of bureaucratic procedures significantly hinders the dynamics of the area. Daily life is quiet, everything plods along slowly, but there are few expectations for the future and the feeling of community is becoming lost.

Small Businesses correspond to the occasional case of old immigrants who have set up small local businesses of direct sales and also some with international or global business. They chose the area by chance, placing value on the rural lifestyle, the small population and the quiet location. They were also attracted to the small size of the village as an ideal place to bring up a family and set up their first place of residence.

They usually combine setting down roots in the area, with a significant degree of mobility. They value nature, interpreting it as the whole environment together with an understanding of the loneliness of the place, and associate it with personal freedom and movement. The community is considered to be important for daily life, especially when it is free from conflict, in spite of the limited social life and small population.

They describe significantly better conditions compared to when they arrived. Now there are utilities: electricity, mains water and telephone lines, which weren't there before. They also appreciate the improved communications with the provincial capital, less than an hour away.

They place great value on the peacefulness in daily life, the little influence from outside, control of the micro space, extension of the self in the natural environment, and effective management of time. There is even a degree of mistrust of the wealthier visitors to the area. Social uncertainties are more linked to schooling of their offspring and mobility between the village

and the provincial capital.

They describe how the social life is conditioned by their jobs and their precedence: children of villagers, outsiders, and the ones who never left. “It's a heterogeneous society made up of few very different individuals, a more individualistic society, in which the demands are shared but daily life is not ...” (Mig & turzo, April 2010). Expectations of problems of rural life are associated with actions of the authorities.

The Farmers

Farmers, old and new, have a professional discourse, but also a rural and moral one, which varies depending on the type of farming activity and their age. Before the rural exodus they remember how all the land was cultivated, even the hill slopes and there were 100 farmers alone in the valley's largest town, with farms covering from three to five hectares it was possible to make a living. Now, there are less and less farmers, about five in the whole valley who need to farm large areas to survive. If the subsidies did not exist they would have to give it up immediately. Much of the previous cultivated land is now used for pastures or woodland. Only 10 - 15 percent of the land is farmed and the rest is uncultivated. The last farmer to start up in the area arrived ten years ago, returning from the city to farm his father's land and other land he rented. “... It's unbelievable that we have to live off government subsidies, we should all really close down. He sold the tractor, it's better to get others to do it for you, it's more profitable, this is a widespread phenomenon all over Castile and Leon (...), just one farmer can do all the work of the Sedano valley (...). It feels like the farmer is living off hand-outs. We're living off grants, the situation of cattle farming is getting worse and worse ...” (Gal & Sedano, April 2010).

On the other hand, the farming profession is also associated with ambivalence towards environmental issues. On the one hand, until the present day farmers have been almost solely responsible for maintaining the landscape without anyone's help. On the other hand, they also hold a pessimistic view about the problems associated with environmental regulations that have caused many farms to disappear. They describe excess regulation, not only for the professional activity but also for their daily lives: “you have to ask permission for anything you want to do ...” (Ber & Esc, April 2010). “When there's no-one here things don't get done. The authorities often hold you back, they don't make things easy, everything takes ages to do, there are more and more meaningless rules and regulations. Sometimes it's impossible to know all the rules, it takes a long time to get all the paperwork through ...” (Ber & Esc, April 2010).

Other areas of discourse are shared with other groups of individuals. They are also linked to the dynamics of the depopulation process: the small population in each nucleus, and the large seasonal population. The outlook for the future is associated with uncertainty related to the depopulation and agricultural policies. It has even been suggested that farmers may disappear altogether from the area. This pessimism is also discerned in other areas of work in the valley, especially tourism, owing to its seasonal nature. Now, 30 people work in the service sector and only five in agriculture.

Retired farmers present a discourse that is closely linked to all types of changes that they have witnessed taking place since their childhood. They started working on the farm early on from 7 to 10 years old and remember the harshness of daily life. They explain how, in most cases, they stayed because they wanted to, “I like the village life more than city life ...” (Jose & mora, May 2010) and also to carry on their father's work. None of them thought that they would end their days in the village, but they

never thought of going anywhere else either. They don't seem to have many worries now either, because the village life is coming to an end. A degree of nostalgia and melancholy can be noted in relation to changes in the landscape or associated with the population loss. Before the exodus, "all the land was cultivated, along the hillsides, but now it's been abandoned. There used to be lots of people, and now there are just enough. Only the vegetable gardens are looked after now, by the old people. But life is much better now, before we even didn't have soap to wash the clothes with, or oil to cook with ..." (jos & mora, May 2010). There has also been a big change in the lifestyle, in the family and religious life, also in the work, now it's easier because of the mechanisation, but subsidies have had a negative effect on the professional morale, which has led to less care and dedication in farming.

There is a subgroup of farmers who immigrated to small villages at the time of the depopulation and exodus and have not moved from there since the Seventies. They have brought up a family and have made a living there. These are exceptional cases of individuals who associate the community with the family and the constructed space to the place. One family, one village. They agree that farming activities are done better now than they used to be. They agree about the value of the depopulation, in living alone: "The city is for short visits", but they feel out of depth there.

Traditional Families and Tourism Activities

Traditional families and tourism activities. These correspond to traditional families who set up there to develop tourism activities. The decision to stay there was completely voluntary and with time they began to enjoy living in the place, because of the setting, family roots, self-organisation and self-employment. All this tends to be linked to a certain anti-urban feeling: "I only want to spend a bit of time in the city. I've got used to this life now" (Rob & Pes, April 2010). They do not view the past with nostalgia, since they have been through much worse stages, with less population, and more abandonment of constructed spaces and the landscape. They explain how the decision to stay was originally made by their parents, when they were born, in the Seventies there was no-one left. They have become the pioneers of the tourism industry. They have inherited family businesses and have adapted to new demands. They consider that it is possible to live off these tourism activities but only by working hard. They describe how life has a faster pace in the summer. With the depopulation process they envisage a problematic future, and the problem of finding seasonal workers. They also talk about a loss of community and relationship among neighbours.

The critical aspect of their discourse targets the public authorities and excess regulation of these areas that make it difficult to live a normal life.

Conclusion

This paper aims, from a cultural and moral geographical perspective, to show how "marginal spaces" (Shield, 1991) are a flexible and fluid category that permit the setting up of open and comparative frameworks of identity in the context of depopulated settings. Hence, in addition to their topographical characteristics, these areas have a cultural and moral dimension constructed by the individuals and communities living in the areas, and also by those from outside. In these spaces, it is useful to combine cultural and moral perspectives, as shown previously, in an attempt to study the coexistence of collective or

community micro identities and a multiplicity of parallel moral lives. Empirical analysis has revealed the existence of collective or community identities of different levels, among which variable tensions may exist, which coexist with moral discourses of variable degrees of complexity. It is, therefore, possible to argue that two planes exist, a cultural and a moral one, on the same spatial materiality. The first is associated with spatial and community micro identities that compete with, or complement each other or other places and the existence of a multiplicity of interacting moral lives in the place, of diverse level and relevance. In each study case, these are shown with different discursive contours and complexities. In the first case, 11 categories have been distinguished that present different individual trajectories and moral lives, while in the second case a total of eight have been identified.

Here it is shown how a representation of past and present rural life can establish the different perspectives upheld by different individuals. These are, largely, characterised by their precedence and permanence in the area and their employment, but also by their micro position in the place (central or peripheral) and the existence or not of a current family structure. Moral lives are conditioned by a degree of seasonality of the depopulation between winter and summer. This produces a segmented social life that is mainly limited to the summer months. The loss in population and the seasonality largely determine social relationships, associated to a degree of individualism and also the emotive memories of a lost cultural past. There is also a certain reencounter, not exempt from conflict, between the seasonal inhabitants of the valley and its permanent inhabitants. As explained above, the depopulation has especially affected the farmers, who now cultivate lands in better conditions, many dairy farms have been changed into beef cattle farms which has led to changes in the management of common lands. These new initiatives, however, are still limited.

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