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Inheritance and Inequality in a Spanish Galician Community, 1840–1935

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Abstract. This paper describes a socialization process that sorts presumptive major and minor heirs of agropastoral estates into distinct family roles and status groups. The discussion illuminates the ambiguities inherent in this process that give all prospective heirs some scope for altering their ascribed roles and statuses. It is argued that their success in this endeavor depends largely upon their ability to locate attractive life options outside their natal community and bring these options to bear on negotiations over the transmission of their family's estate.

The transmission of property is strongly associated with inequality in many European peasant communities. Village parents in Pyrenean and Alpine districts (Bourdieu 1962, 1976; Cole and Wolf 1974; Collomp 1984; Douglass 1975), Germany (Berkner 1977; Golde 1975), large parts of Western Ireland (Arensberg 1968; Scheper-Hughes 1979), and other regions (Berkner 1972; Hansen 1977; Lisón 1974, 1977; O'Neill 1983; Vernier 1984) commonly assign their children unequal rights, duties, and legacies with reference to cultural norms that define the ideal characteristics of major and minor heirs. Individual offspring typically function outside their families in accordance with their places in these domestic orders of precedence. Their differential public behavior furthers the development of distinct status groups at the community level.

This sorting of offspring into distinct family roles and status groups is an ongoing process subject to the changing interests, claims, and capabilities of property owners and their expected heirs (see Medick and Sabeian 1984: 16). Customary practice may initially motivate parents to designate the eldest son as their expected major heir (e.g., Bourdieu 1962; Collomp 1984; Lisón 1974), but they usually retain the right to replace this child at a later date with a more promising successor. In most preferential inheritance societies,

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parents aim their strategies for transmitting their estates at improving the social positions of their families (e.g., Bourdieu 1976: 122; Lisón 1974: 74; Vernier 1984: 40). They tend to encourage all their children to compete for larger portions of their estates and to hope for individual advancement on the basis of their relative contributions to the realization of this aim (see Scheper-Hughes 1979: 163–85). This underscores the equivocal statuses of individual heirs-to-be and the uncertain paths of specific family histories.

A key issue underlying the negotiation of differential heirship statuses is the relative power of actors bargaining over the transmission of an estate. Among nineteenth-century European peasants, ownership of land was the premier source of power. This reinforced the domination of parents over children, major heirs over minor heirs, and largeholders over smallholders. However, villagers with subordinate statuses might strive to improve their life options by exploiting resources outside the purview of local power holders. They sometimes prospered in this endeavor as a result of exceptional abilities or exceptional circumstance. Witness the successful transatlantic migrants (*indianos*) of nineteenth-century Northern Spain (Ferrer del Río 1851: 16–20; Kasdan 1965; Kenny 1976). Those who returned to Spain and settled in their natal communities were often able to negotiate new heirship or family statuses with unexpected strength. As a result, social differentiation produced by inheritance processes acted back upon domestic relations.

In the following pages, I analyze the relationship between inheritance practices and inequality in a local context. I describe the family and inheritance systems of the villagers of the Sierra del Caurel, an agropastoral district in the Spanish province of Lugo, as constituted in the century prior to the Spanish Civil War. This period is characterized by relatively stable patterns of behavior that formed in the early decades of the nineteenth century and changed substantially after the war. My description focuses on the socialization process whereby the members of an offspring set are distinguished as individuals and social actors by their recognized claims to major and minor shares of their parents' estate. I show how these claims are negotiated by parents and their children with reference to interacting norms that emphasize the precedence of eldest sons, the required competencies of major and minor heirs, and the integrity of patrimonies. My aim is to reveal how inequality develops within particular families, is extended to and reinforced at the community level, and is transmitted between generations.

The Inheritance System

Property and family in the Sierra del Caurel are bound together in a complex conceptualized by Caurelaos—the inhabitants of the sierra—in the notion of the *casa* (house) (see Lisón 1974, 1977). The *casa* centers on an agropastoral estate composed of real property and connected rights in the communal do-

main. Preferential inheritance practices tend to perpetuate a link between this estate and a particular family line. This link is the essence of the *casa*.

Cultural norms favor a single child in each generation of a family as the major heir of the *casa*. This child receives the *millora* (improvement) from each of his parents. The *millora* typically comprises “the third and the fifth” (*el tercio y quinto*) or (after the establishment of the Spanish Civil Code in 1889) two-thirds of the parents’ estate. All children in a family, including the major heir, share equally in their parents’ residual estate. Consequently, even in a large offspring set, a *millorado* (improved heir) inherits the bulk of his house’s patrimony.

This customary division of property sharply differentiates the life chances of major and minor heirs within a given family. The *millora* enables the major heir to become a fully enfranchised community member: it ideally gives him a complete and viable farmstead, the right and obligation “to marry in his natal house” (*casarse en casa*), and the right and duty to speak for his *casa*. The *legítimas* (legally required minimal inheritance shares) of minor heirs secure their place in Caurel’s domestic economy and simultaneously restrict their claims on community and *casa*. *Legítimas* ideally serve to capitalize minor heirs’ marriages with major heirs of other *casas*, support their independent farming or business ventures, or otherwise provide them livelihoods of their own. In practice, minor heirs often remain lifelong dependents of their natal *casas*—as celibate residents, seasonal migrant laborers, or operators of exiguous farms supported by their favored sibling.

Cultural preferences identify the ideal major heir of a *casa*. Lisón describes Caurel and adjacent mountain districts of eastern Lugo province as the portion of the region of Galicia in which the “patrilineal and patrilocal *millora*” is most deeply embedded (1977: 175). He goes on to say that in principle “one tends to marry an eldest son *en casa*, whether or not he is the first offspring, or at least a son of any kind; in case there are no [sons], it is a daughter, preferably the eldest, who receives the *manda*” (i.e., *millora*) (1977: 175). To what extent are these cultural preferences realized in practice?

Consider the sex and birth rank of individuals who were married *en casa* in the parish of San Juan de Seoane in 1940. I identified a total of 48 such apparent major heirs (or heirs-to-be) in Caurel’s *Padrón Municipal*, the township’s household register (Ayuntamiento 1940). All of these individuals had at least one surviving sibling; all but six had two or more. Twenty-seven (56 percent) were eldest sons. Sixteen of the 22 who remained were daughters. It is significant that half of these favored daughters were eldest children.

The order of preference for major heirs suggested by the 1940 *Padrón* approximates Lisón’s observation. Despite the myriad factors that tend to constrain agreement between cultural norms and practice—among them, the absence of male offspring, the incapacity or disinclination of eldest sons, conflicts between parents and their children—it is clear that eldest sons are

favored as major heirs (see Douglass 1975: 45). It is less obvious that in lieu of a qualified eldest son, Caurelaos normally prefer a younger son as major heir over any daughter. However, this preference is manifest in the remarks of informants: the owner of a farmstead in Villasivil, for example, observed that women by nature lacked the ability to govern a house and therefore ought to be denied the millora. It is also made plain in certain testaments, like the will of Gervasio Touzón, which states that if the donor's eldest son dies without "legitimate succession" of his own, the millora is to be transmitted to his other offspring "by the order of oldest to youngest, and with preference for males over females" (Carballo Rivera 1858: 152).

While I am aware of no testaments that prescribe that females are to be favored over males as major heirs, some, after conditionally bestowing the millora upon an eldest son, establish a contingent order of succession that follows the order of births without regard to the sex of substitute millorados (Carballo Rivera 1839: 5; Rodríguez Fuentes 1891). This suggests that birth order per se was a fundamental consideration in the designation of a major heir. Indeed, a general preference for older over younger children made "structural" sense in Caurel. Given a traditionally late age at marriage (in the period 1835–1939, a mean age at first marriage for women of 26.1 years, for men 30.9 years), parents were often of advanced age by the time their children matured. They were concerned to marry a child en casa in order to provide themselves with a caretaker and in order to perpetuate their patrimony and family line. They endeavored to install this child as an expectant major heir as soon as they were able. Ideally, this facilitated their control of the transmission process. It also helps to explain why eldest children who were daughters were sometimes favored over sons as major heirs.

The cultural dominance of male primogeniture gave a first-born son the greatest possibility of becoming a major heir, but it did not assure him of this status. The primary objective of the donors of agropastoral estates was to preserve and augment their casas. To assure their success in this enterprise, it was essential that major heirs be able house administrators and progenitors of the next generation in their family lines. Pierre Bourdieu's observations concerning "the right of eldership" in the French Pyrenean district of Béarn are applicable to Caurel:

It appears then that this right is not precisely attached to a particular person, male or female, first- or second-born, but to a socially defined function; the right of eldership is less a right of property than the right, or better, the obligation to act as a proprietor. . . . It is necessary therefore that the eldest is capable not only of exercising his right but of assuring its transmission. (1962: 36)

A child had to demonstrate certain capabilities before his status as major heir was assured. If a donor bequeathed an estate to immature heirs, he might name a specific major heir only under the condition that this child "turned out

well.” Hence, Ramón Morales of Seoane declared on his deathbed that his twelve-year-old daughter, the eldest of his four children, all of them girls, was to be the major heir of his estate unless she failed to develop “in good conditions” (Morales Valcarcel 1891). If this failure occurred, the major heirship was to pass to his second-born child. Similarly, Antonia López Fernández named her youthful grandson Domingo her major heir under the conditions that he evinced the qualities of “good behavior, customs, and obedience to his parents,” and eventually married *en casa* (Carballo Rivera 1861: 202). Alternatively, a donor whose children were very young might simply leave the choice of the major heir to his spouse. Francisco Touzón, the father of four daughters aged one to ten, declared that if he died his wife was to prefer “with the third and the fifth” of his considerable possessions the child “who for her good talents” came to merit it (Carballo Rivera 1864: 187).

The uncertainty of a putative major heir’s status was often prolonged by the tendency of parents to control their farms until the last possible moment. Wills were frequently made on the deathbeds of donors or in conjunction with the wills of dying spouses. The majority of testaments I read in private and notarial archives were bequeathed under these conditions. They were always subject to modification in the lifetime of the donor; cases of the revocation of *milloras* bequeathed in written testaments or verbally promised children already married *en casa* were once common and are widely known in Caurel. Elderly fathers typically managed their farms as long as they were physically able to do so. The degree to which they delegated authority to their expected successors varied, but they inevitably retained ultimate control of their estates.

This chronic uncertainty concerning parents’ bequests encouraged the subordination of all children in a given family. An eldest son who consistently disobeyed his parents risked the loss of a substantial inheritance and the key privileges that accompanied the *millora*. Real or threatened revocations of this child’s favored status implicitly offered junior sons and daughters the possibility of becoming their parents’ major heir.

Moreover, just as parents could use the *millora* to shape the life course of their expected major heir, they were able to manipulate dowries to shape the life courses of their remaining heirs. They might promise to bestow a sizable gift upon an especially worthy or devoted child who agreed to settle in a propitious marriage. Parents typically paid out such a dowry in several installments, adjusting the size and timing of these to the nature of their continuing relationship with the child. Since parents commonly arranged their children’s marriages with an eye toward establishing useful alliances with other *casas*, they rarely dowered children who chose to marry on their own. Such independent offspring were forced to await the death of their parents in order to share in the division of the parental estate.

It may be argued, then, that although parents customarily ascribed differential heirship rights to their children according to their sex and order of birth, they ultimately assigned their children heirship statuses according to

their behavior and achievements. Most parents viewed their children with some measure of detachment, constantly weighing each child's demonstrated abilities and inclinations against those of their other children. They deliberately cultivated a measure of ambiguity concerning the ultimate disposition of their estates. They endeavored thereby to augment their control of their farm, their household, and the future of their casa.

The tension between cultural norms that identify the ideal major heir and the demands placed on this heir is still evident in contemporary parent-child relationships. The degree to which modern parents express it varies substantially. Some parents are always equivocal in discussing the millora in the presence of their offspring and contend that the most competent and obedient from among them will be chosen as millorado. Others are more straightforward, like the woman from Paderne who explained inheritance practice to me in the presence of her two children, both daughters. She pointed to the older of the two and said: "The manda belongs to her, and that's the way it should be . . . but if things go wrong [that is, if the eldest child does not prove deserving] it may be given to her sister."

Caurelaos' strategies for differentiating children's heirship statuses within particular families interact with inequality at the community level in two important ways. First, parents' efforts to influence their children's behavior and achievements tend to succeed in proportion to their wealth. In general, parents with large estates are better able to offer desirable livelihoods to their children than are parents with small estates. Consequently, wealthy parents usually have more intrinsic influence over their children's life choices than poor parents. This difference is reflected in the superior ability of wealthy families to realize cultural norms governing domestic relations and succession. Second, the process of sorting children according to differential rights to an agropastoral estate has the effect of separating them into distinctly advantaged social groups. Those who become major heirs constitute the community's leading members—its principal farm owners, heads of casas, and administrators of public affairs. Minor heirs who marry into established casas become subordinate partners of this dominant group. Other minor heirs are typically reduced to more marginal statuses as dependents or clients of major heirs. In Caurel, as in the Tyrolean villages studied by Cole and Wolf, "the inheritance process thus has vital public dimension: it continuously creates and recreates the conditions for the recruitment of the village core population, while creating the conditions for the development of a village fringe population and for the expulsion of supernumeraries" (1974: 204).

Incorporation of Children in the Domestic Labor Force

As long as the agropastoral enterprise provided Caurelaos with their most attractive life options, parents ideally prepared all their children to become

farmers and herders. Their efforts to achieve this were conditioned by their desire to choose a single child as their major heir, by preferential norms that identified this heir and the special role he was to play in the *casa*, and by the need for labor in the domestic economy.

As they matured, children were ordinarily assigned increasingly complex and varied domestic work roles. Prior to adolescence—many *Caurelaos* say as early as six, seven, or eight years of age—boys and girls regularly pastured their families' cattle, goats, and sheep. As they grew older, boys learned to drive oxen, plow and harrow, reap, stack, and thresh grain, and mow hay; girls learned to care for barnyard animals (calves, pigs, chickens, and rabbits), tie grain into sheaves, tend garden vegetables, spin wool and flax, and cook and clean. In a family whose sexual composition was skewed or in a family with extraordinary labor needs, a boy or girl might be assigned tasks ordinarily given to a child of the opposite sex. However, only boys were trained to manage the public affairs of *casas*. Adolescent boys often learned to barter in the market, deal with local governments and courts, and negotiate exchanges of goods and labor with their neighbors by gradually assuming these responsibilities under the charge of their fathers, but girls rarely acted independently in these domains.

Cultural norms conditioning the selection of a major heir were manifest in parental discrimination among children as workers. Parents wished their principal successor to demonstrate a proper "zeal . . . toward the care and governance of the House" (Doval Ribera 1868). Pedro Méndez of the *Casa de Lelo*, born in 1908 and the first of six children, recalled that although his parents never stated explicitly their preference for a major heir, they made him aware that they favored him by demanding more of his work than they did from the work of his siblings. He was expected to work longer, harder, and with more skill, and he engaged in a broader range of activities. He often accompanied his father to livestock fairs and, in time, was permitted to purchase, raise, and resell a number of his own cattle. Like many other parents, Pedro's father and mother openly compared the work of their eldest son with that of his siblings. Their intention was to suggest his special status and simultaneously indicate that it could be revoked.

The tension produced by parents' tendency to play off their children against each other in this way usually encouraged the latter's obedience and proficiency, but it occasionally provoked a child's rupture with his parents and siblings. Pedro Méndez and a few other eldest sons with whom I spoke forsook the *millora* and struck out on their own as a consequence of their parents' excessive demands on their labor. Such rebellious children are usually seen by villagers as having suffered as a consequence of their refractory behavior. I was told, for example, of a putative major heir of the *Casa de Seijoo* who insisted on marrying his sweetheart over his parents' objections. He was denied the *millora* and was left to raise his children in a tumble-down shack

on a meager estate at the side of his natal casa. Accounts of such failures in the parent-child relationship often take on a common aspect of legends: they depict perennial generational conflicts and the expected manner in which these conflicts are resolved.

While an eldest son tended to be increasingly involved in his parents' farm over time, his siblings tended to be gradually pushed into more marginal roles in the family's agropastoral enterprise. Junior sons were the principal laborers in village systems of mutual aid. They spent many days each year guarding communal flocks, manning road and irrigation works, and tilling outfields in cooperative work crews. Adolescent junior sons and daughters often worked as wage laborers in Caurel's iron industry and on lowland commercial farms during slack periods in the cycle of agropastoral activities. This wage work had several important functions: it enabled an ambitious household to exploit a variety of niches in the larger economy for the good of the casa as a whole, gave prospective minor heirs scope for developing a measure of independence, and affirmed the latter's status as supernumerary household members.

The last children to come of age in a family were least favored in the household division of labor. Given the continuous need for herders in most households, the youngest children in completed families were often permanently assigned the task of pasturing animals. A household regularly employed at least one herder for its cattle and often employed three in the winter: one tending oxen and cows in lowland heaths, another guarding goats and sheep in more marginal upland terrain, still another taking pigs to scour for chestnuts. Late-born children were the last additions to an expanded domestic labor force able to support a larger number of animals. Consequently, they tended to be inordinately burdened with the work of herding.

Caurelaos frequently relate stories of younger brothers or sisters being repeatedly forced to remain at home guarding livestock while privileged older brothers went to school, fairs, or feasts. In general, the experiences of such disfavored siblings were relatively limited. I have spoken to elderly villagers who attribute their remarkable ignorance of the world outside their villages to lives spent herding animals in highland moors. Some of the women in this group have never left Caurel, while the outside travels of the men are often confined to one or two brief stints as rural wage laborers during their youths. The clarity with which these men tend to recall their sojourns outside Caurel—they continue to marvel at what they saw long ago in the countryside of Castile, Asturias, or France—attests to the relatively narrow range of their experience.

The meshing of family cycles and herding regimes often impaired the life chances of late-born children. Those permanently relegated to the role of herder frequently remained lifetime bachelors or spinsters, their plight an outcome of their early separation from full involvement in their society. Some

of these individuals came to be regarded by other villagers as especially uncultured people. The speech of one elderly herder is likened by his neighbors to the noise of an animal. The reputed fearlessness of another is described as inhuman, resembling the boldness of wolves. Guarding livestock—in particular, goats and sheep—is considered by Caurelaos to be the most degrading form of farm work (see Freeman 1979). Seen as the rightful province of young children and handicapped adults, guarding livestock is an occupation associated with people who are not fully competent as social beings and unable to exercise the full range of social prerogatives.

Parents who were poor and could not support all their children—parents with exiguous agropastoral estates—often placed some of their sons and daughters in other households as domestic servants. This arrangement enabled the children to earn their keep until they secured places in their native *casas*, acquired the means to establish their own *casas*, or chose to emigrate. Carmen Gancedo, the younger of two daughters born in an indigent family of Ferreirós, recounted how she had worked at various times in her youth as a servant. During her early and middle teens, her father placed her successively in the households of a bachelor farmer in Meiraos, a doctor in Seoane, and a childless couple who owned a large farm in Paderne. She worked as a housekeeper and general farm laborer. Mercedes Campo of Seoane recalled having placed her illegitimate son as a servant in a *casa fuerte* (strong house) of Moreda in the 1930s. He was only six-years old at the time, but was employed as a goatherd. Mercedes explained that she was unable to support him on her own. She had no property and was herself employed as a servant. Mercedes' son, like many other children of impoverished families, essentially grew up as a servant. He remained in his adoptive *casa* until he reached adulthood and married a woman from another house in Moreda. His former masters regard him as a quasi-family member. He apparently regards them with similar affection.

Children reared as servants might eventually acquire special claims in their adoptive *casas*. This is evident, for example, in the will of Diego Díaz. His testament includes a bequest of three fields of arable terrain to Manuel Chelo, a domestic servant, who the donor professes to have “reared and educated from the age of two” (Carballo Rivera 1861: 110). Diego declares that Manuel may withdraw this inheritance from the larger patrimony if he decides to establish a household of his own. He also stipulates that if Manuel chooses to remain in the Díaz household, working for Diego's major heir, the latter has “the obligation to feed him, provide him with shoes, dress him, assist him in his old age and indispositions, and, at his death, to say mass for him and bury him as any other family member of the house” (Carballo Rivera 1861: 110).

Despite this traditional intimacy of masters and servants, Caurelaos disparage the status of the servant. Working another man's property to which

one has no intrinsic rights and for little more than one's keep is antithetical to the ideology of the house complex, which emphasizes economic self-sufficiency and the integrity of families. Apocryphal stories about the rise and fall of real ancestors and once-existing *casas* neatly capture the opposing images of the servant and the head of a *casa fuerte*. One such story relates how the owner and administrator of the strongest house in the village of Mercurín was deceived by his neighbors who abused his generosity and sunk him deeply into debt. He was forced to sell his estate and ended his days as a servant working in a rival *casa* in Seoane. Another story tells of this transition in reverse—a servant who became a powerful master. This servant was a young boy employed in the *Casa de Vila*, a house inhabited by a “distinguished” family. One year, during the season for sowing rye, this boy dropped a basket of seed down a mountainside. Cowed by his master, he ran away. Several years later, a man and his family came to Seoane in the night. The next morning, the man was found to be installed as head of the large iron foundry in Seoane. To the astonishment of all villagers, he turned out to be the former servant who had fled his master.

These stories make clear the denigrated condition of the servant and suggest the degree of submission to a master's will his life entailed. Service in an alien *casa* was a last resort for indigent villagers: it was preferable only to the lives of the many rootless, wandering, and desperate men and women who came to Caurel as beggars and laborers.

The practice of placing children as servants affirmed the inability of poor households to realize fully the cultural norms governing domestic production and family relations. Impoverished parents were unable to achieve the ideal of economic self-sufficiency. The poorest essentially gave up their young children as domestic servants as they acquired the ability to work. In such families, the birth order and sex of offspring might lose much of their practical meaning with respect to the differentiation of children's work roles and their rights to a patrimony.

At the same time, children employed as domestics enabled rich households to better realize normative production and family relations. Servants' labor allowed these households to engage intensively in the full range of agropastoral activities, while releasing their masters' children from the more onerous and time-consuming work. This practice of “putting out” children can be regarded as “a disguised means whereby wealth and labor flowed from the poorer to the richer” (MacFarlane 1970: 209). It worked to reinforce the inequality of families within the community.

Schooling and Training in Special Skills

Formal education was usually regarded in Caurel from a narrow, utilitarian perspective. Basic literacy was seen as helpful in negotiating the complex

elements of governmental and legal regulation that impinged on the management of a *casa*, and simple mathematical reckoning was seen as essential to keeping accounts in economic negotiations. This point of view gave rise to strategies for schooling children that clearly exemplify the way in which parental discrimination furthered the differentiation of children's life courses.

Since it was assumed that a woman's market activities and relationships with external authorities would be mediated by men, girls were rarely educated in schools. This is reflected in the disproportionate number of elderly women who are illiterate. The 1970 Padrón Municipal of Caurel indicates that 20 of 40 (50 percent) women aged 50 or older and living in Seoane are illiterate (Ayuntamiento 1970). Only 9 of 36 (25 percent) male residents of the village aged 50 or older are similarly categorized. Female informants born early in this century often told me that their parents regarded sending them to school as a waste of time and labor. This attitude is reflected in a petition placed before the township council (*ayuntamiento*) of Caurel on July 31, 1910, by the householders of Seceda. The latter wished to have the female teacher who operated their parish's school replaced by a male because "nearly all the children who attend the school are boys" (Ayuntamiento 1909-1911: n.p.).

Boys were sent to school sparingly. Once they were ready for school, they were also ready for work. Their capacity to contribute labor to the agropastoral enterprise was of primary concern to their parents. An informant who supported the abandonment of large-scale sheep- and goatherding in the 1950s and 1960s declared: "If I had to send my sons to the heath with our flocks again, illiteracy and hunger would return."

Families varied in their tendency to educate sons according to their relative economic status. A prosperous household could replace its sons' labor with the work of domestic servants and might send them all to school at least briefly. A household of moderate means might school the eldest son for three or four winters and a second son for one or two. Poor parents were unlikely to educate any sons at all. Those who resisted this tendency might be regarded as presumptuous or foolish. Isabel González of Esperante, an elderly woman who was once an indigent daylaborer, related how the owner of a large estate in this village had chided her for sending her two sons to school. He told her to take them out of school and place them as domestic servants. He argued that otherwise they might have nothing to eat. This propensity to exclude poorer children from formal schooling limited the life options of these children. It diminished their perceived abilities to function outside the role of farm laborer.

While parents generally educated their older sons for longer periods than their younger sons, a countervailing tradition encouraged ambitious families to prepare one or more junior sons for the priesthood or another profession. I discovered references to such highly educated offspring in family records per-

taining to nearly a dozen houses in the four parishes of Upper Caurel. These records indicate the presence of as many as four priests in successive generations of given family lines in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Families able to accumulate sufficient means to support a full-time student often made special provisions to prepare a junior son for the priesthood. In his last will, Gervasio Touzón, the dynamic head of a rising house in Seoane, charged his eldest son and major heir with the obligation of “educating one or two of his brothers who may be inclined to pursue a priestly career” (Carballo Rivera 1858: 154). The task of preparing a son for a career in the Church was fraught with expenses and risks. It entailed paying his tuition, room and board in some distant city, tutors, and bribes to various individuals who could ensure that he received adequate attention away from home. There was no assurance that he would achieve a career. Consequently, Gervasio’s testament and another will originating in the Casa de Gallego (Carballo Rivera 1867: 272) both specify that in the event an educated son fails to become a priest, the cost of his training will be deducted from his inheritance. On the other hand, parents might grant a successful son who was newly established as a cleric a bequest beyond his “legitimate portion” (*legítima*) of their estate “so that he could have enough to sustain that state with decency” (Carballo Rivera 1852: 66). Such a son could amply reward his parents for their efforts to educate him.

Training a son for a career sharply distinguished him from his siblings. In terms of literacy, the contrast between educated Caurelaos and their brothers and sisters was often stark: in the documentary records priests and other professionals are commonly found to have siblings who cannot even sign their names. Equally pronounced was the disparity in the range of their worldly experience. Years spent at school in the cities of Lugo and Santiago fostered knowledge, friendships, styles of interaction, and values in a career-oriented son that were largely inaccessible to his sedentary parents and siblings.

A son destined for a career removed himself from the everyday work and management of his family’s farm. In the richest as well as the poorest *casas*, future heirs aspiring to be the administrators of agropastoral estates typically participated in all aspects of farm work. While there is considerable lore concerning the pretenses of former heads of *casas fuertes* to the honorary designation *don*, such men were always active laborers on their own farms. Their ability and vigor as farmworkers was a positive measure of their status as estate managers. In contrast, well-educated men dissociated themselves from manual labor. This dissociation was a fundamental marker of their special power.

Sons who received advanced educations prior to the Civil War usually practiced their professions in Caurel or adjacent districts and exerted a strong influence over their natal *casas*. Their command of a broad range of resources that conditioned farming and herding activities often enabled them to promote their families’ economic activities. Documentary and oral records reveal that local priests who originated in the Houses of Olmo, Torre, Redonda,

and Puente in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exploited their personal authority and church claims on produce and labor to enrich their *casas*. Similarly, educated sons from the Houses of Touzón, Barreiro, Gallego, and Montero took advantage of the reorganization of local government by a Liberal Spanish regime in the nineteenth century to acquire control over township councils and courts, thereby augmenting the political and economic influence of their *casas*. Invested with the powers and resources of ecclesiastical or bureaucratic offices, these junior sons brought their once-ordinary families to prominence or strengthened their already powerful families. Some acted as partners of their major-heir siblings; others dominated these siblings. All helped determine the ultimate fate of their *casas*.

While only a few *casas* managed to prepare sons for elite professions, many others were able to train some of their children in trades. Adolescent girls were often taught to weave locally produced wool and linen into cloth. Adolescent boys were often trained as carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, or masons.

Girls who learned to weave usually were trained in their natal *casas*. The skills of the weaver were more widely diffused than those of the “male” trades, but most households had no women who could produce their own cloth. Some houses traditionally specialized in weaving other *casas*’ yarn and thread and providing them with fabrics for household use. A number of estates in Caurel still include massive wooden looms that have been passed through many generations of women.

For most women with special training, the continued practice of their skills was contingent upon their domestic situations. Spinsters who lived in their natal *casas* often contributed substantially to their households’ incomes by weaving. In contrast, women who married into *casas* without looms might cease to practice their learned skill of weaving. During the decades prior to the Civil War, a few girls from Caurel were trained as seamstresses in Quiroga; most stopped sewing commercially once they were married in Caurel. A woman’s domestic tasks were of paramount importance. Her wage work was incidental to her role in the agropastoral enterprise.

Men trained in a trade were essentially farmers with special skills. Some houses combined work in the agropastoral economy with a male trade over many generations. The skills of this trade were transmitted from father to son along with the knowledge of producing crops and raising livestock. Written and oral records that refer to the Casa del Torre, for example, indicate that this house operated a smithy in Seoane for nearly three centuries. If such a house was well-proprietyed, not all sons were prepared for the practice of its traditional trade since some were relegated full-time to the requisite agricultural tasks. However, the first-born son was sure to be among those trained. His special skill as a craftsman was a key component of his house’s identity. It also enhanced the economic power he was expected to wield as major heir.

In households without such traditions, parents might contract with an

established craftsman, storekeeper, or other market specialist to teach one of their sons a trade. This might involve a period of formal apprenticeship during the son's adolescence. José Peral of Paderne, for example, was apprenticed to a master tailor in the tiny market center of Puente de Lózára at the age of thirteen. His mother paid the tailor 30 *pesos* to train him. José spent two and a half years in Puente de Lózára early in this century learning to make clothing "of all kinds" from linen, cotton, and wool. He and two other apprentices lived with the tailor, who provided their keep in exchange for their labor. Sons sometimes were trained by a craftsman in more rudimentary fashion: an elderly tinsmith in Seoane described with pride how he learned the basics of his trade in a mere few days spent watching an itinerant *fontanero* at work in the doorstep of a village merchant; a blacksmith from Campelo told of learning his trade during a week spent with a master *herrero* in the Valley of Lózára while his parents sojourned there as sharecroppers.

Parents typically arranged to train a junior son for a trade. Since this usually separated the son from full participation in the exploitation of their farm, it implied removing him from consideration for the status of major heir. If the son learned a craft, he initially practiced it while residing in his parents' household. He ideally contributed a portion of his earnings to the household budget while accumulating sufficient capital to establish a viable household of his own. His eventual departure reduced pressure on his parents' estate and facilitated their final designation of a major heir from among their remaining offspring.

In some cases, sons themselves took the initiative to learn a trade. A junior son might apprentice himself to a local craftsman when it became evident to him that he had little chance of becoming his parents' major heir. Both junior and eldest sons might learn special skills while serving in the army or while employed as migrant laborers. The relative independence this gave them could upset their parents' plans for designating a major heir. I knew several men who had been expected major heirs prior to the Civil War but eventually broke with their parents over the terms of their succession. In almost every case, the recalcitrant son had learned a profitable trade during a sojourn outside Caurel. He felt able to live on his own and therefore renounced the millora.

The fortunes of sons who became artisans or tradesmen varied considerably. The most entrepreneurial members of this group took advantage of their frequent travels, diverse contacts, and ability to deal in cash to develop a variety of business ventures. They acted as moneylenders and emigration agents, and operated stores, taverns, and mills. They invested their earnings in land and livestock to augment the farms worked by their own households and to build new farms leased to sharecroppers. The most successful of these sons founded some of Caurel's most prosperous *casas*. However, artisans, shopkeepers, and other specialists usually suffered a more marginal existence. With market involvements that were typically small scale and scarcely profitable,

they supplemented their scant incomes with the produce of spare holdings inherited from their parents. They often were forced to trade their services and labor to major farm owners for the use of oxen, carts, and other assistance. As a result, their estates and family lines rarely survived for more than a generation or two as cohesive *casas*.

Labor Migration

Although many parents in Caurel endeavored to separate some of their children from their natal *casas* by placing them in other *casas* as domestic servants or by preparing them for special careers or trades, these provisions applied to a minority of children. The supply of potential servants inevitably exceeded the demand for them, and few parents had the means to provide special training for their children. Moreover, most parents wished to keep at home more of their children than just the eldest sons. The vicissitudes of mortality and individual development, as well as the needs for domestic labor, encouraged such behavior. Indeed, many parents urged their dependent children to work occasionally in the market sector in order to ensure their support.

Periodic wage employment was an essential aspect of Caurel's pre-Civil War agropastoral regime. Caurelans often remark of their past that there were always too many people and that few families could continuously support all their members with the produce of their farms. There was a perpetual shortage of cash, attested to by the flourishing business of local moneylenders, creditors with an eye toward acquiring landed property pledged to them as security for their loans. Consequently, the majority of *casas* had members who worked occasionally in the market sector to supplement domestic production. However, unless they exploited exiguous farms, the core members of households—the owners of farms—rarely worked outside the agropastoral enterprise. Wage work was chiefly the province of their unmarried heirs-to-be.

Junior members of households predominated among laborers engaged in the most important forms of wage work available in Caurel and adjacent districts. During summers, adolescent males and females from the villages of Lower Caurel worked as harvesters in the more productive villages of Upper Caurel after mowing hay and reaping rye on their own farms. Once grain harvests were completed in late August, youths from throughout the district worked in nearby lowland valleys picking grapes in commercial vineyards. During winters in the nineteenth century, they manufactured charcoal in communal heaths for sale to local iron foundries (*herrerías*). Youths were frequently employed during winters in the early decades of this century on the construction of public roads in Caurel and neighboring areas of the Galician Massif.

Young villagers also sojourned in market sectors far outside Caurel. The most enduring form of labor migration—accounting for the largest propor-

tion of villagers who departed from Caurel in the nineteenth century and still in evidence in the 1920s—was the work of itinerant harvesters on the commercial wheat estates of Castile. This migrant stream composed of both males and females included boys and girls in their early teens. Single young men were employed in a variety of other rural occupations outside Galicia: as miners and foundry workers in the Cantabrian region; as construction workers at railway sites throughout Spain; and, after 1900, as ranch hands in Argentina, as farm hands in the sugar plantations of Cuba, and as laborers on the Panama Canal.

Prior to the 1920s, when many villagers settled in urban areas overseas, village men appear to have worked infrequently in cities. Young village women, on the other hand, were often employed in cities as domestic servants: in Barcelona and Madrid long before the turn of the nineteenth century and through the Civil War; and in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and Havana after 1900.

This points to a paradox in the traditional situation of women in Caurel's households. Women working exclusively in the domestic economy, especially spinsters who remain in their natal casas, are relegated to a sphere of activity that isolates them, making it difficult for them to understand and interact with unfamiliar social environments. These women often seem exceptionally naive when forced to act in such environments, as in negotiating with a foreign visitor. However, women who have emigrated to cities and worked as domestic servants in their youths tend to be more worldly than the men of their generations. This sophistication carries over into the role they play in their domestic groups. In several households that I visited regularly, female members played a large role mediating my relationship with the male household heads. Invariably, these women had once worked as servants in urban homes. They had a much more subtle understanding of my style of social interaction and motives than their husbands or brothers. They were also more inclined to criticize established life ways and conventional social hierarchies in Caurel. Village women employed in urban homes played a leading role in migrant streams directed toward Latin American cities in the 1920s and in the post-war rural exodus from Caurel.

The wages of a dependent child temporarily employed in the market sector were given to his parents to spend for the benefit of the entire family but were customarily recognized as his own and were added to his eventual inheritance. Consequently, an eldest son could endeavor to improve his heirship status with lengthy sojourns into the market sector. His accumulated earnings could increase his stake in his natal casa, manifest his ability to improve his family's farm, and thereby confirm his special claim to the millora. A junior offspring's wages might augment a dowry or supplement a minor inheritance and increase his possibilities for marrying into another casa, or they might encourage him to establish an independent household of his own.

Important aspects of the relationship between migration and the designation of a major heir are illustrated by the life histories of four siblings born between 1902 and 1914 in the Casa de Canedo of Seoane. Each of these siblings worked outside the family's agropastoral enterprise prior to his marriage. Miguel, the eldest, was the first to work outside his natal casa. At the age of sixteen, he joined a group of harvesters who traveled to Cebrero to reap grain. Arturo and Manuel, second and third sons, respectively, also harvested rye in Cebrero during their late teens. Marisa, the only surviving Canedo daughter and the third-born child, worked for ten years in Barcelona as a maid, beginning in her late teens.

At the end of 1920, when he was eighteen, Miguel emigrated to Cuba. His parents, although reluctant to let him leave Caurel, borrowed the money to pay his passage overseas. They wanted him to avoid the military draft and service in Spain's African campaigns. He spent seven years in Cuba. During his absence, Arturo and Manuel remained in their parents' household because their labor was needed on the family farm. In many respects, Arturo took on the responsibilities of an expected major heir. He and Manuel now contend that in Miguel's absence their parents left unclear which of their sons would be given the millora.

Miguel, however, recalls the strong hopes he had of making his natal house a casa fuerte when he left for Cuba. During his stay there, he sent his parents a substantial part of his savings—1,500 *pesetas*, a sum equivalent to 750 day-wages of a common laborer in Caurel in the 1920s. His parents used this money to pay off debts and purchase property and tools to improve their farmstead, always with the understanding that the money Miguel sent them would be repaid him apart from his legitimate portion of their estate. Invested as it was in the Canedo farm, the money Miguel remitted from Cuba increased his stake in his native casa.

While in America, Miguel married a woman from the village of Noceda, close by Seoane. For a time, he and his wife entertained the idea of migrating to Argentina to join her siblings there. However, when his brother Arturo was drafted into the army in 1927, Miguel's parents asked him to come home. The younger couple tentatively returned to Seoane to settle in the Canedo household. Miguel recalls that he intended to reemigrate if the situation in his parents' household should warrant it. His parents feared his departure, and, consequently, not long after he arrived in Caurel, they confirmed him as their major heir. In 1929, Miguel and his father went to the town of Quiroga to draw up the latter's will without the knowledge of Miguel's siblings. Not until the father died in 1954 were Miguel's brothers and sister aware that he had been granted the millora.

Yet, once Miguel had married en casa, his status was clearly distinct from the statuses of his siblings. Except for a few months in the 1930s when he was employed in construction of the road being built into Seoane, he rarely

worked outside the family's agropastoral enterprise. Arturo and Manuel, on the other hand, often worked outside the domestic sector—in Bilbao and in various kinds of temporary, local wage work. Arturo learned the trade of shoemaker, which he practiced while continuing to live with Miguel and eventually taught to Manuel. Marisa returned to Seoane for a while, but then married and reemigrated to Barcelona in the early 1940s.

Despite the claims of his younger siblings to the contrary, Miguel was seemingly favored by his parents for the millora prior to his departure for Cuba. Yet his brothers' uncertainty about this evokes the sense of tentativeness with which parents traditionally selected a major heir. As donors of an estate, parents looked at the behavior of successful emigrant sons as demonstrating their ability to augment an estate and improve it. Emigration was not the only means by which a future heir might demonstrate this ability and earn capital to invest in his house's patrimony, but in the decades of emigration to Latin America just prior to the Civil War, the image of the successful emigrant crystallized as an expression of qualities valued in a major heir. Hence, the donor of an estate in Villasivil is said by one of her heirs to have declared to the eldest son who expected to receive her millora: "You never went to America and have no special claim to the manda."

Just as it might improve the life chances of an eldest son, successful work outside the family farm could allow his siblings to increase their fortunes. Daughters and junior sons ideally married the major heirs of established casas, but given the chronic surplus of heirs-to-be in relation to a relatively small and relatively fixed number of estates, as well as customary constraints on pre-mortem bequests that tended to limit dowries, these offspring often remained for many years as adults in their natal casas in the hope of entering suitable marriages. They strove to accumulate sufficient personal property to realize this hope and secure comfortable places for themselves in Caurel's agropastoral economy.

In some families, junior sons were favored over older brothers as major heirs by virtue of their success as migrants. Witness the case of Rogelio López, the last of four sons born into a modest casa in Mercurín. All four sons sojourned outside Caurel as laborers in the decades prior to the Civil War, but only Rogelio thrived as a migrant. He spent several years in Cuba employed as a traveling lineman with an American electric firm. He returned to Mercurín with a woman he had married overseas. With his considerable savings, he settled in his natal casa and was treated by his parents and siblings as the presumptive major heir. Rogelio remarked sarcastically that his family expected him to work like a major heir. He soon informed them that he had no intention of supporting them with his savings or labor. His message to me was that he had gotten his way and took over the administration of his casa.

In a few other families, secondary offspring were able to establish independent local households as a result of successful migration. During the nine-

teenth century, some junior sons prospered in a highly specialized form of labor migration: they substituted as soldiers for the drafted offspring of *casas fuertes* in exchange for substantial fees (Carballo Rivera 1841: 152; 1852: 68; 1863: 13; 1867: 29; 1869: 166). Such mercenary soldiers reportedly originated the *Casa del Soldado* (the “House of the Soldier”) of Piñeira and several houses in other villages. Other migrants, employed as iron workers in Cantabria, railway construction workers in Castile, or domestic servants in cities, founded houses with their earnings. Early in this century, a number of junior sons and daughters returned from America, using their savings to purchase land and develop farms or operate stores and inns. Some of these returning emigrants came to be numbered among Caurel’s most powerful householders.

It is important to note, however, that the majority of offspring who set out on their own in Caurel’s domestic economy led a marginal existence. Parents rarely provided dowries to secondary children who chose to marry other expected minor heirs. Such unions were often “marriages of hunger and thirst” (Bourdieu 1962: 46). The herding of goats and sheep, regular wage work, consensual unions, and illegitimacy—all disesteemed conditions—are strongly associated in Caurel with impoverished households founded by minor heirs. Hence, minor heirs often preferred to remain permanent celibates resident in their natal *casas* rather than eke out deficient livelihoods in separate households.

Although a child’s successful migration tended to recast his relations with his sedentary family members, in general parents remained the dominant partners in negotiations over the transmission of their estates. As donors of land and livestock, most parents offered their children a better standard of living and greater security than the occasional or incidental employment available to them in the market sector. Migrant laborers from Galicia were universally scorned in Iberia during the nineteenth century (Gil 1851; Carnarvon 1848: 56ff). They engaged in the most humble and abject occupations, casual or incidental work that the natives of the areas in which they sojourned did not want. Work in America afforded opportunities not available to migrants in Castile or elsewhere in Spain, but it was highly contingent: elderly informants clearly recall the cycle of boom and bust that characterized Cuba’s sugar industry in the early 1900s, first attracting large cohorts of migrants overseas and then compelling them to come home. In this uncertain economy, the family farm remained the chief source of stability. Those who controlled the farm continued to hold considerable sway over other family members.

Conclusion

The interaction of inheritance and inequality occurred within changing constellations of family relations in Caurel’s pre-Civil War society. Ongoing

transactions among family members concerning succession and the devolution of property ordered and reordered family hierarchies. Parents manipulated promised bequests to shape, differentiate, and correct their children's behavior. They were culturally predisposed to favor sons over daughters and older children over younger children when initially assigning family roles and heirship statuses, but they were also inclined to reassign these roles and statuses as their children demonstrated varying abilities and characters. Expected major and minor heirs alike endeavored to strengthen their claims on their parents' estate, while remaining open to any opportunities to establish themselves outside their parents' farm that might appear on the horizon. Each future heir paid close attention to his siblings' behavior and achievements when formulating his claims and counterclaims to his parents' legacy. Future heirs also strove to negotiate the most attractive family roles and maximize their life options. The frequent rearrangement of family hierarchies meant that succession outcomes were largely indeterminate within given families. To a significant extent, these outcomes were products of unpredictable changes in the goals, hopes, and interests of individual donors and heirs.

Actors involved in the complex transactions that structured Caurel's social hierarchies drew upon their rights in agropastoral property as their principal source of bargaining power. Thus parents with large holdings in land and livestock had the means to determine their children's social roles and statuses with a firm hand. Parents with smaller holdings had proportionately less control over their children's behavior and situations. Similarly, largeholders strongly conditioned the life options of smallholders. They dominated the labor of impoverished villagers, but offered them an alternative to abject poverty and homelessness. Smallholders and children without settled inheritance claims had some scope for applying achievements and relationships developed outside the local community to establish or strengthen their rights in agropastoral property. This enabled exceptional migrants to renegotiate their roles in Caurel's status hierarchies. Caurel's boarding school students, mercenary soldiers, and rural-to-urban migrants all provide examples of successful entrepreneurs who elevated their statuses within their *casas* and villages.

Villagers' specific involvements in a larger society were key factors shaping the interrelationships between property, inheritance, and inequality played out in a local context. Caurel's families actively exploited resources located outside their community as an integral part of their developmental strategies. However, prior to the Spanish Civil War, external markets afforded migrant family members only sporadic or transient opportunities for advancement. Consequently, they were readily reincorporated in their community's existing social order. Successful sojourns outside the community gave individuals an essential measure of social mobility without violating the basic integrity of this order.

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