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Women Narration: Land, Gender and Oral Memory. The Forgotten History of the Maquis at Aran Valley

Mireia Boya-Busquet and Rosa Cerarols-Ramirez

Historical context

The *maquis* and the Spanish' Reconquest Operation

- 1 In October 19th, 1944, a contingent of 4,000 Spanish *guerilleros* returned to Spain from France through the Aran Valley. It was an armed invasion, which aimed to topple the regime of General Franco. This invasion, codenamed *Operation Reconquista of Spain* was a serious attempt by the Spanish National Union (SNU) to establish a provisional republican government in the Aran Valley with the support of the Spanish guerrillas (the *maquis*), who have been collaborating with paramilitary French resistance in exile. Despite the initial euphoria from those who shortly before were able to defeat the Nazis in France during World War II, the *Operation Reconquista of Spain* failed shortly after its inception. The rebels were finally expelled eleven days after its entry, October 29, 1944. The most reliable data speak of 32 dead and 248 wounded in the side of the national army and Civil Guard, and 129 dead, 588 wounded and 241 prisoners in the side of the guerrilla forces (Aguado Sánchez, 1975).
- 2 For decades it has been a complete silence about these facts, both on the side of Franco's troops and the Communist and Republican side. Martínez Baños (2002) justifies the military operation silence due to the interest of Franco's to hide the *maquis*' attempt and the interest of the Communist Party for not taking such an important failure. Daniel Arasa (2004) described it as the most important post-war armed attempt to overthrow the dictatorial regime of General Franco. The *Operation Reconquista of Spain* is of great

importance from a military point of view, since it was the last episode of the armed Spanish Civil War (five years after the signing of the Pact of Victory by General Franco).

- 3 From this point of view it is important to take in account the political implications of the event, especially within the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). In this sense, for this historical period, Julián Casanova (2013) reminds us the existence in Spain of more than five years of terror after Franco's victory. He also notes that very few people dare to participate in any antifranco heroic activities due to the intense repression and retaliation. However, after a review of what happened, Paul Preston (2013) and the same Communist leader Santiago Carrillo (2006), speaks of the rapid withdrawal of troops and the modest advance of this operation as a great political failure that must be assumed.
- 4 Despite being one of the least studied chapters of the Spanish postwar, always has been analyzed and documented by the testimonies of soldiers and resistance fighters who participated in the invasion, or public and political figures that had a direct relationship with the purpose of this historical event (Martínez de Baños, 2002). It has never been approached from a local perspective, from the point of view of the inhabitants of the region who experienced directly.

Maquis' soldiers during the Aran Valley invasion



PICTURE OF MAQUIS' SOLDIERS DURING THE ARAN VALLEY INVASION, OCTOBER 1944, PROBABLY SHOT BY A PCE MEMBER.

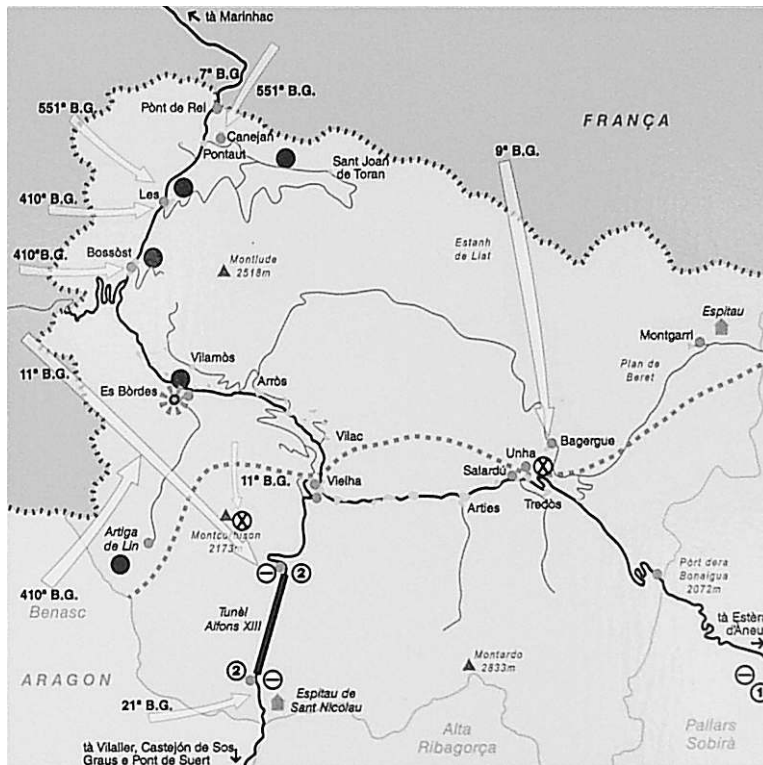
Source: Daniel Arasa, Argos Vergara publishing company, 1984.

Geographical location

Baish Aran, mountain region and borderland

- 5 The geographical location of the Aran Valley is clearly strategic. In the north side limits to France, following the course of the Garonne's river. But to the south, east and west, surrounded by large mountains that hinder communication, it does with the regions of Catalonia and Aragon in Spain. This location on the northern slopes of the Pyrenees has significantly marked economic relations and cultural exchange with neighboring Occitan communities of southern France. In fact, this region has a clear Occitan influence, as we can observe, for instance, in their traditions and their language, Aranese, a variant of Gascon. Nevertheless, since 1313, with the signing of a privileges document known as the *Querimonia*, Aran Valley administratively is part of the territories of the southern slopes of the Pyrenees. However, the harsh winter and poor communication across the mountain ports of Vielha and Bonaigua, prolonged geographic isolation of south territories until 1948, the opening date of the tunnel of Vielha, the main channel of communication with Catalonia and the rest of the Iberian peninsula.
- 6 The Aran Valley is definitely a mountainous and border region. Geographically located on the north side but belongs administratively to the south. These two features have largely determined the nature and the elements that are part of the social imaginary and representations linked to the territory; also had a marked influence on the history and economic development followed by this territory (Gorría 1995, Martínez 1997; Wall, 2002).
- 7 As part of this research, location and orographic configuration of Aran Valley were decisive factors in choosing this area as ideal for the attempt to overthrow the Franco regime in 1944 scenario. Initiating the operation in October was not accidental, as it coincides with the first snows in the Pyrenees, a climatic factor that at that time prevented communication with the Iberian Peninsula and, consequently, was considered a great natural barrier to delay the arrival of the national army to counter the military offensive. The reaction of the local population also influenced the failure of the military operation, as few were those who joined the maquis during those days (Martinez de Baños, 2002).
- 8 The presence of maquis was particularly significant in Baish Aran, the northern part of the region. There were combats in the villages of Canejan, Bausen, Les, Bossòst and more particularly Es Bordes, where took place one of the most violent episodes, but also Unha and Salardú, belonging to the municipality of Naut Aran. The unexpected arrival of maquis to a traditionally isolated place, as well as the contact of the guerrilla with the local population during the 11-day conflict, caused a radical change in everyday life of these people, especially women and children, often unexpected protagonists in war episodes.
- 9 The border area of the Aran Valley has always been linked to trade, exchanges and movement of people. The end of the Spanish Civil War caused the exodus of thousands of Republican refugees who were forced into exile in southern France through border points of Portilhon and Pont de Rey, at Aran Valley. A few years later the territory was chosen again, in the opposite direction, to those fleeing the Second World War, often clandestinely, following paths and mountain trails in the Franco-Spanish border.

Maquis' movements during the Aran Valley Invasion



Map of the most important maquis' movements during the Aran Valley Invasion.
Source: Albert Mateu, Cat Patrimoni.

State of art

The female historical memory

- 10 Currently we are far from *Blood of Spain* (1979), the reference work of Ronald Fraser that has demonstrated the importance of oral sources in historical research. In our context, the Spanish translation of his work has helped us to understand the need to tell the story from the beginning, from the base, taking into account the opinion of all; the winners, the losers and the spectators. In short, giving a voice to all those who have never appeared on official accounts or in historical documents about wars and revolutions. Fraser started from the idea that oral history “articulates what is not articulated historically”. Thus, the content of the interviews, we can overcome the classical idea of the historical narrative of “this is what happened” to create an alternative version in which we can say “this way we remember what happened.” This is precisely the aim of the present paper.
- 11 We consider the importance of using oral history to narrate and deconstruct contemporary history, but we also believe it is essential their incorporation into the theoretical discourse of epistemological developments in relation to historiography and gender (Scott, 2000). Based on some of the Anglo and French feminist approaches, and to a lesser extent also Spain, we argue that gender is a prolific analytical category for fair historical reconstruction, also becoming a reporting tool which highlights the need for question the views of traditionally androcentric historical analysis (Nash, 1995, 1999;

Ramos, 1993, 1994). Some authors have demonstrated a persistent veiling of differences between men and women, and the feminist critique has also emphasized the lack of a female perspective. It is evident therefore the need to analyze those historical events in order to highlight the complexity of the intertwined discourses and the variables of gender, space and time.

- 12 In this sense, and for this research, the emergence of a new discourse based on the daily lives of women (Lindon, 2000) of a border mountain society is studied. This research contrasts the feminine vision of the political sphere, in the broadest sense, with the dominant discourse from the male point of view, usually presented as the “truth” of historical events. As Maria Dolores Ramos (1993) claimed, we reflect on the importance of lived experience in public spaces, but also in private, those most directly related to the reproductive sphere and, in general, more feminine.
- 13 Almost seventy years after the attempted invasion of Baish Aran, the aged women who lived firsthand, had not yet publicly explained his personal experience, had not shared their related experiences about this historical episode.

Objectives and research methodology

Saving and organizing oral memory: storytelling and audiovisual tools

- 14 The main objective of this research is saving and recording the oral history of Baish Aran women regarding the historical events of October 1944, known as *Operation Reconquista of Spain*. Our research has focused on the collection and video recording of women oral accounts who lived firsthand the historical event described above. We have chosen this social group because traditionally has been a silenced voice. At the same time, most of these witnesses give us much more information about daily life in the region during the Spanish Civil War (Nash, 1999). Thus, the interviews also allow us to perform a complete description of the daily life of these Pyrenees women, because interviews also talks about life in the mountain villages or activities carried out by women in their households. These descriptions also provided information on specific aspects of their education; work inside and outside the house, the spaces of conviviality and respect, traditions, their interactions with the military men that lived near the border, and many other elements of the everyday life of Baish Aran women during the early years of the Spanish Post Civil War.
- 15 In this research, it is important to highlight the particular characteristics of place. Mountain areas and border areas are historically related to national political territoriality. To Kayser (1990), the imaginary of rural areas should be analyzed as a social and cultural representation of the territory. It should also further investigate the relationship between population and space, which Lefebvre (1974) and Harvey (1989) have defined as the social production of space. Thus, during the years of the Spanish war, the Baish Aran became a territory of transit and escape, in which the associated geopolitical history has changed the traditional structure of mountain communities in this rural area of the Pyrenees.
- 16 Registration and systematization of oral memory are necessary and urgent because the advanced ages of the main testimonies. Although, over time, we note that we can talk

more openly about the dark years of the Spanish Civil War, it is also true that the younger witnesses have a minimum 75 years and, therefore, may soon disappear, and with them a part of our collective history.

- 17 As for the choice of informants, we decided to work only with women who in 1944 had at least 7 years, because we believe that was the minimum age to have clear memories of the historic event studied. We interviewed women Baish Aran born in 1937 or earlier and who lived firsthand the maquis' invasion. In the village of Les, where we began our research, the assistance from the local women's association (Association Hemnes de Les) has allowed us to locate 40 women, of which 26 have agreed to be interviewed. We also interviewed several men with the goal of building a narrative in feminine by comparing both points of view, masculine and feminine and highlighting their main differences.
- 18 Methodologically, we have conducted interviews with each informant and have supplemented the information obtained on several public forums. These focus groups allowed us to combine the most intimate and personal stories with their collective narratives. The result is a more complete picture of the experiences of these young people in October 1944. Technically all interviews are videotaped and registered in the native language of these women, Occitan for most of them.
- 19 With the life stories obtained we have been able to build the history (and the "other" stories) from the base, creating a new non-teleological history. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of "existential phenomenology" for interpreting the life stories and to show how the witnesses address the historical period they lived and how they agree (Fraser, 1979). This intellectual position emphasizes on individual existence, subjectivity and values of personal experiences. This responds to the need to discover what Paul Thompson called "hidden areas": the views and memories of those who were rarely represented in historical documents. According to this point of view, the factual record is not enough, it is also important to understand its meaning and to move from individual to collective story.
- 20 We use therefore, video recorded individual and collective interviews as our main methodological tools used to identify, enhance and preserve the oral report on this particular historic event, always with gender focus. The analysis of the life histories becomes a documentary and a biographical source to discover the childhood of these women; and also is a source of information to learn and understand everyday social relations of these women with their environment and their sense of belonging to a place and a culture (Scott, 2000).

Interview during the research period



Picture of one of the interviews done by Mireia Boya and Rosa Cerarols during the research period in Aran Valley. All interviews were recorded in video.

Source: Mireia Boya and Rosa Cerarols.

Results: the specificity of oral recounts of Baish Aran women

- 21 This research aims to contribute to the collection of oral memories of those women that witnesses this historical event, but also provides information from the perspective of the everyday lives of people in terms of gender. This research is made in a time when we begin to appreciate the importance of the recovery of historical memory, but also to speak openly about the war and the Spanish transition to democracy. With the interviews we can identify some commonalities between all the stories as they are detailed below.

The detailed account of an historical event

- 22 The sum of the stories obtained allowed us to know the details of the events that happened during the 11-day maquis' occupation. We were able to compare them with existing descriptions, those written before by other authors and military and political actors of the Spanish' Reconquest Operation. We identified some important moments in the interviews: the arrival and departure of the rebel troops, downtown fighting, the days before the invasion which already had a contact with the maquis who were hidden in the mountains, and finally, some anonymous local actors from the area that with their gestures and courageous actions contributed to write down the story as we know it.

“We were with the nuns at school. They closed the windows. Classes stopped and made us sit on the floor and pray to God. We didn’t know why we have to do it, but we prayed. We heard shots in the street. At midday they came for us. The maquis accompanied the girls home. In my case there were two or three girls and two maquis. When I got home there was nobody. Everyone, Mom, Grandma, Dad were hidden”(MPB, 77 years old).

“It was the postmaster, who slept and ate in our house. It was called Aranzubi I think. When he heard the maquis arriving, he went into his room and grabbed his shotgun and while he was jumping out the window the maquis shot him from the bridge, he was hit on the head. I saw him when they took him down to move him to France”(MB, 83 years old).

- 23 These interviews also offer us interesting details about the daily life of rural families in Baish Aran during the Spanish Civil War. These stories provides detailed information and descriptions of the border, and the cultural and commercial relations between Aran Valley and neighboring French territories, even when the border office was closed. Smuggling, for example, was a common practice in this frontier mountainous region. From the Aran Valley, political refugees escape to France; from the French side some commodities arrived and also some Jewish refugees crossed to Spain clandestinely to escape from the Nazis.

“The government gave us a ration book, but it was not enough. Then the products came from France and those who had some money to pay the smugglers could have bread, sugar, coffee, oil... Later, we started to go to Fos by ourselves, with an authorization from the customs office. On our way back, we were inspected and they confiscated any extra products found. For that reason I used to hide things under my skirt”(MC, 83 years old).

- 24 On October 19th, 1944, the same day that the Spanish’ Reconquest Operation began, the village of Les was celebrating a wedding between a local woman, Herminia, and one of the heads of the national police. The maquis arrived when the procession left the church and many women were on the street watching the procession. In the shootout that followed, many of the police officers hid in the village houses. Many of them escaped into the mountains, aided by women. They were the protagonists because, at the time of the invasion, most men were working outside the village (in the fields, forests, etc.).

“I was on top of the hill of San Jaime because that day was the wedding of Herminia with a police officer. They reached (the maquis), my cousins called me and I ran to Forcada’s home with them. We were scared, we saw many maquis coming down from the mountains and we heard the shots”(IB, 83 years old).

- 25 That day most of the girls were in the school of the French nuns of the Congregation of Santa Emilia de Rodat. The sisters, on hearing the shots, took the girls to the small chapel of the school, where they remained for hours, until the maquis escorted them to their houses. During the days before the invasion, the inhabitants of the Aran Baish already noticed the presence of guerrilleros in the surroundings, hiding in the forest. Several of the women interviewed remember seeing the maquis confiscating food; how others helped the police to hide and avoid being captured by the maquis. All the women interviewed remember that day as it was written in stone of their personal lives.

“Commissioner Castillo came into our house. “I’m lost, I have been discovered“, he said. My mother took him to the backyard to hide him in the barn, on the second floor, with hay. Maquis broke down the door of the house. They were convinced that the shots of Castillo came from there. But they couldn’t find him. He remained there four or five days, until Tata helped him flee to the mountains. She dressed him like a woman, with her dress, and both went through the side of the maquis overnight. They did not see that this was Castillo!” (MPB, 77 years old).

The importance of Baish Aran as a border territory in a mountain area

- 26 The episode studied here is one of many historical facts relating to Aran Valley as a border area between France and Spain. We must not forget that the Pyrenees here became a geographical, political and economic territorial unit where the “valley” was a key location. In this sense, social and trade relations with the neighboring French regions did not disappear with customs established in the early nineteenth century. Eventually, customary exchange became contraband often organized by networks on both sides of the border.

“My first communion dress I got it like this. My mother commissioned it and one night someone brought it from the French side. It was normal, there was nothing in Spain” (MPB, 77 years old).

- 27 A few years before the *Operation Reconquista of Spain*, many people went through the Baish Aran temporarily cohabiting with the local population. Republican exiles, socialists, anarchists and communists who fled the Spanish civil war, called “red” in general; in 1942 and early 1943 were Jews and Allied soldiers fleeing the European’ Nazi occupation during World War II; a little later, Baish Aran people saw the arrival of German troops during the fall of Nazism and expulsion from the south of France. These inputs and outputs of soldiers and ordinary citizens have helped to form the character of the people on the border of Aran Valley; also show adaptation to the historical changes that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. It is equally important to emphasize the welcoming nature of families and their altruism toward newcomers.

“Later the Polish, the Germans came. We also helped them. I remember going to see them with my older brother. They were confined in the old school of the Brothers of La Salle. They gave us money and we went to buy things for them, cans, bread ”(CE, 78 years old).

- 28 In regard to the resistance fighters, Aran Valley was not chosen by chance. Its location on the northern slopes of the Pyrenees, the Atlantic climate of harsh winters and agriculture and livestock economy based on, were decisive. However, the rugged terrain and poor communications were also a key factor in the failure of the military operation. The neutral and peaceful reaction of the inhabitants, who didn’t join the anti-Franco guerrillas in their offense, as expected, greatly contributed to the decision to order the withdrawal of foreign troops.

“One or two men of the village went with the maquis. After the war nobody wanted to start over, it was hard to eat, had to work. How do you want people to start another war again? No, no” (IB 83 years).

- 29 During the maquis’ invasion and, particularly during its withdrawal, the intervention of some neighbors clearly avoided major physical and property damage. For example, the mediation of local people prevented the destruction of the hydroelectric power station of Cledes or the border bridge of Pont de Rey. Maquis’ General Juan Blázquez, nicknamed “César”, born in Bossòst, was one of these local mediators.

“The last day, maquis came to tell us to leave because they were going to blow up the Clèdes’ plant. Es Banhs’ entire street was evacuated. We went home. Finally, Blázquez stopped everything. He said it was a mistake that could cause damage to the people of the country. That night was final withdrawal of troops ”(MPR, 78 years old).

Baish Aran women during the early years of the Post Spanish Civil War

- 30 The life stories of women interviewed show us some recurring elements in their speeches. We stress that during the postwar Spanish girls had an active role in the houses, but they also worked outside. Most of these works had a close relationship with the primary sector (agriculture, grazing, etc.). In regard to education, the French nuns' School in the town of Les played a key role, unlike other remote mountain area, children of Baish Aran had access to good schooling.

"I helped my mother at home, but also to my father with cows. We did everything. Every day I would get the milk up there and then also helped during wheat and potatoes harvesting..." (MC, 84 years old).

"We learned French at the Nuns' school. We also learned how to sew and a bit of geography. We had the opportunity" (MS, 78 years old).

- 31 Matriarchy also played a major role in this territory. During the Spanish Civil War, Baish Aran women had control of the family finances. There are two main reasons to explain this peculiarity: on one hand, the social division of labor within families made men go to the mountain pastures with flocks during the summer months; on the other hand, a large number of men, heads of families, were exiled for ideological reasons, and others were called to join the national army. In all these cases, the women took care of children, older people, livestock and household assets.

"My parents and brother escaped to France. I stayed here with my grandmother. We took care of cattle and worked the fields. It was too much work for a woman and a girl, but some neighbors helped us" (MS, 93 years old).

- 32 Equally important is the belief, widely held among the women interviewed, that politics is not something that concerned them. Only men were authorized to speak publicly about political issues, they were the only ones who could choose one or another political ideology. According to the interviews, women never discuss politics, neither at home (private and family settings) nor outside (neighborhood relations). In fact, most respondents had difficulty in distinguishing between political ideologies or common names used for identification, such as "red" or "national". The gender variable appears as crucial when referring to political ideologies; only men can show a trend, while the women take the same as their husband or family, without knowing what that trend means.

"I never spoke at home. I shut up... Nobody had to listen us..." (MC, 84 years old).

"No, no, we didn't talk, we had enough work. Men yes... saying "this happened, be careful". "We do not" (MB, 94 years old).

"I knew nothing about one side or the other, it was my father who decided to go to France" (CA, 87 years old).

"My father didn't want, it was taken to jail, but I love that policeman. We saw each other in the dance floor on Sundays, secretly, until one day he went to talk to my father" (MB, 94 years old).

- 33 One of the most remarkable particularities that have found is related to gestures and actions of villagers. During the occupation of the maquis never acted for ideological reasons. What prevailed was helping others regardless of ideology, perhaps because mutual aid was a common practice in mountain societies. Local people helped the maquis with food during the 11 invasion days but also helped the national military hiding them in their homes and help them to escape in the mountains.

“There were 11 policemen detained, some wounded. ”We're lost, there are going to kill us, help us“ said to my aunt. She came home to take two strings. My mother and I helped her rolling them around his body. She took a coat of my grandfather and returned to where they were detained. That was the way how they could escape. Everyone, even the wounded ”(MPB, 77 years old).

- 34 Finally, we identified the existence of conciliation acts in order to avoid reprisals for ideological reasons. There are two types of acts representing the social relations of the Baish Aran inhabitants; both showing the conciliatory character and resilience of the people who inhabited this territory. First, we find agreed weddings in order to bring together families with different political tendencies. These acts of reconciliation focus on the family and the private sphere of individuals. Second, we find some collective gestures that are part of the public and social sphere. The most significant example of this second type is perhaps, the collective baptism of children born in 1937-1938. These children were not baptized because the priests of the region were forced into exile in France with the arrival of Spanish Republican soldiers. The inhabitants of the village of Les offered to one of the military to be the godfather of one of those children, a girl. to be It was a gesture of goodwill, friendliness towards national troops who “reconquest” the territory after the maquis’ occupation.

“There were eight or nine children who had not been baptized during the war. Neighbors asked the priest who was with the soldiers if he could baptize them. They didn’t know when will be another priest, so it was the only opportunity. When the Colonel accepted they agreed to seek a military godfather because they felt it was a gesture of reconciliation. There was a bit of tension, fear for existing retaliation in the village. My grandfather proposed me, my mother did not want it to but finally agreed that I was the one that would have a military godfather ”(MPB, 77 years old).

Women on the Baish Aran 40s



Picture of three women on the Baish Aran 40s, taken in Les, near the France-Spain border.
Source: Irene Boya’s Personal Collection.

Conclusion

- 35 This article clearly shows the interdependence between Aran Valley regional particularities and the events of October 1944. Geographical location and terrain features were crucial for Baish Aran to become the starting point of the attempt to overthrow the Franco regime in Spain. However, from a historical perspective, we can say that the *Operation Reconquista of Spain* has not been addressed from a local perspective or told by people who lived it firsthand.
- 36 In fact, the abrupt arrival of the maquis to a traditionally isolated territory and the direct contact between the guerrilla and the local population during the conflict days should be regarded as an exceptional event that has changed the daily life of the inhabitants of this mountainous and borderland territory. From this point of view, we particularly emphasize the disorder and the experiences of children and women, as these are usually the “actors” most forgotten in all war episodes.
- 37 Conducting in-depth interviews with the systematization of the oral memory of some of the people who lived firsthand the *Operation Reconquista of Spain* considerably enrich the history of the Spanish Civil War. In addition, we have detailed information on what happened and how they lived it. The popular memory speaks of unique moments, such as the arrival and withdrawal of troops fighting in the villages and the vicissitudes of local actors, which until now had not been explained.
- 38 Beyond these stories also emerge the description of everyday life and the way of life of Baish Aran rural families and how they have been able to be influenced by cross-border relations in this mountainous territory. In this regard, it is interesting to analyze gender roles and characteristics of women and children in this context.
- 39 With the testimonies of the protagonists we can conclude that, during the Spanish postwar reconciliation gestures and silences avoided reprisals against Republicans who remained in Spain. However, we have also found that the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath have, in the Aran Valley, very different characteristics compared to other regions.

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ABSTRACTS

In the Aran Valley, the political and administrative border does not coincide with the cultural boundaries. The Spanish Valley situated in the Atlantic Pyrenees and within the Occitan cultural realm has a peripheral and quite inaccessible location in relation to Spain, while it has easy access from the French side. The particularities of this territory were highly valued by the Spanish Republican army to design the Spanish Reconquista campaign during the early years of

Franco's dictatorship. The invasion of the Aran Valley is one of the historical episodes of the Spanish post-war that has little been studied. It was the most serious attempt, in October of 1944, of establishing a provisional Republican government in the Aran Valley with the support of the Spanish guerrilla (the maquis), who also have been collaborating in the exile with the French resistance in Southern France. The operation lasted 11 days and the maquis' presence was particularly important in this area. Its unexpected arrival and their contact with the local population are the subject of our research. This historical episode always has been explained from the point of view of the "maquis" or the francoist soldiers who participated in the operation, but never from the viewpoint of the valley residents. Our focus is to unfold the narratives of those who experienced a real alteration of their everyday life, and more particularly women. Recorded interviews are the methodological tools used to discover, to value and to preserve the oral memory of this event, always with a gender perspective. The analysis of these life's stories of these women that were children at that time offers us a new narrative of the events, as well as a resource to understand the daily relationships and their particular sense of place. The objective and contribution of this research is thus the recollection of testimonies of the immaterial patrimony and the study of everyday life practices from a gender point of view in a key historical moment of the valley history. The importance of the recovery of the oral historical memory goes together with the breaking off of secrets around the post-war and the Spanish democratic transition.

Le Val d'Aran est l'un de ces territoires où frontière géographique et frontière culturelle diffèrent. Situé sur le versant nord des Pyrénées, dans l'espace culturel occitan, cette petite région frontalière montagneuse qui appartient administrativement à l'Espagne, est difficile à atteindre du côté espagnol, mais aisément accessible par la France. Cette situation géographique et cette configuration orographique du Val d'Aran ont été des éléments déterminants dans le choix de ce territoire par les Républicains espagnols pour lancer l'Opération Reconquête de l'Espagne et tenter de renverser le régime franquiste. Cette opération, réalisée en octobre 1944, visait à établir un gouvernement républicain provisoire en Val d'Aran, avec l'aide de la guérilla espagnole (les maquis) qui collaborait, en exil, avec la Résistance française du sud de la France. L'opération a duré onze jours et la présence des maquis a été particulièrement importante dans la zone du Baish Aran. L'arrivée inattendue de ces résistants et leur rapport avec les populations locales constituent aujourd'hui l'objet de notre recherche. Bien que l'invasion du Val d'Aran soit un des épisodes historiques de l'après-guerre espagnol le moins étudié, il a été largement évoqué par des témoins et des militaires qui ont participé à l'opération, tous masculins. Il n'a pour l'heure jamais restitué le point de vue des femmes des villages, qui ont aussi vécu pendant ce laps de temps un changement radical dans leur vie quotidienne. Entretiens directs de ces femmes et vidéos de leurs témoignages, constitueront de précieux outils méthodologiques aptes à nous faire découvrir, valoriser et conserver la mémoire orale autour de cet événement historique majeur, relaté ici dans la perspective du genre. L'analyse des récits relatifs à tous ces différents vécus, non seulement alimentera les sources documentaire et biographique de l'enfance de ces femmes, mais elle mettra aussi en lumière leur sentiment d'appartenance au lieu, notamment par leurs relations quotidiennes avec leur territoire, ainsi qu'avec la frontière.

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