

Serie Trabajo de Campo

Esta serie surge de la colaboración entre La Alcordanza, Centro de Historia Oral y Tradiciones del Noroeste de España y la División de Ciencias Sociales y Estudios Globales de la universidad California State University, Monterey Bay. La iniciativa incluye varias series y está dedicada a la publicación práctica de resultados preliminares de investigación.

El proyecto de investigación *Trabajo de Campo* recoge las impresiones, análisis y materiales originales de investigadores y estudiantes que han participado en sesiones acogidas por La Alcordanza en comunidades del Noroeste de España.



Reporte de la Comunidad de Acisa de las Arrimadas, León

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Brianna Skinner

Concentración en Antropología Cultural

División de Estudios Sociales y de la Conducta

California State University, Monterey Bay¹

¹ Dirección de contacto. Proyecto La Alcordanza: Juan José Gutiérrez Álvarez, Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences. 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA 93955. California State University, Monterey Bay. Teléfono +1(831)582-4621. juan_gutierrez@csumb.edu

Prefacio

Las comunidades de Las Arrimadas son comunidades con una singular historia en esta parte de la zona de la Montaña Leonesa. Situadas entre los ríos Porma y Curueño, tienen una belleza y serenidad indiscutibles, pero aún más importante, tienen una andadura histórica y de frontera singular y fascinante. Los primeros registros de población de que se tiene conocimiento datan de tiempos pre-romanos en los importantes asentamientos militares de los castros cántabros. La presencia romana se deja ver en los vestigios de la infraestructura militar que dejan las legiones a su paso por estos lugares en su intento por pacificar a los aguerridos cántabros y astures, puesto que fue precisamente esta una zona de frontera entre estos dos grupos. También las estructuras visigodas en enterramiento y después medievales tanto en castillos, como torres defensivas, hablan de la gradual expansión de los reinos cristianos en la península dominada por los califatos y sociedades españolas musulmanas de los siglos octavo al quince. La zona pasa pronto a ser reino cristiano, y la presencia de los monjes templarios habla de la importancia gradual que fue adquiriendo el lugar para los peregrinos de la ruta de Santiago. Hoy en día las comunidades de Las Arrimadas aparecen por momentos como suspendidas en un tiempo indefinido. De hecho, la tendencia demográfica continúa perfilada por la pérdida gradual de población.

Sin embargo, y como esta serie de reportes de experiencias de estudiantes presenta, la comunidad tiene enormes posibilidades y potencial que está particularmente definido por el espíritu emprendedor de los jóvenes que habitan el lugar y sus alrededores, y por la enorme riqueza histórica, cultural y material de la zona que guarda celosamente la población adulta de la región. El reporte de

campo que nos presenta Brianna Skinner es una modesta contribución a la preservación de la cultura y tradiciones de Boñar y una manera de agradecer el apoyo recibido por tantas personas que nos apoyaron durante la realización de la práctica de campo en el mes de junio de 2014.

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Reporte de Campo de la comunidad de Acisa de las Arrimadas, León.

Field Research Report, Community of Acisa de las Arrimadas Brianna Skinner

Introduction

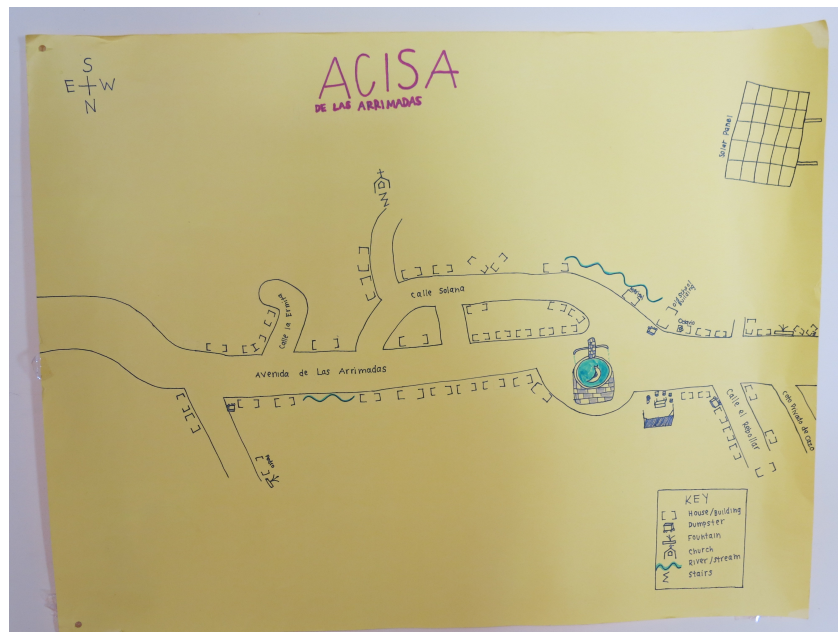
This report is a culmination of a month-long study of Acisa de Las Arrimadas, a small community in the province of Leon. With only 16 full time residents, Acisa could be considered an isolated community. This report will describe the community and some of the people that live there, and will explore ways that the community connects to each other, those who have migrated to larger cities, their history, and their land. The report will mention typical home constructions, as well as a genealogy of a family extending 7 generations.

Community Ethnography

Community Layout

There are five communities that stretch Eastward along LE 4606 that comprise Las Arrimadas, beginning at the farthest community West, Laiz, and moving Eastward to Acisa. In order from East to West the communities are Acisa, Barrillos, Corral, Santa Colomba, and finally Laiz. There is one main road that runs all the way through Acisa and all the communities comprising Las Arrimadas. This street is called

Avenida de Las Arrimadas or LE 4606. Acisa has 3 side streets, Calle la Ermita which is located on the East side and stretches south accommodating two homes before ending in a cul de sac, and Calle Solana, which contains 12 homes and also branches South before running parallel to Avenida de Las Arrimadas and finally connecting with la Avenida at the main fountain in the center of town. The third street the farthest West which runs North off of the main avenue and is called Calle El Rebollar. There are six homes situated on this street. There is also a private hunting ground that is the final street on the West end of town. This gravel path extends North off the main Avenue.



(Map of Acisa de Las Arrimadas drawn by Brianna Skinner, Llaritza Rodriguez and Reyna Flores)

Acisa is a community that gets its namesake from Roman times. “Cisa” is a cut in the mountains made by the Romans. They would light the rocks on fire for many weeks and break them down until the

cut was made in the mountains for them to pass through (Field Notes p.75).

Home Structures

Many of the homes in Acisa are newer. This is visible from the construction materials used to build the house. The newer homes are made of concrete, which was a building material that could not access Acisa until 1976-1977 when the Avenida de Las Arrimadas was paved (just after the death of Franco) because trucks could finally pass through over the paved road bringing the building materials. Octavio has a solar panel on top of his house that he explained provides him with hot water and he installed it recently when there was a push from the government to reduce reliance on traditional non-renewable energies (Field Notes pp.23-25).

Many homes that have a newer construction also have preserved the older home behind the new home. These older homes were made with natural traditional building materials. They include a base of flatly cut stones held together by a mortar of adobe and limestone. The walls above this base layer of stones is made of adobe mixed with straw and small rocks. This mixture is formed while wet and needs to dry in uniform heat. This type of house needs a base of rocks because the ground water can be absorbed by the adobe and impair the integrity of the structure. This type of building also needs a roof that hangs out far past the wall in order to protect the adobe from the rain and snowfall. Something I found particularly interesting is that the adobe mixture is recyclable and needs to be moistened and reformed and can be used again and again (Field Notes p.45).

Octavio, a main informant for this project, lived at 15 Calle Solana

and had a home with a wooden structure with many glass panel windows.



(Octavio Bayon Bayon standing in front of his home in Acisa de Las Arrimadas)

He constructed this home 1983 but also maintained his grandfather's home, which was constructed 250 years ago, behind his new home. His new home also has a small solar panel on the roof that provides him with hot water and energy for his stove in the summer (Field Notes p.25).

Natural Resources

The larger area comprising Las Arrimadas is abundant with natural resources. Las Arrimadas are communities situated in a valley with mountains lush with vegetation surrounding them. Maria Jesus, a woman from Santa Colomba, who now lives in Barcelona for work, was visiting and gave us some information on el 5 de junio 2014 at a dinner hosted by Jose Maria. She told us that many of the people in her parents' generation were miners because the hills that surround

this valley were rich in coal. The industry fell apart because the coal became too deep to mine efficiently and there was coal that could be mined much more easily for less money in León (Field Notes p.17).

There are many private hunting roads throughout all the communities and also a river for fishing, *El río Porma*, that is found just West of Laiz. These rivers, along with runoff water from the mountains, provide the area with fresh water that is available for the community to access free of charge through a fountain in the center of Acisa. The people in this community depend on this resource for watering their plants and animals. We observed a man filling his watering cans many times from this fountain so he could water his plants and tend to his land. The hills in Acisa, specifically, are ideal for grazing animals and sheep often scatter the hillside.

Community Features

The most prominent feature right when one enters Acisa from the West side via Barrillos is a very large solar panel facing East. Amable, a community member in Acisa told us the solar panel was privately owned and provided power to the nearest house, 23 Avenida de Las Arrimadas (Field Notes p.21).



(Large Solar Panel in Acisa de Las Arrimadas)

Another key feature in Acisa is a church that lies between Acisa and Barrillos that was built in the 11th Century and that back then up until 1975 the church played a very strong role in the lives of the people in the area. Some informants say that up until the death of Franco in 1975, it was required to go to church every Sunday. After Franco died and Juan Carlos took over and adopted a democracy and a constitution, the constitution allowed people to choose to practice whichever religion they pleased (Field Notes p.23).

Octavio is related to 2 other families that live in the community. Octavio's cousin, Remedios Bayón Valladares lives with her husband Pedro Martinez Ríos in Acisa. Remedios Bayón Valladares is the cousin of Octavio Bayon Bayon. Another one of our main informants, Marisol, lives at 11 Calle Solana. She spends part of her time living in León and the other part in Acisa taking care of her elderly parents, who are siblings by marriage to Octavio's parents Romueldo Bayón and Remedios Bayón Rodriguez (see attached

family tree).

Octavio mentioned that often families have one or more children, specifically daughters, that do not marry and spend their time taking care of their parents in their parents' home (Field Notes p.89). Marisol's father, Antonino Valladares Rodriguez worked in the mines for 40 years (Field Notes p.59). Sebastián, a permanent resident of Acisa worked in the mines for 9 years until he got married in 1965 at 26 years old. (Field Notes p.67)

Aside from mining, Octavio said that until 1991 the communities of Las Arrimadas relied on agriculture, livestock, and trading in order to support themselves and their communities. Every week in Boñar, people could come to trade livestock. Each house would have its own oven and everything people ate came directly from the community. This was a closed and sustainable system because the community was isolated. He mentioned the climate is getting harsher now and the fresh produce that people used to grow gets damaged in the cold, snowy weather (Field Notes p.25). Because of the depleted agricultural sector of the community due to the industrialization that took place in the 1990's, many younger people migrated out of Acisa, and small communities like Acisa in order to find work in big cities (Field Notes p.25).

This next section will explore how despite all these changes to a once thriving community, they community still finds ways to maintain their connectedness, even with those who have left the community to find work elsewhere.

Overcoming Isolation

Religious Festivals

While the community of Acisa has some members who no longer identify with religion (Field Notes p.17), the community still maintains the practice of their religious festivals. (Field Notes p.57) Marisol expressed that the community has lost its religiousness but still preserves the festivals out of respect for the history of the community.

On the 16th of January there is the festival of *San Antonio* which is the saint that protects their animals. On the 16th and 17th of September there is the festival of *San Hipólito*, who is believed to be a clergyman or warrior. On the 18th of July there is the festival of *Santa Marina* who is the Patron Saint of Acisa and Barrillos.

Marisol told us about the traditional foods they prepare during these festivals. Pork is very common and the whole community assists in preparing the pork after the pig is killed. Other popular dishes are pastas, *chorizo*, *paella*, and *morcilla*, which is blood sausage.

There is also *Semana Santa* which is in April. During *Semana Santa*, the community comes together to construct a doll of Judas, which is hung in the town. After the *Semana Santa*, the children that come to the community after school lets out burn the doll of Judas.

Acisa has an *ermita* (hermitage), *La Ermita de San Antonio* that was remodeled in 1998 and since then has only had 3 weddings, but is also used for feast days and first communions. (Field Notes p.59)



(La Ermita San Antonio, Acisa de Las Arrimadas)

While the community might not be as closely tied to the religious beliefs their parents and grandparents once held, these festivals provide a platform for the community to come together and celebrate their history, share stories, and honor their community.

Gardens

Gardens are another way the community can not only connect with the land, but with their ancestral past. Marisol mentioned that everyone in the community has a garden and they use the crops their garden produces in order to feed themselves. The most common crops grown in Acisa are lettuce, carrots, peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, spinach, and artichokes. (Field Notes p.55) Marisol showed us her family's smaller garden. This small garden is used to nurse crops until they are big enough to be transported to their bigger garden. They also have many fruit trees lining the back perimeter of

this garden. There are also larger gardens in the community.



(Garden, Acisa de Las Arrimadas)

Sebastián spoke about his garden, which was originally his mother's. He mentioned that the garden has moved from location to location around Acisa in order to keep the soil rich in nutrients. He said that while the location of his garden has no sentimental value, the act of working the land and planting the soil does have sentimental value for him (Field Notes p.79).

The growing of pears in Acisa has a long history. Acisa used to be famous for its pears and would cook them many different ways for community festivals. The pear trees, however, no longer produce fruit, but the community still incorporates pears into their festivals by purchasing them from nearby cities (Field Notes p.81).

These gardens provide the community with a connection to their strong agrarian past and allow them to support themselves by providing them with their own food.

TeleClub

The TeleClub is a very unique aspect of Acisa. The TeleClub is located at 13 Calle Solana, the former schoolhouse of Acisa that is no longer in use. The TeleClub provides the community a place where they can gather and spend time together. This club had tables, chairs, card mats for playing card games, a wall of bench seats, a bar with an espresso machine, fridge and freezer, and a TV. She told us there were rooms upstairs where the kids could play games while their parents and families were watching TV and socializing downstairs. Marisol told us the community meets here every night after dinner to watch TV.

Also, about once a month, there is a community meeting called the *Junta Vecinal* which is conducted by a president with the title *Alcalde Pereño*. This TeleClub seems like a great resource to build a greater sense of community within Acisa (Field Notes p.53). Octavio also mentioned that the TeleClub was a place for the community to connect and share time with each other (Field Notes p.89).

Sebastián, however, does not go to the TeleClub. He used to, but no longer drinks, so he does not enjoy going (Field Notes p.67).

Community Services

While some people in the community are unable to take themselves to other cities, due to lack of transportation, there are services that bring outside goods into the community. There used to be a medic that would make house calls for elderly that had gotten sick, but that service stopped in 2008 due to the financial crisis (Field Notes p.87). The services that still do exist include a *panadero* that brings bread, eggs, cheese, and milk, and a *pescadero*,

that brings fish to the community (Field Notes p.15). These services allow people, especially the elderly to be connected to the larger cities and what is offered there.

Transportation

Although there is no transportation publicly available directly in Acisa, many residents have cars. Octavio has a car and expressed a need for his vehicle. He stated that this tranquil way of life, while this is what the people that live in Acisa choose, could also be stressful because people feel isolated. He is able to leave his house everyday if he wants to, and often chooses to go to León, Boñar, or Cistierna for day trips.

The importance of transport in isolated communities can be better understood in the article, *Older People 'on the Edge' in the Countrysides of Europe* by George Giacinto Giarchi. In this article Giarchi explains how older people living in the countryside are affected by globalization. Giarchi explains that “transport is the most important factor in determining degrees of isolation experienced by many rural residents” (Giarchi 713). This might explain why Octavio, who has a car and the means to get around felt more open to talking and sharing his experiences, while Sebastián, who never leaves Acisa seemed more closed off and unwilling to connect or share his experiences.

Outmigration

Acisa is a sparsely populated community with many uninhabited houses. Globalization brought a collapse to the small-scale agricultural sector and made this an industrialized process. This pushed many jobs out of the community because jobs were being

created in urban centers. Many people were forced to move out of Acisa, or commute from Acisa to bigger cities in order to find work. (Field Notes p.17) Many people who live in Acisa, live there either just for the summer or just on the weekends. These people maintain their connections with the land they grew up on by retaining their homes and returning to them, if only for just one season out of the year (Field Notes p.81). People that need to seek work outside of Acisa during the week, often return to Acisa on Saturdays (Field Notes p.17).

La Collada: Connecting Inside and Outside Acisa

La Collada is a newsletter published by La Collada Association of Acisa de Las Arrimadas. This newsletter includes photos and information collected by the community about their festivals, crop harvests, and other happenings in the community throughout the year. This publication is written by residents in Acisa, and also those who have moved out of Acisa, but still have ties to the area, whether it be their old home that they kept, or their family that still lives there. These magazines speak to the loneliness experienced by Acisa's residents and can work to create a greater sense of inclusiveness and community especially among those who have left in order to support themselves and their families through work in larger cities.

Conclusion

Although Acisa might seem isolated and disconnected, the residents there choose this lifestyle. Marisol explained that if people wanted to leave Acisa, they could. She said that the older people are satisfied living here and then spoke about her own life. Marisol is 51 years old, and while she spends her weeks living in León, she said she feels much more connected to Acisa because she enjoys the tranquility and peacefulness of the area and has work to do there like work on the garden and take care of her parents (Field Notes p.79). Octavio also explained that while there is loneliness in Acisa it is chosen and not forced upon the people. He told us people had the choice if they wanted to leave or stay. He expressed that he has everything he needs in Acisa. He has a home that provides everything he needs and allows him to live a comfortable life.

Appendices.

I. Interviews

Include here a transcription of all your interviews.

Organize all your field notes and materials in documents and labels as indicated below:

Text files: Include all relevant text files labeling them with your last name and date.

For example: gomez_06182013.docx

Sound files: All your sound files should be included in a folder and the files labeled as follows: thomas_001_06122013.wav

II. Images

Images: There should be two different folders for images. The first folder includes only your selection of the best 20 ethnographic images. The second as many images as you would like to store in the La Alcordanza archives. The 20 selected images represent the best of your experience and study. Each image will be labeled with your last name, unique number, and date.

For example: davis_001_06272013.jpg

II. Maps and Charts

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