

SPIRITUAL KINSHIP, POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND SOCIAL COOPERATION: A SWISS ALPINE VALLEY IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES.

in : Guido Alfani, Vincent Gourdon (éds.), *'Spiritual kinship in Europe, 1500-1900'*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-McMillan 2012, 183-203

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I. Introduction: The Val de Bagnes as a laboratory

In this chapter I will present some observations and results about Ritual Kinship and political mobilization of popular groups in an Alpine valley: the Val de Bagnes, in the Swiss canton of Valais, - a mountain valley, well known today thanks to the tourist station of Verbier – where we can rely on excellent sources about local families. This region presents a particular political situation, because the 11 major villages of the valley form only one commune, which includes the whole valley.

There are two major reasons to choose the Val de Bagnes for our inquiry on kinship and social networks in a rural society:

- A. The existence of sharp political and social conflicts during the 18th and the 19th centuries;
- B. The existence of almost systematic genealogical data between 1700 and 1900. (Casanova, Gard, Perrenoud 2005-08)

The 18th century was characterized by the struggle of an important part of the community of Bagnes against the feudal lord, the abbot of St-Maurice. The culminating point was a local upheaval in 1745 in Le Châble, during which the abbot was forced to sign several documents in accordance with the wishes of the rebels (Guzzi-Heeb 2007). In the 19th century feudal lordship was abolished, but now the struggle confronted a liberal-radical faction and the conservative majority in the commune.

The starting point of my presentation focuses on this question: which role did spiritual kinship play in the political mobilization of popular groups and in the organization of competing factions? This question allows us to shed light on some utilizations and meanings of spiritual kinship in the local society. Was spiritual kinship a significant instrument for economic cooperation? Or was it a channel for privileged social contacts and transactions?

II. Kinship and political factions in the 19th century

An important part of my study is inspired by classical methods of social network analysis.

I think that this methodology can be very useful to detect network structures which are not visible from a qualitative point of view. But it must be handled with care, for several reasons. I will only mention three of them:

1. The identification of individuals and groups is in many cases difficult, sometimes impossible; our data are fragmentary, sometimes uncertain. 2. Our sources – especially notarial records – provide us with a high degree of selective representation of social relations. We are never sure that the transactions we can see are the important ones; probably they are fragments of more complex social forms. 3. Social networks are abstract representations of relationships proposed by the researchers; they do not exist as such in social reality. In this sense represented networks are a *working hypothesis* to test forms of social organizations, but they are not existing forms of social organization. People do not (only) think and behave according to these abstract patterns.

For these reasons network analysis is only one part of historical reconstruction: it must be combined with qualitative studies, with the study of specific families or biographies, to understand how individuals behave in social reality and what they actually do within the abstract structures we can observe.

The 19th century was in Western Valais a time of strong political polarization. Since the late 1830ies we can observe the building of two competing factions: a conservative one, defending Catholic religion, political decentralization and traditions, and a radical faction, contesting the role of the Church and demanding political reform. Since 1835 radicals founded the local section of the *Jeune Suisse* (Young Switzerland), a political association inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini, and – as an answer - conservatives organized themselves by *Vieille Suisse* (Old Switzerland).

I will not deal with the details of local political life (Arlettaz 1971; Roten 1971). I will rather try to summarize some results concerning the role of kinship solidarity in the organization of political factions and then ask some questions about the specific role of spiritual kinship in the perspective of political solidarities. At first I wondered how strong endogamy was within the radical group, that is, how many radicals married women coming from radical families or kin groups – women who were relatives of their radical friends. In the 1840es, radicals were a small minority: this fact allows us to identify most members of the group and to describe precisely their organization.

The data basis is built by 320 identified individuals, 174 radical men and their wives (146)¹. The result was quite surprising for me:

Table II.1: Marriage Relations of members of the “*Jeune Suisse*” and political allegiances.

Cases, category	%
72 wives belong to the radical group (in)	49.3%
31 wives are linked with other wives of the radical group (in-f)	21.2%
8 wives are linked to the group by distant kinship ties (far)	5.5%
35 wives are outside of the group (ex)	24.0%
146 = all relations	100%

One might suppose that this result is accidental. But if we look at the kinship-relationships among the clan, we see that close relationships were far more important than other ties.

Table II.2 : Kinship Relations between wives of members of the “*Jeune Suisse*” and other radical men.

Kinship Relation/ degree	cases
father-daughter :	4
brother-sister	25
uncle/aunt-niece	7
grand-father	1
cousins	2 nd degree 12
	3 ^d degree 6
	3 ^d -4 th degree 2
	4 th degree 5
far relations :	
	4 th -5 th degree 6
	5 th degree 2
	5 th -6 th degree 3

Solidarity within the clan is basically ensured by close kinship ties.

The importance of kinship ties can be observed in the conservative faction too. To give an example: the Besson Group is a very big kin-group which we find in several villages of the valley. But if we look at the conservative individuals – who signed petitions and were involved in conflicts - we discover that they belong to two families in Verbier and Médières: they were close relatives. (Besson 3-1162.. from Verbier and Médières, Besson 4-112.. from Verbier). The same is true for other groups, like Corthay 5 or Cretton 2. Since about 1839 we can actually observe a certain stability of the radical clan over the time, up to the end of the 19th century when radicals, anticlerical groups, founded their own free school, the « Ecole libre de

Bagnes ». We can observe f.e. clearly defined radical families and also clearly recognizable conservative families or kin groups.

On the radical side, I identified about 20 kin-groups (according to our genealogical classification: s. *Familles de Bagnes*, 2004-08) which constantly appear in every local conflict between 1840 and 1900:

Bessard 7, Dumoulin 6, Filliez 4, Morend 10, Jacquemin 1, Besse 30, Alter 5, Boven 1, Besse 30 (vg), Carron 9, Fellay 8, Fellay 37, Gard 1, Maret 39, Maret 49, Michaud 14, Oreiller 1, Pache 3, Perraudin 4, Rey 1, Troillet 5 et Troillet 4.

These groups seem to build the steady core of the radical faction. About 12 other families appear in several conflicts at the same time, but neither always nor systematically:

Fellay 34, Collombin 2, Gard 7, Luy 1, Michaud 8, Nicollier 16, Vaudan 10, Guigoz 7, Gaillard 1, Gabbud 10, Fellay 44, Bruchez 28, ...

These are groups – or individuals - which were close to the radical faction, but did not belong to its core – as far as we can see according to our sources. The trend during the second half of the 19th century was a stronger political polarization; but the building of closed kinship « clans » remains imperfect: the principle of exclusion cannot be observed in every case. Moreover, we can observe a significant evolution of the political factions, which opens a huge space for individual strategies and political change. For these reasons, kinship must be seen as an important factor in faction building, but it is not the only one: factions are not simply local kin-groups. In fact, spiritual kinship is another important element of political life². But how important is it?

III. Spiritual kinship and faction building in Bagnes 1840-50

III.1. Core radicals: the Bessard family.

It is possible to appreciate the role of Ritual Kinship through the observation of particular families: I started with the Bessard Family from Le Châble and Villette, a core radical group which was connected to the main conflicts against the conservative majority between 1835 and 1900. (Bessard 7 according to our classification, from Le Châble and Villette). The majority of the relations created through Ritual Kinship actually concern other radical families. Let us consider the relations established by the members of the Bessard group as godfathers or godmothers. We can start by isolating the individuals whom we know as radicals and their wives: who are their godchildren?

Table III.1.1: Godchildren of radicals of the Bessard Group

Cases, category	%
28 godchildren come from core radical families (+1?)	66.7% (69 %)
6 have a distant kinship relationship with radicals or their wives	14.3 %
7 come from other families (1 from a conservative family, the Michellod 20, Verbier)	16.7 %
42 relations considered	100 %

Are there significant differences between the Bessards as godfathers and their wives as godmothers?

Table III.1.2: Godchildren of radical men and women of the Bessard Group

A. Radical men as godfathers:

Cases, category	%
21 godchildren come from core radical families	77.8%
3 have a distant kinship relationship with radicals or their wives	11.1 %
3 come from other families	11.1 %
27 relations considered	

B. Wives of radicals as godmothers:

Cases, category	%
7 godchildren come from core radical families (+ 1?)	46.7 % (53.3%)
3 godchildren have a distant kinship relation with radicals or their wives	20 %
4 godchildren come from other families	26.7 %
15 relations considered	100 %

The rate is higher for the men, which is not surprising: the Bessard men from Villette were very active radicals and it is likely that people having close relations with them would be identified as radicals (or sympathizing with them) by other inhabitants of the region. Women could maintain other relations, partly resulting from kinship solidarities of their own, but they played a significant role as godmothers within the radical faction too. These results concern, as I said, only the well-known radicals, husbands and their wives: but it is interesting to remark that we obtain similar results even if we consider the whole Bessard-Group (Bessard 7 and Bessard 2) between 1830 and 1865. We have in this case 86 godfathers or godmothers of the Bessard group (100 %):

Table III.1.3: Godchildren of the Bessard Group 1830-65.

Cases, category	%
51 godchildren came from radical families	59.3 %

13 godchildren are probably related with radical families ³	15.1 %
22 godchildren are outside the radical group – as far as we know.	25.6 %
86 relations considered	100 %

This result is rather surprising: is there a political solidarity within the extended kin-group?

As the matter of fact, several alliances exist between the two main kin-groups – Bessard 2 and 7 – since the 18th century and again in 1847 (a marriage between members of two radical branches). The two families were structural allies and kept a certain degree of political solidarity over a long time: both groups were represented among the radicals of the “*Jeune Suisse*”.

The result is clear: spiritual kinship reinforced ties within the radical faction. As we will see, this conclusion can be verified by studying other groups – although the Bessard family is quite a particular case. We can observe a similar tendency within the conservative Michellod- Family in Le Sappey. In this case too, the Michellod choose other well-known conservatives as godfathers and godmothers for their children.

But did spiritual kinship simply reinforce kinship ties, or did it create new relationships, outside the kin group?

Generally, the spiritual kinship solidarities within the kin group are important:

Table III.1.4: Godchildren of the Bessard Group 1830-65, kin and non-kin.

Cases, category	%
42 godchildren are relatives	48.8 %
9 are distant kin	10.5 %
35 are not kin	40.7 %
86 relations considered	100 %

If we consider the 61 godchildren from the radical milieu (uncertain relations included):

Table III.1.5: Godchildren of the Bessard Group from the radical milieu, 1830-65, kin and non-kin.

Cases, category	%
35 are kin	59.3 %
5 are distant kin	8.5 %
21 are not kin	32.2 %

In 1/3 of the cases, spiritual kinship allows to establish a new relation to radical elements outside the (close) kin-group. In this perspective, spiritual kinship seems to be an important instrument to connect the members of the radical faction.

III.2.2. Radical patrons? The Filliez family in Le Châble.

The role of non-related godchildren from the same faction suggests that spiritual kinship could be an important instrument for political patronage.⁴ I tried to verify this idea by considering the influential family of Maurice-Eugène Filliez, the most important radical leader of Bagnes in 1844 and an important politician in Valais until his death in 1856. In my sources I found 93 baptisms into which Maurice-Eugène Filliez, his brothers and their wives were involved as godparents.

Table III.2.1: Godchildren of the Filliez Group from Le Châble, 1830-65.

Cases, category	%
54 are with radical families: <i>Jeune Suisse</i> , core radicals	58.1 %
9 with families of wives of members of <i>Jeune Suisse</i>	9.7 %
5 are distant kin of radicals	5.4%
6 are elements from the „liberal milieu“ ⁵ :	6.4%
3 uncertain results ⁶	3.2 %
16 are outside the milieu (8 of them are kin)	17.2 %
93 considered relations:	100 %

To sum up, we can say that about 80% of the godchildren were more or less closely tied to the liberal-radical milieu of the Filliez, only 17 % did not have any visible relation to this faction.

Once again, spiritual kinship appears to be an important instrument to reinforce solidarity within the radical faction: but are there solidarity relationships within or beyond the kin-group? This question is important to understand the structure of patronage round the Filliez-Family: did the Filliez play the role of powerful patrons towards other families of the liberal-radical faction?

The part of kin in the ritual network of the family seems to be minor than in the Bessard family: among 93 relations established through spiritual kinship:

Table III.2.2: Godchildren of the Filliez Group from Le Châble, 1830-65: kin and non-kin.

Cases, category	%
43 are close kin of the Filliez (or of their wives)	46.2 %
9 are distant kin	9.7 %
41 are not kin ⁷ .	44.1 %
93 relations considered	100 %

More than for popular families (like the Bessards), for the wealthy Filliez-Family spiritual kinship is an instrument to create patronage-relations outside the kin-group and to affirm a leadership role within the liberal-radical milieu. Does this mean that spiritual kinship represents a central element in the patronage network? We must be careful, because our sources do not reveal the actual meaning of the relation to the godparents. To answer this question we must take into account the social and economic significance of godparents in 18th and 19th century Bagnes.

IV.1. Spiritual kinship, economic and social cooperation in the 18th century.

During the last years several studies have pointed out to the importance of spiritual kinship for social organization. The crucial problem in this perspective is the fact that our sources do not allow us to understand the actual significance of spiritual kinship (Alfani 2006, 22-23). Does spiritual kinship ensure a privileged relationship between godfather (or godmother) and their godchildren? Do men and women rely on ritual kin when they need money to borrow? Or when they sell land?

My analysis of some families connected to the upheaval of 1745 does not allow to verify this hypothesis. I could not observe particular *direct* economic or social transactions between godparents and godchildren if they are not relatives. We can try to go further in this investigation and consider two families which were deeply involved in the 1745 upheaval and more generally implicated in the opposition against the abbot of Saint-Maurice: The Terrettaz 7 from Lourtier and Le Châble and the Morend 10 from Le Cotterg and Le Châble.

The first important element to notice is the fact that kinship networks are open: parents do not choose godparents from a few powerful families but try to diversify their relations, taking godparents from different kin groups. We find some exceptions from this general rule, but they do not seem to have visible consequences for the social strategy of the family. The Morend family had some godfathers and godmothers from the family of Jean-Mathieu Jacquemin; but we do not find any economic or any further social transaction between the two groups. My research until today has not shown any privileged relations between godparents and the families of the godchildren in loans or land sales. We can study f.e. the loans network around the family of Paul and Valentin or François Maret, the most important private creditors according to our sources – including their brothers and sisters and their wives. Is there any spiritual kinship between creditors and debtors? Our identification does not reveal any significant correlation.

There where we can observe preferential economic relationships, spiritual kinship is not the only possibility to explain them. In these cases, godparents and godchildren are often kin. We can observe f.e. preferential relations between the Morend family from Le Châble and Anne-Marguerite Maret from Le Châble, (MAR/39-122). Anne-Marguerite was Pierre-Hyacinthe's (*1745) and Anne-Marguerite's Morend (*1749) godmother. She lent the Morends some money (1750) and bought land from them (1769).

She was a sister-in-law of Marie-Rose Maret, who in 1743 married Jean-Philibert Morend (MRE/10-47), a cousin of Théodule and Pierre-François Morend. But there were further relations between the two families: Anne-Maries husband was the son of Jacquemod Maret, who in 1745 took part in the upheaval against the abbot of St-Maurice, on the side of Théodule and Pierre-François Morend.

As we will point out to in paragraph IV.3., both the Morends and the Marets were components of the dense network we can observe in Le Châble. Spiritual kinship was not the only important relation between the two families: kinship, village solidarity and shared political allegiances within a densely connected local network played a crucial role. We can observe a similar relationship between the Morend and the related Bruchez-Family from Villette (related through the mothers, two sisters from the Besse 4 group), with several reciprocal social and economic ties. In this case too, the intense relations developed on the basis of kinship, political solidarity, local proximity and spiritual kinship.

IV.2. Patronage in the 18th century?

Several recent studies have suggested that spiritual kinship is a very important element in patronage structures.⁸ Is this the case in 18th century Bagnes? This question is not easy to answer. It is evident that powerful local notables, like the notary Jean-Pierre Coutaz or Felix Dumoulin, had many godchildren and it is very likely that their network was an important component of their social capital. But we must be careful for several reasons:

1. The wealthiest notables of the valley (J.-Pierre Magnin, Etienne Gard, ...) do not appear on our lists as very popular godfathers. Perhaps they were too old by the time of the revolt – the time on which we collected our data: but their close relatives were not the most popular godfathers or godmother either.
2. The spiritual kinship relations I described above were often reciprocal ones. The notary Jean-Pierre Coutaz was, as I said, the godfather of several children from his own political faction, including the adversaries of the abbot of St-Maurice. This way he was tied to several men who participated with him in the 1745 revolt, like Jean-André Gard, the Terrettaz brothers or Théodule and Jean-Pierre Morend⁹; but on the other hand Jean-André Gard and Jean-Georges Terrettaz were godfathers of Coutaz' children too. The reciprocity is even stronger in popular families like the Terrettaz and Morends: in this sense spiritual kinship establishes a horizontal and reciprocal solidarity, rather than an evident patronage structure.
3. If we have a closer look at the relation between godparents and godchildren, it is very difficult to observe *direct* privileged relationships. The transactions of Jean-Pierre Coutaz do not reveal preferential contacts with ritual kin.

From all this it seems to me that the high degree of political mobilisation of individuals or family groups in 18th and 19th century Bagnes cannot be satisfactorily explained by local 'clientele' or patronage structures. I do not mean that such patronage structures did not exist; but we must take into account the very complex strategies of popular groups and families to avoid strong dependence from powerful patrons and to diversify contacts and social relations.

IV.3. Kinship, spiritual kinship and faction building 1745

It is quite a surprising fact that the building of rival factions in 19th century Bagnes was not new. If we analyze the 18th century conflicts between the community and the abbot of St-Maurice, we detect a similar opposition of two factions and a similar role played by kinship ties, ensuring a high degree of endogamy and a stability of the faction including the opponents of the feudal lord (Guzzi 2007; Guzzi Payot, forthcoming). The two major struggles were an upheaval in 1745 against the abbot and a conflict in 1766 about the foundation of a new municipal school, supported by the local elite as well as by the bishop of Sion against the abbot and his faction.

To simplify, we may say that the kin-groups involved in the two conflicts were nearly the same. Kinship ties ensured a continuity of the factions in a similar way as in the 19th century conflicts between radicals and conservatives.

At first glance, village solidarity does not seem to play a big role in the 1745 upheaval: the rebels came from different villages and we can not recognize a strategic center of the movement. But if we observe the relationships between the rebels (and their families) living in the same village, we discover an interesting, dense network structure.

Figure 1: Relations between the opponents of the abbot in Le Châble, Bagnes (all relations)

Figure 2: Relations between the opponents of the abbot in Le Châble, Bagnes (all relations, individuals grouped according to their kin-group)

But which was the influence of spiritual kinship? How much do spiritual kinship relations reinforce the ties within the faction? In Le Châble we see that kinship represents the fundamental structure of the group: most of the families involved in the movement were connected by kinship. But we can also observe that the rebels and their families are connected by a dense network made of spiritual kinship and social or economic transaction that produced a high degree of social proximity.

Spiritual kinship did reinforce these ties, underlining relationships of active solidarity within the kin group, but creating transversal relations between different groups as well, which were not connected by kinship, like the Terrettaz and the Morends, coming originally from other villages of the valley. Similarly, Jean-Michel Besse from Le Châble was f.e. the godfather of 4 children from the Terrettaz group, although he was not a close kin. Both Besse and the Terrettaz brothers were opponents of the abbot of Saint-Maurice. The families

Morend 10 and Terrettaz 7 were members of this network in Le Châble, as well as other rebels like Jean-Michel Besse, Etienne Gaillard, Jean-Joseph Maret and others, although they came from other villages of the valley. In both cases the rebels came to Le Châble after they had married women from Le Châble (or from another village of the lower valley).

To understand this point, I have to deal with the problem of mobility within the Val de Bagnes.

The valley shows a particular mobility pattern, because marriages between people from different villages were frequent: and the men often changed their residence to follow the brides to their villages. Thus ca. 40 – 45% of the new families were matrifocal. From this point of view, spiritual kinship ties were an important instrument to integrate foreigners in the new village and especially in local political groups.

The conclusion is that spiritual kinship plays a very important role by constructing dense local solidarity networks within the village; as I said when describing the relations of radical families in the 19th century, spiritual kinship represents a crucial element for the building of a specific political faction (a radical faction, or an oppositional group in the 18th century), characterized by intense social cooperation.

Spiritual kinship does not play a role *per se*, but only if related to relationships of village solidarity, dense kinship and political networks. It is the overlapping of different social as well as kinship ties which shapes strong proximity and cooperation patterns. And the network is not exclusive: it is open for other contacts and other cooperations. The thick network shown by Figure 1 – 2, which connects the adversaries of the abbot and their families, seems both to provide the ground on which local *political cells* were organized and to be a crucial factor in local mobilization. This densely tied groups show *the structure of coherent political cells*, although I must admit that we know nearly nothing about the practical functioning of such a “cell”.

For the better understanding of the role of godparenthood in local society we have to look at the evolutions from the 18th to the 19th century and at the changing economic or social function of spiritual kinship.

V. Spiritual kinship: Evolutions 1700-1900

Several studies on spiritual kinship suggest that a shift can be observed between the 18th and the 19th century, from rather vertical relationships to powerful patrons towards more horizontal ties with kin or with persons belonging to a similar social group (Sabeau 1998, 266; Alfani 2006).

Can such a transformation be observed in Bagnes? As a first step, we can consider the quantitative aspect:

We can observe the relation between the number of baptisms and the numbers of individuals as godfather/godmother: does the concentration on a few powerful patrons decrease in the 19th century?

This method is not very exact, because of the difficulty to precisely identify the individuals according to the names in the records; but the results I will present can be verified by a more detailed analysis of particular families or groups.

In the period 1735-1766 we find 2486 baptisms and only 696 godfathers (= 3.57 children / godfather) and 632 godmothers (= 3.93 children / godmother);

In the period 1835-1870 we observe 2848 baptisms with 1143 godfathers (= 2.49 godchildren / godfather) and 1117 godmothers (= 2.55 children / godmother).

Thus we have a higher concentration on a few powerful men or women as godparents in the 18th century and a broader distribution among a larger group in the 19th century. We can probably observe the same trend I described for Vouvry, a village in the Rhône plain of western Valais : the increasing tendency to choose kin and socially closer persons as godfathers in the 19th century – which can be interpreted as a trend towards more personal and intimate relationship with the godfather and the godmother (Guzzi-Heeb 2008, 257-259; Sabeau 1998, 238-255; 266-268).

From another point of view, the great patrons have partly disappeared: whereas in the 18th century some popular godfathers had more than 20 godchildren, 100 years later the powerful notables of the valley have no more than 10 godchildren. The identification of 19th century godfathers in the parish records is often difficult, because the priest only recorded their names, without further information. We can observe, anyway, that now individuals who had more than 10 godchildren were an exception, like André-Frédéric Filliez (19 godchildren) in the first or Etienne-Joseph Courthion in the second half of the century, with 15 godchildren. In spite of the uncertain method, the trend towards more horizontal relations is therefore evident. To answer the question about the role of spiritual kinship in political mobilization we must know more about political conflicts and political factions in this region.

VI.1. Spiritual kinship, patronage and loans in the 19th century.

Our analysis of 18th century Bagnes suggests that spiritual kinship was not an important element in patronage networks. Can we observe any significant evolutions in the 19th century?

Generally, the role of godparenthood in vertical patronage structures is all but evident. When the Bessards had to borrow money, they did not appeal to the godparents but rather to wealthy men and women, even if they were members of conservative families. In this case, spiritual kinship does not seem to participate in a clientele.

Moreover, the fact that different families belonged to the same radical milieu did not automatically mean that they had close contacts through spiritual kinship or close social cooperation. One could suppose that the Bessards relied on radical friends or radical notables, like the Filliez family in their village, to get loans and protection. But the reality is not as simple as that. The Bessards did not belong to the ritual network of the

Filliez: there is no ascertained relation before 1870. Although the two groups belonged to the same faction and lived in the same village, they seem to build two separate clans, without reciprocal contacts.

On the other hand, social networks were open: most transactions we can observe for the Bessard family did not concern radicals but rather conservative individuals and groups. In 1850 Etienne Bessard borrowed money from Etienne-Joseph Pittier, a wealthy notary and influent conservative leader. Many contracts concerning the Bessard were stipulated by another influent notary, Pierre-Joseph Jacquemin, a leader of *Vieille Suisse* since 1844. Other contracts were stipulated by other conservative notables like Georges-François Fusey, Pierre Gard and Etienne Pittier.

It is interesting to notice that these social ties sustain the building of political clans, but they do not automatically establish a clientele-relationship between the godfather and the family of the child, but rather cooperation-relationships with other popular families. In this sense my observations confirm what David W. Sabeau wrote about the evolution of spiritual kinship towards rather horizontal cooperation patterns in the 19th century (Sabeau 1998). The study of the Bessard family suggests that there is no strong relation between spiritual kinship and economic cooperation: can this be verified in other cases?

VI.2. Spiritual kinship, trust and economic cooperation: the foundation of the Clothes Factory in Montagner 1839

The foundation of the textile factory in Montagner (Bagnes) in 1839 is quite a particular example of industrial enterprise in a mountain valley in 19th century. On February 14th, 1839, a society was created by a small group of men, including :

the president of the commune, Georges-François Fusay (1803-1856), his brother François-Joseph Fusay (1805-1854),

their brother-in-law Jean-Pierre Gard (°1804)¹⁰ from Le Châble and his brother Etienne Gard (1814-1895) from Montagner,

the carpenters Pierre-Joseph Morend (°1807) and Pierre-Alexis Bruchez (1800-1872) from Le Cotterg, Bruchez' brother-in-law, the mayor Jean-Christophe Besse (1791-1854)¹¹ from Versegères and Louis Morend from Le Châble.

The analysis shows the importance of kinship ties to ensure reciprocal trust: the founders of the factory belong to three parental groups. But how are these different groups connected? Does spiritual kinship play a role in underlying preferential kinship ties? Or does it establish trust relationships outside the sphere of biological kinship and marriage alliances?

It is interesting to notice that the individuals participating in the foundation were deeply concerned with local politics: most of them fought on the radical side in the following years, like Louis Morend, who was president of the local *Jeune Suisse* section. The Fusey-brothers were, in 1844, among the leaders of the

conservative faction, although, according to local historians, they had been liberals in previous years (Rillet de Constant 1845).

The factory seems therefore to be the expression of a liberal-radical milieu of the Thirties which was organized around several reciprocal ties¹². Matrimonial alliances seem to represent the main instrument to ensure reciprocal trust between the individuals concerned¹³. But which role did spiritual kinship play?

We can analyze the baptisms within the concerned families in the crucial period 1830-60 and ask whether there existed significant ritual ties between them. If we consider the godchildren of the factory-founders, no significant relationship outside the own kin-group can be detected: no direct relationship between the concerned families. Although spiritual kinship did evidently underline political solidarity¹⁴, the analysis confirms the impression that in Bagnes it was not used to reinforce trust between partners in economic enterprises and was not strongly linked with economic or social cooperation.

VI.3. The building of socio-political milieus

I have to admit that the results presented above did not fully convince me. I wondered whether I had overlooked some important aspect. On the one hand, I pointed out that spiritual kinship did not represent a privileged vector of economic or social cooperation between individuals; on the other hand, in the 18th century spiritual kinship played a very important role for constructing dense local solidarity networks between the rebels' families in the village of Le Châble. The dense network shown by Figure 1 – 2, which connects the adversaries of the abbot and their families, is composed by strategic social and economic cooperation too.

Also with 19th century loans relations we find some interesting exceptional cases: in 1862 the brothers Bessard borrowed money from Julie and Eugénie Gard (GAR/7-62476, GAR/7-62472), two cousins of Louis Gard, *Jeune Suisse*; Julie Gard will later be the godmother of François-Alfred Bessard; but already before (1840) she had been the godmother (and aunt) of his mother, Julie-Léonie Maret (MAR/18-3.11.4735), long before she married Séraphin Bessard (1872).

Figure.3

Was there a direct relationship between the economic transaction with Séraphin Bessard and the later marriage? Or were they members of a similar, radical close milieu? I suppose that the latter is true: the 3 families (Bessard 7, Maret 18 and Gard 7) were deeply concerned with the liberal-radical milieu; even if spiritual kinship did not play a direct role.

In fact, the method I adopted raises some important questions: if we consider the direct relationships between godparents and godchildren, we do not observe any preferential cooperation pattern. But what about the

relations between families or between extended kin-groups? Perhaps we have to take into account extended kin groups and analyze the collective relations between such groups?

The analysis of 19th century radical notables leads us to crucial questions concerning the meaning of spiritual kinship: are there important relations between the godchildren of the same family? Are there preferential relationships between the families of the godchildren? Does the fact that different individuals have the same godparents lead to any privileged relationships?

To answer these questions I studied the ritual network of Maurice-Eugène Filliez', the radical leader in the battle of 1844, and his family. An important role is played by André-Frédéric Filliez, Maurice-Eugène's eldest brother, although he was not directly involved in the struggles of the 1840es: he was one of the most popular godfathers of the valley and had at least 19 godchildren, most of them (16) in the liberal-radical milieu.

I created an Excel table with all ascertained mentionings of ritual kin of André-Frédéric Filliez in my sources (godchildren, their parents, and their transactions). The table contains 407 transactions and shows interesting patterns: most economic and social exchange did actually take place within the group of the Filliez and their ritual kin. Among 236 identified transactions:

Table VI.3.1: Transactions between spiritual kin of the Filliez Group from Le Châble, 1830-65.

Cases, category	%
117 concern ritual kin of André-Frédéric Filliez or their families	49.6 %
52 are related to ritual kin of André-Frédéric Filliez or their families by alliance	22.0 %
22 are distant kin of A.-Frédéric's spiritual kin	9.3 %
45 individuals have no recognizable relation to ritual kin of A.-Frédéric.	19.1 %
236 relations considered	100 %

In only 13 cases we can observe direct transactions with the Filliez Family, but these transactions concern only 4 ritual kin: Zacharie Fellay (who was particularly close to the Filliez), J.-Michel Dumoulin, François Troillet and Maurice-Eugène Perraudin. Dumoulin was not directly connected by Spiritual kinship; he was the uncle of André-Frédéric's godchild. Other relations concern close kin of the Filliez, like the Pache 3, the family of the wife of A-Frédéric Filliez and so on.

Sometimes the logic of the relation is not evident. 1843 Etienne-Placide Nicollier and François-Frédéric Carron exchanged some meadows in Le Sappey. Nicollier was the father of A-Frédéric Filliez' godchild; Carron was the brother-in-law of a Maret 18-3, a close kin of another godchild of André-Frédéric, but not directly related to the Filliez. Several other transactions concern the Maret 18 as well as the related Maret 35, kin of André-Frédéric's wife.

Among 236 identified transactions, we can notice that only 46 concerned people outside the group of the ritual kin of André-Frédéric Filliez and their families, but sometimes these relationships are recurring, like the relations to the Magnin 7 group (4 transactions, 1836-1866). In fact, Pierre-Alexis Magnin was an affinal kin of the Dumoulin 13 group, and belonged indirectly to the extended group of André-Frédéric Fillez' ritual kin. Other transactions concern the same families (f. example the Cretton 2 and the Collombin 2): we may suppose that the Collombin, although not related with the rest of the group, were preferential partners of the Crettons.

Of course this result can not be generalized, and it has to be verified through the study of other families. But from the methodological perspective I believe it to be very important. It suggests that the important relations are not the individual ones (godfather-godchild, or godfather - godchild's father), but those taking place within a larger collective network which includes the kin on both sides.

In this sense spiritual kinship contributes to building a preferential „*milieu*“ where contacts and transactions are more intense, although never exclusive. I speak of “milieu” in the sense of a preferential network based on intense kinship, political and social relations. (Guzzi-Heeb 2009)

In fact, spiritual kinship was not the only tie between the members of this group: kinship, political allegiances, village solidarities, social proximities were other ties reinforcing solidarity within this „milieu“. Spiritual kinship seems to encourage preferential transactions outside the kin group as well, f.e. between the Filliez-group and the Cretton family from Le Châble – a conservative family. I think that a more precise conceptualization of the network structure of such “milieus” is a crucial step towards a better understanding of kinship and spiritual kinship in alpine societies.

VII. Conclusions

I agree with Guido Alfani, interpreting spiritual kinship as a weak tie – according to the definition by Granovetter (Alfani 2006; Granovetter 1973). Our inquiry in Bagnes shows no clear structural function: spiritual kinship as such is neither a channel for preferential economic relations nor an instrument for privileged social cooperation between *individuals*. The concept of flexibility is therefore very important to understand the meaning of this social relation (Alfani 2006, 221-238). In fact, even within the politically homogeneous radical milieu we can observe different functions of spiritual kinship:

- a. It underlines political solidarities,
- b. confirms active kinship solidarities,
- c. and creates social endogamic relations with non-related families.

This plurality of possible utilizations of godparenthood provides a high flexibility of this relation, and makes any generalization difficult. In this sense, spiritual kinship is a matter of strategy: it allows to test social alliances without becoming too deeply committed with other individuals and families, to give up certain

relations, to create new ones. Being a weak tie, it represents an important instrument of diversification and adaptation to changing political and social conditions.

But at the same time spiritual kinship is an important element of social proximity between families and kin groups. The main result of my inquiry is the relevance of preferential networks linked with godparenthood and political “milieus”, shaping political solidarities and political mobilization.

Spiritual kinship appears mostly as an integrative social relation: it is not significant *per se*, but only linked with other social relations, above all kinship, political and local solidarity relationships. Relations to godparents or to godchildren and to their families contribute to form dense social networks, where social and economic contacts are intense.

If these observations can be confirmed by further examples, many classical theses on clientelism in mountain societies and popular political mobilisation will have to be revised (Madic, Pfister, Clavier). The core of the power of political patrons, like the Filliez, does not consist of the control of *vertical* relations to lower class clients, but rather of the mediating role of the notables within a dense network where the plot is built by *horizontal* relations.

This result may be partially connected with a specific political situation in the Val de Bagnes: the structure of the community of Bagnes, with a large population and several villages, encouraged competition for power and influence between local notables and the diversification of social contacts. In smaller villages of Valais, such as St-Gingolph or Vouvry, dominated by local aristocratic families – we may find in the 18th century a more vertical social structure and more visible patronage structures (Guzzi-Heeb 2008, 257-58).

I believe one last remark to be important: in the 19th century spiritual kinship becomes increasingly a matter of culture. It connects families sharing certain ideas and values and sometimes a specific social behavior. As such it is a very relevant political tie in the 19th century, underlining political solidarity relationships within both the radical and the conservative milieus. But this political aspect is already evident in the middle of the 18th century in the milieu of the opponents of the abbot of Saint-Maurice: it seems to be an important factor of political mobilization against the feudal lord (Guzzi-Heeb 2007).

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¹ The individuals are members of *Jeune Suisse* and signatories to two liberal petitions (1841 and 1842) who could be sufficiently identified.

² On spiritual kinship s. recently Alfani 2006, Gourdon 2003, Munno 2005, Terpstra 2000. S. also Héritier-Augé; Coupet-Rougier 1995, Zonabend 1978.

³ In these cases the relation is uncertain, because of the uncertain identification or because the relation is not close.

⁴ S. for example Nicole Reinhardt 2000. Recently, for 19th and 20th century Italy and France Alfani, Gourdon, 2010. For Switzerland: Polli-Schönborn, 2004.

⁵ 2 men from these families signed petitions against the conservative community administration in 1839, 4 will appear among the radicals in the 1860es.

⁶ Perhaps relations with radical families, but the identification is uncertain.

⁷ But which is the specific influence of kinship-ties within the radical milieu? Among 70 relations with the liberal-radical milieu (liberals, radicals, members of the *Jeune Suisse*, wives of members of the *Jeune Suisse*):

43 godchildren out of radical-lib families are kin; 27 are not kin.

⁸ On Patronage in Switzerland s. Pfister 1992; Teuscher 1998, especially 135-179; Anne-Lise Head-König, 2001. On patronage and spiritual kinship s. Polli-Schönborn, 2004 and Guzzi-Heeb 2009. Cf. the essay by Cosme Gomez Carrasco, in this book.

⁹ The notary Jean-Pierre Coutaz had – as far as we know – 16 godchildren; many of them belonging to the oppositional faction of Le Châble – although most of them were not close kin (Morend 10, Farquet 1, Fellay 34, Maret 1, ...). In this case the political function of Ritual Kinship is very evident: the relations of the notable are strongly oriented along the political position of the families, but not exclusively; he has several godchildren in the kin group of his wife and in other families.

¹⁰ Georges-François Fusay and Jean-Pierre Gard married two sisters, Marie-Geneviève (1806-1849) and Anne-Patience Nicollier (1804-1852).

¹¹ Pierre-Alexis Bruchez and Jean-Christostome Besse married two sisters, Marie-Françoise (1794-1866) and Anne-Catherine Collombin (1803-1864).

¹² François-Joseph Besse, a liberal petitioner in 1839, was Chrisostomes' brother; Frédéric Besse (perhaps a member of *Jeune Suisse*, although the identification remains uncertain) was a cousin. Moreover, Chrisostomes sister was the wife of Benjamin Guigoz, a *Jeune Suisse*. As for Pierre-Alexis Bruchez, he was a cousin of a liberal petitioner, Pierre-Maurice Bruchez'; another kin, Alexis « le jeune » was also a member of the radical society. When the promoters chose a worker to build the factory (Etienne-François Besse), again they chose the brother of a radical friend, Etienne-Joseph Besse from Versegères, a member of the *Jeune Suisse*.

¹³ The two quoted kin-groups are organized around the female groups: the Collombin and the Nicollier sisters (Collombin 2 and Nicollier 18), whose families were close to the liberal faction too. Modeste Collombin signed a liberal petition in 1839. Other kin were members of *Jeune Suisse*. Justin Nicollier, a brother-in law of the promoters of the factory, signed a liberal petition too. Joseph Baud, M.-Geneviève's and Anne's brother-in-law, was a *Jeune suisse*.

¹⁴ But most Ritual Kinship-relationships of the promoters' families were deeply embedded in a liberal-radical milieu. I consider 67 godparenthood-relations with the founders of the factory and their wives. 14 of the godchildren come from the families of the promoters (and their wives), clearly belonging to the liberal milieu,

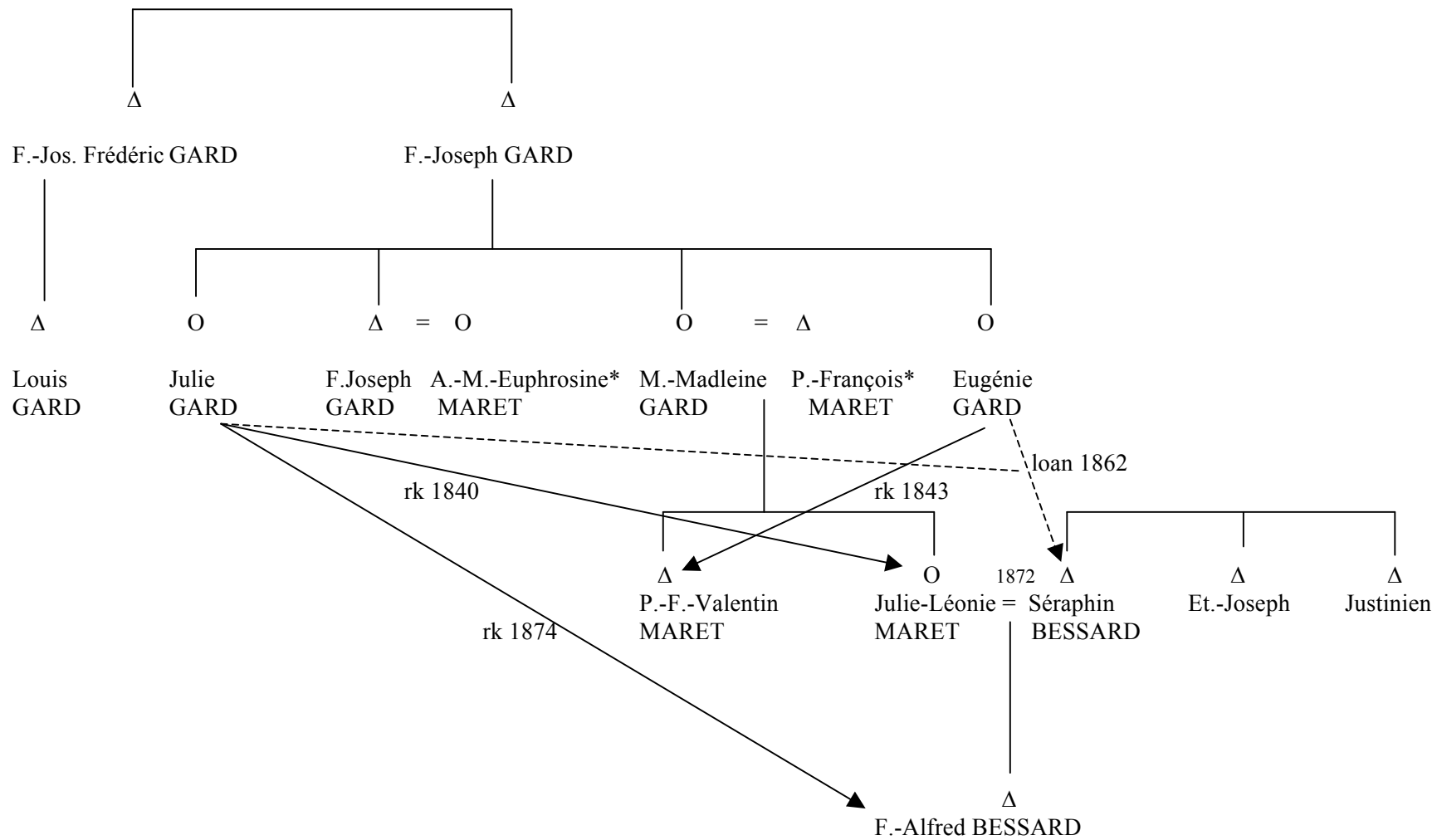
35 of the godchildren come from other clearly recognizable radical families,

3 are kin of radical wives,

3 have a distant kin relationship with well-known radicals,

12 do not belong to radical families.

Figure 3. Relations between Séraphin Bessard's family and the Gard sisters



rk= ritual kinship
 *= siblings