Volume I
Number 5
July 2014

workersoftheworld

International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts

Table of contents

International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts

Contact

workersoftheworld2012@yahoo.co.uk

Website

http://workersoftheworldjournal.net/

Workers of the World is the journal of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts, born in Lisbon on March 2011. The Association now has the participation of more than three dozen academic institutions from Europe, Africa, North and South America. Website: http://iassc-mshdijon.in2p3.fr/

Advisory Board

Letter from the editor

The fifth issue of *Workers of the World – International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts* is dedicated to "Conflict in the contemporary rural world. New interpretations of an old problem", and it has Histagra (Research Group on the Agrarian and Political History of the Rural World, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain), as guest editors.

Miguel Cabo, Lourenzo Fernández-Prieto, Antonio Míguez, Daniel Lanero and Ana Cabana are the members of Histagra (from the Department of American and Contemporary History at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Galiza, Spain) who were responsible for the initial selection of articles – which were then submitted to evaluation by independent referees – and the introduction to this edition that you can find in the next pages.

Let me also call your attention to our next issue (January 2015): its dossier will be dedicated to 'Resisting war in the Twentieth century' and it is still possible to submit articles.

Workers of the World is the journal of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts (http://iassc-mshdijon.in2p3.fr/). *Workers of the World* is an academic journal with peer review published in English, for which original manuscripts may be submitted in Spanish, French, English, Italian and Portuguese. It publishes original articles, interviews and book reviews in the field of labour history and social conflicts in an interdisciplinary, global, long term historical and non Eurocentric perspective.

Articles should be sent, according to the Editorial and publishing rules that you may find in our site (http://workersoftheworldjournal.net/), to the executive editor at workersoftheworld2012@yahoo.co.uk.

António Simões do Paço

Executive Editor

Introduction: Conflict in the contemporary rural world. New interpretations of an old problem

Histagra - Research Group on the Agrarian and Political History of the Rural World, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain[1]

The peasantry: a contemporary historical subject

One of the characteristics of this monographic issue of *Workers of the World* is that we conceived of and attempted to explore the history of peasants and farmers as rural *workers* and also as pluriactive or "symbiotic" agents, capable of influencing and adapting to contemporary processes of social and productive transformation.[2] We expressed this clearly in the *Call for Papers*. The other characteristic is that we tried to organize a global edition and we achieved it in part, with the presence of works from two continents and seven different national states, although in terms of the peasantry we may refer to twelve distinct geographic territories covered in the edition since the peasantry does not define state boundaries nor does it conform to them. Indeed, it pressures and pluralizes state boundaries.

A central and traditional object of study in the field of the history of

---

[1] Miguel Cabo, Lourenzo Fernández-Prieto, Antonio Míguez, Daniel Lanero and Ana Cabana are the members of Histagra (from the Department of American and Contemporary History at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Galiza, Spain) who were responsible for the editing, the introduction and the presentation of this edition.

[2] There is a great deal of literature regarding the industrial, commercial, and daily activities of the peasantry. An excellent guide is DOMINGUEZ MARTÍN, Rafael. "Caracterizando al campesinado y a la economía campesina: pluriactividad y dependencia del mercado como nuevos atributos de la "campesinidad". *Agricultura y Sociedad*. n. 66, 1993, 97-136. As for adaptation and unrest, some perspectives that guided our work had already been raised by ARTIAGA, Aurora; BALBOA, Xesús L; CARDESIN, J.M.; FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, L.; HERVÉS, Henrique. "Agricultura y capitalismo en Galicia. Una perspectiva histórica". In: VILLARES, R. and SAAVEDRA, P. eds., *Señores y Campesinos en la Península Ibérica (ss. XVIII-XX)*. Barcelona: Crítica, vol. 2, 1991 and HERVÉS, Henrique; FERNÁNDEZ GONZÁLEZ, A.; FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, L; ARTIAGA, Aurora; BALBOA, Xesús L. "Resistencia y organización. La conflictividad rural en Galicia desde la crisis del Antiguo Régimen al franquismo". *Historia Agraria*. 13, 1997, pp. 165-191. And following this Hispanic thread of rural studies, an important inspiration came from SEVILLA-GUZMÁN, E. and GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. *Ecología, campesinado e Historia*. Madrid: Eds. de la Piqueta, 1993.

social conflicts, and social history as a whole, has undoubtedly been the working class, often understood as "working classes" precisely because of its plurality and diversity of conditions, rather than being seen as a homogeneous social group. The initial analyses in the field of social history predominantly paid attention to the lives and work of industrial workers and the organization of labour in countries that were considered to be "advanced capitalist", of which the English case featured as the genuine model. Yet the progressive historiographical renewal of the second half of the twentieth century assisted in diversifying, on the one hand, the objects of study, and, on the other, it helped to break with interpretative paradigms of a more deterministic and teleological character.

The deficiencies were marked in part by some of the positions of Marx himself, which left a lasting impression on the historiography of the left.[3] Both classical Marxism, from a theoretical point of view, and the political parties and the trade unions whose practice was inspired by it, had difficulties dealing with the integration of the peasantry in their readings of capitalist social relations and their alternatives to overcome them. Marx dismissed the question of the attitudes and potential for social transformation of the peasantry with the successful (for its repercussion, not for its accuracy) expression "sack of potatoes". The ties of the peasantry to the land it farmed, its immediate surroundings, its supposed individualism, the mirage of property (whether real or as an aspiration) and its apparent isolation hampered the collective actions of the peasantry. It is significant, in this sense, that the depth, subtlety and nuance of Marx's analysis of capitalism and the proletariat was not matched by his analysis of the peasantry and agriculture. The conception of the peasantry as a dead weight, incapable of adding value to any revolutionary process, led Marxists to downplay its importance in their interpretation of reality, as they predicted the drastic decline in the agricultural workforce as a consequence of the unstoppable progress of industrial capitalism. If the means of production developed as they had been intended to in this Marxist interpretation, we would thus observe in agriculture the same process of concentration that had already occurred in the industrial sector (concentration of capital, decrease of the craft sector, etc.), which would give rise to corporately managed large farms. The fate of the peasants was either emigration or exodus to the cities to reinforce the needs of the secondary sector, thus becoming real proletarians. Coinciding with conceptions in classical economics, the

[3] F. Engels had similar positions. For example, in *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850) and *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* (1894).

economic role of agriculture as a sector would be subordinated as a mere supplier of food and, in the process of primitive accumulation, a provider of capital and labour.

With the development of the labour movement in the late nineteenth century, the European socialist parties (as well as the trade unions) would face the problems that arose from this discourse when they needed to propagandize and mobilize for collective actions in rural areas. Both the agriculture and peasantry still had an enormous weight in the European economies and societies at the turn of the century. Furthermore, the data did not corroborate the Marxist prediction of the decline of the small peasantry since family farming had weathered with surprising adaptability the broad, baffling agrarian crisis at the end of the century, capable of shaking up the agricultural estates and consciences throughout Europe. Moreover, the crisis also inflicted serious damage on large farms, affected by the rise in wages and by the exclusive dependency on certain cash crops.

The practical difficulties that these theoretical standpoints meant for the expansion of socialism in rural areas led to intense debates at the core of social democracy, particularly within German social democracy.[4] This controversy was related to, but did not overlap with, the debate over revolution and revisionism. Kautsky emerged as the guardian of orthodoxy (years later he would revise his positions): to defend the small landholding peasant was to prolong the agony of a social group doomed to extinction that was also fundamentally "counter-revolutionary". In the case of the Italian Socialist Party, the only European socialist party with a strong agricultural base, its expansion was largely due to the figure most easily assimilated by the proletariat, the rural labourer (*bracciante*) in need of land to work on and whose demands (greater salary, reduction in working hours, etc.) and methods used to achieve them (strikes) were comparable to those of industrial workers. However, Italian socialism was unable to incorporate in equal measure the needs and traditions (mutual support and reduction of the recruitment of wage labour) of the other categories within the peasantry, leading to the tragic consequences of the fascist offensive in 1921-22.[5]

---

[4] LEHMANN, H-G-. *Die Agrarfrage in der Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1970.

[5] See PROCCACCI. *La lotta di clase in Italia agli inizi del secolo XX*. Roma: Editori Riuniti Procacci, 1972 for a classic vision and CRAINZ, G.. *Padania: Il mondo dei braccianti dall'Ottocento alla fuga dalle campagne*. Roma: Donzelli Editore, 1994 for a revision that shows how the *braccianti*, even those who were socialist militants, had not necessarily renounced the aspiration of private ownership of the land nor had they left behind the peasant ethos. There was a certain parallelism in the clash in France between BARRAL, P. *Les Agrariens français de Méline à Pisani*. Paris : A. Colin, 1968 and

Throughout Europe, the difficulties of the socialist parties were very similar[6] and in the absence of a reassessment of theoretical dogmas, cooperativism in its multiple forms (on which were pinned the hopes of spreading collective habits which would erode the supposed individualism of the peasants) was the main palliative.

The more militant, and increasingly theoretically stagnant, Marxist historiography continued to voice these positions until after the Second World War. The lack of cooperation of the peasantry with the labour movement was attributed to their alleged lack of class-consciousness and inability to shake off the mental and material shackles of traditional hierarchies (landowners, clergy, etc.). In the 1960s new perspectives began to emerge, especially British cultural Marxism. E. P. Thompson was able to understand the logic of seemingly *primitive* actions like the food riots of eighteenth century England, while contributing to *dematerialize* the analysis of such conflicts. These were no longer exclusively due to the evolution of objective and measurable factors (prices, wages, distribution of land), but also due to the cultural values associated with the economic activity, and the expectations regarding what was to be expected of the different actors involved, which Thompson coined the "moral economy." Meanwhile Hobsbawm and Rude, in their study of the Captain Swing riots, revalued the rational logic of actions that had traditionally been dismissively referred to as simple fury against "progress".[7] Hobsbawm would also rescue the role of the peasantry in socio-political processes, although his theoretical positions would lead him to qualify as "primitive" the formulas and ideologies separate from Marxism, as in the case of Andalusian anarchism.[8]

There was also a revaluation of the role of the peasantry in historical sociology such as Charles Tilly's work on the defensive or reactive conflicts to keep the state at bay (which for Tilly was the vanguard of economic progress and modernization in general), giving way to proactive conflicts in

---

BARRAL, Pierre and GRATTON, P. *Les Paysans française contre l´agrarisme*. Paris: Editions François Maspero, 1972. Barral put the emphasis of the involvement of the French peasantry in the political sphere around the nineteenth century on associationism and Gratton replied that the "agrarian defense" discourse only benefited the powerful and hid the class struggle that in the rural world included lumberjacks, day labourers, etc.

[6] BLOK, A; HITCHINS, Keith; MARKEY, Raymond; SIMONSON, Birgir. eds., *Urban radicals, rural allies. Social Democracy and the Agrarian Issue, 1870-1914*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2002.

[7] HOBSBAWM, E. J.; RUDÉ, G.. *Captain Swing: A Social History of the Great English Agricultural Uprising of 1830*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1969.

[8] HOBSBWM, E. J. *Primitive Rebels. Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1959; HOBSBAWM, E. J. *Bandits*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.

which influence within the political and administrative system was sought.[9] And although his conclusions were controversial, since they seemed to imply that a precondition for the triumph of liberal democracy was a reduction, as drastic as possible, of the peasantry, another historical sociologist Barrington Moore also put the fundamental role of the peasantry on the table, showing that its political positions could decide one way or another the outcome of the struggle between democracy, fascism and communism.[10]

Thompson, Hobsbawm, Rude and Tilly, among many others, contributed to this renewal that would also result in a rethinking of the significance of the processes of politicization, until that time closely associated with what were considered certain essential moments and historical subjects, almost as if there were "chosen" classes. In the consolidation of these new perspectives, a key aspect was the criticism of modernization theories, which had gained a hegemonic status in the social sciences since World War II. So much so that social science and modernization theories constituted an essential part of an era and a paradigm: that of modernization. It was in this context that the social sciences were constructed and their arguments strengthened: through studying the delay and obstacles to modernizing development. What about history? Imbued with such social scientific theories, researchers regarded history as the best place to discover how obstacles to progress developed. The past was effectively turned into a laboratory of modernization in the present.

Following this historiographical renewal, but in a more focused manner, the rural world and its protagonists, the peasants, would later became central objects of attention. When investigating the composition of the British working class in the Industrial Revolution – and "industrialization" before the Industrial Revolution itself – there was nothing to be found, but the rural world and peasants. But that was in the past. In the present of Thompson, Hobsbawm and Rude in the 1950s and 1960s, the prominence obtained by farmers in the context of the liberation struggles of the Third World put the emphasis on the need to diversify beyond a Eurocentric and industrial-urban perspective. In this second half of the twentieth-century, peasants were no longer considered as the "sack of potatoes" defined by Marx in the nineteenth-century, useless to the

[9] TILLY, C. *The contentious French. Four Centuries of Popular Struggle*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
[10] MOORE, B. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. London: Beacon Press, 1966.

revolution that only the working class could undertake. To the contrary, they began to appear as active social and political agents in the liberation and anti-colonial struggles of the Third World, as shown by the studies of E. Wolf and J.M. Paigne.[11]

The contemporary realities of the 1970s allowed such scholars to see a different past when reviewing classic themes. It also opened space for a dialogue with the parallel conceptualizations of the peasantry as defined by rural anthropologists and sociologists, from the Polish rural sociology of the 1920s to the fundamental contributions of peasant studies led by T. Shanin and passing through the conceptualizations and reconceptualizations of anthropologists such as Kroeber from 1923-1948 and E.J. Wolf in 1966.[12] The appearance on both sides of the Atlantic (USA and UK) of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* in the early 1970s represented a concrete materialization of this new research on the peasantry in which anthropologists, historians and sociologists participated (as did the World Bank, politicians and university students). Farmers got "trendy" and the search for conceptual categories and theories that could bring us closer to the understanding of its historical evolution and its role in history led not only to new formulations, but reinterpretations of classic authors such as Lenin and Redfield.[13] In this context, the rediscovery of the Russian author Alexander Chayanov in the 1960s was fundamental; especially his studies from the 1920s on the workings of the peasant economy – the peasant economic unit – that he had actually began before the Russian Revolution of 1917.[14] During the Russian Revolution, Chayanov developed his understanding of the nature and logic of the peasantry and published *Peasant Farm Organization* in 1925 in which he formalized and revealed the economic aspects of the peasant family. This Russian populist and independent socialist, convicted in the Stalinist purges of 1930 and executed in 1937, has since been instrumental to peasant studies and to the understanding of the relationship of the

---

[11] WOLF, E. *Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century*. London: Faber and Faber, 1969; PAIGNE, J.M. *Agrarian Revolution: social movements and export agriculture in the Underdeveloped World*. New York: Free Press, 1975.

[12] KROEBER, A.L. *Anthropology: race, language, culture, psychology, pre-history*. New York: Harcourd-Brace, 1948; WOLF, E. *Peasants*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966.

[13] LENIN, V.I *Development of Capitalism in Russia The Process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large-Scale Industry*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977 [1899]; REDFIELD, R. *The Little Community*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1956; *Peasant Society,* Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1956.

[14] CHAYANOV, A. *La organización de la explotación campesina La organización de la unidad económica campesina*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1974 [1925].

peasantry to the market and to wages.[15]

But this renewal of peasant studies emerged through a long and often interrupted process. Under the modernization paradigm in European and Western history itself, it was revealed that the history of rural areas and peasants was generally relegated to a secondary role, limited to occasional outbursts of protest arising from their poor living conditions or rejection of the innovations of modernity. Groups of farmers became peripheral, ostracized, quintessentially subordinated groups, incapable even of revolt against historiography. Not surprisingly, the contemporary world started, symbolically, with the French Revolution and the struggle of the Jacobins against the "reactionary" peasants of the Vendée. Throughout modernity, peasants had been the repositories of reaction, of political conservatism and, in some cases, the essence of patriotic traditions that were lost in the mists of time, unable even to support or collaborate with the historically revolutionary classes of modernity, whether it be the bourgeoisie or, later, the proletariat. The farmers were the Irish scabs of Marx's England, or the tireless workers of the "cursed races" of his son-in-law, P. Lafargue, in *The Right to be Lazy*.[16]

Therefore, concepts such as "democracy", "citizenship" or simply "politics" let alone technological innovation or social change were incompatible with the nature of social processes related to the rural world.[17] These ideas dominated in some influential theories of political science in the second half of the twentieth century, which generally pushed in two ways for a vision of politicization as a unidirectional process: from top to bottom

[15] The first publication of Chayanov in English appeared in SOROKIN, P.A.; ZIMMERMAN, C.C.; GALPPIN, C.J. *Systematic Source Book of Rural Sociology*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965. In 1966, his *magnum opus* was published. CHAYANOV, A. In: KERBLAY, B; SMITH, R.E.F. and THORNER, D. eds., *Theory of the Peasant Economy*. Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin for the American Economics Association, 1966. A Spanish edition followed in 1974. See CHAYANOV, A. *La organización de la unidad económica campesina*. *Op.Cit*. The last two publications recovered the two most important books by Chayanov from the 1920s *Sobre la teoría de los sistemas económicos no-capitalistas* and *La organización de la explotación campesina*. The English version of 1966 was translated from the German and the Spanish version of 1974 from Russian. See SÁNCHEZ DE PUERTA TRUJIILO, F. *La economía de trabajo* (Alexander Vasilevich Chayanov: Selección de escritos)". *Agricultura y Sociedad*. n. 55, 1990, pp. 239-248.

[16] LAFARGUE, P. *The Right to be Lazy*. Fifth Season Pr, 1999 [1883].

[17] For an ample debate regarding changes in technology and the peasantry (farmers, ploughmen), consult PUJOL, J. and FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, L. "El cambio tecnológico en la historia agraria de la España contemporânea". *Historia Agraria*. n 24, August 2001, pp. 59-86. Another revisionist article is QUINTANA, X. R. "Campesinos que se adaptan agricultura que se mueve". *Áreas*. n. 12, 1990, pp. 147-165. For a monographic study with respect to this question, see FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, L Labregos *con ciencia. Estado, sociedade e innovación tecnolóxica na agricultura galega (1850-1939)*. Vigo: Eds. Xerais, 1992.

(from the elites of the system to the public) and from the centre to the periphery (from the more modernized dimensions of the social system to the ones falling behind). Therefore, the politicization of the rural world was consistently conceived as a process of the incorporation of farmers into politics through a process of the arrival of a political reality that was completely foreign to them, and the only part they could play was in either accepting or rejecting these modern political identities.[18] Precisely because of this, this paradigm may serve as the articulating element of this introduction since it rejects the peasantry as an object ("a sack of potatoes"), treating the peasants as subjects and actors in the process of democratization.[19]

Questioning the prejudiced vision of the peasantry thus signifies breaking with various interpretative inertias (which actually constituted a lasting interpretative model that was present all throughout modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). First, it is necessary to provide a two-way view of the processes of the politicization of the rural world, in which the rural world is not a passive subject of sociopolitical changes. This is an interpretation that favours the interaction between the adaptability of the elites of the system to the challenges posed by the demands of the political participation of the peasantry, and the ability of the peasantry to influence and act in political struggles. Therefore, the statement by Hobsbawm, during the process of deagrarianization that was simultaneously going on in various parts of the world after the Second World War, that "the end of the Middle Ages" had arrived was also called into question.[20] The idea that nothing important had happened in the history of the rural world up to its extinction was false as was the stigma of backwardness, primitivism, social and technological millenarianism and immutability that it was blamed for. The ahistorical, purely imaginary, idea of a "traditional" and immutable world, either with no history or outside of it, should be strongly criticized.

It was in this way that the notion of "peasant logic" and the understanding of the rural world acquired a central role as a complex, changing and organic object of study. The peasants were understood as

---

[18] MACHO, Antonio Míguez; VILLAVERDE, Miguel Cabo. "Pisando la dudosa luz del dia: el proceso de demcoratización en la Galícia rural de la Restauracíon". *Ayer*. n. 89, 2013, pp. 43-75.

[19] MARKOFF, J. *Waves of democracy. Social Movements and Political Change*. Newbury Park, Ca., Pine Forge Press, 1996; MARKOFF, J. *The Abolition of Feudalism*. University Park, Penn.: State University of Pennsylvania, 1996.

[20] HOBSBAWM, Eric. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*. London: Michael Joseph, 1994, pp. 288–9, 415.

being able to articulate their discontent and their protests according to their own behavioural pattern, a prominent feature if one can see past the walls put up by theory of social movements which imposed a somewhat formalistic interpretation. On the other hand, the successful formula of James C. Scott's "weapons of the weak" was an explanation with Thompsonian foundations to the puzzle of how the peasants expressed their discontent while appearing submissive in the acceptance of their fate, and it did so by empathizing with their conditions (limits to formal organization, aversion to risk, social subordination, etc.).[21] The combination of Scott's work with so called "subaltern studies", focused on colonial contexts, would be a catalyst for the study of the peasantry, which however still had to face criticism from Marxist positions that focused on the lack of definition of the subject, as well as accusations of populism.[22]

Rude, Hobsbawm and H. Alavi, meanwhile, sought the peasant of their present in the past and found it as a pre-political and *primitive rebel*, capable of participating in riots, but not of creating policy proposals and even less capable of building civil society. What is remarkable is, in any case, the search, because the definition contains the explanation of a paradigm that is now too obsolete for us to keep using, even if it continues to appear and people persist on using it, whether because of the success of the expression or by virtue of the strength and intellectual authority of its authors or even simply by the powerful force of modernization theories in the explanation and understanding of present history. We are children of the welfare state, modernization and of the post-war years, as T. Judt demonstrated who, under the progressive influence of the *Annales*, did his thesis on contemporary French farmers.[23] However, a great deal of progress has been made in the characterization of peasants in history since then, and this progress is not without its importance for our knowledge of the past if we take into consideration that we are talking of the vast majority of humanity from the Neolithic period until well into the twentieth century. Even today peasants and farmers account for more than half the world's population.

Environmental studies also contributed to the task of conceptually

[21] SCOTT, J.C. "Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance". *Journal of Peasant Studies*. vol. 13, n. 2, 1986, pp. 5-35. See also SCOTT, J.C. *The moral economy of the peasant: Rebellion and subsistence in southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976 and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
[22] BRASS, T. Peasants, Populism, and Post-modernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth. London: Frank Cass, 2000.
[23] JUDT, T. *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*. London: Penguin Press, 2006.

redefining both the peasantry and its theoretical status. Authors such as Guha, Martinez Alier and Toledo have shown that the "lower classes" in the poorest of the poor countries, almost entirely constituted by farmers, largely indigenous, possess characteristics and knowledge worthy of being retrieved as they may hold the solution to the environmental crisis and help us achieve a more sustainable handling of agricultural ecosystems.[24] In this way, farmers lose their status of "waste" and gain a new status, that of an "alternative model", and they do so mostly under the eyes of non-Europeans. At the same time, this line of study that has become popular since the late twentieth century, has changed its outlook on the conflicts involving the peasantry, adding to their "logic" the defence of environmental ideals ("environmentalism of the poor", "popular environmentalism"), always starting from assumptions opposite to those of "enlightened" Western environmentalism.

The peasantry is a complex object of study, firstly, because the notion of "peasant" was revealed to be an abstraction of multiple realities and social identities that, although always taking place in the rural world, included various types of relationships to the land and to agricultural work. With respect to this, reference may be made to the debate on the definition of peasantry that occurred in the 1970s, which interacted with the crisis of structuralist Marxism. Beyond that, the complexity of analysis thrived with the increasing incorporation of other global realities outside the Western European context. A whole stream of studies related to rural realities in the so-called "Third World" found itself attached to the increased attention to environmental issues. The effects of the Green Revolution had reached a global dimension, constituting a project of transformation of the rural world in the context of the disturbing crisis of the environment and the sustainability of the model of development.

With respect to the idea of the changing subject, reference is made to the attention given to the historicity of the change in the rural world and its relation to society as a whole. The idea of the immutability of the peasantry and its environment, and its supposed secular isolation, was the result of a strongly ideological construction which was employed to justify the submission of their identity, to legitimate identity and romantic discourses

---

[24] GUHA, R. "El ecologismo de los pobres". *Ecología Política*. n. 8, 1994, pp. 137-153; MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. *El ecologismo de los pobres. Conflictos ambientales y lenguajes de valoración*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2004; TOLEDO, V. *La paz en Chiapas: Ecología, luchas indígenas y modernidad alternativa*. Chiapas, México: UNAM/Quinto Sol, 2000.

on the building of European nations in the nineteenth century. It is actually a definition of the social sciences that opposes the urban with the rural, the modern with the traditional, the open market with autarchic-gated communities unfamiliar with the free movement of goods. Conceptions that established and served this paradigm of modernization and the development of the green revolution, although they were already present in the older attacks on the rustic world, reflected a view of the peasantry as ignorant and illiterate (a new version of the pagan) as opposed to the educated and enlightened urban world (a new version of Christianity) that began with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and in some cases even before then.[25]

The deconstruction of this discourse began with the analysis of some of its core elements, such as the evolution of social relations around the issue of land ownership. The complex process of peasant proprietarization went beyond merely overcoming feudalism and was interrelated with forms such as that of communal property that did not fit the "perfect" liberal and individual model of property. This went hand in hand with the new questionings of the alleged lack of technological renovation of the productive practices of peasants, which were traditionally subsumed under the dichotomy of mechanical *vs.* traditional agriculture. These new studies rather looked to include models of adaptation and "dead ends" that, again, challenged the unidirectionality of the notion of historical progress.

Finally, the very dynamics of this evolving and complex subject necessarily implied conflict. The rural world had been very much alive in history, and this was so primarily due to the capacity to organize themselves as one, to struggle for their interests when possible and to attempt to take advantage of what political and economic systems offered. The attempt to unify all these struggles under the category of "reactionary" resembled an ideological prejudice more than a historical observation, since this latter reality also demonstrated struggles to build profitable alternatives for the peasantry. The questioning of the model of development that prevailed through concepts such as modernization and progress also arose in this struggle for alternatives, directly or indirectly. In line with this approach, several authors have questioned the idea of a single genealogy of the concept of democracy in favour of a more plural and complex vision where the paths to democratization were numerous, although one eventually imposed itself.

The problem of the denomination of the peasantry, as we call it here

[25] BAROJA, Julio Caro. *Le Carnaval*. Trad. Sylvie Sesé Léger. Paris, Gallimard, 1979.

in an attempt to unify academic studies in a comprehensive way, is not a minor problem. The denomination that has stood out has been that of *peasant*, but this term, although it depends on this language, is often foreign to the peasantry itself. It is how they are identified yet there are other names according to the time period and their activities: farmers, day workers, tenants, landlords, ploughman, land workers, etc. But what do they call themselves? Almost always, external observers have referred to them differently to what they call themselves, whether they come from urban, scientific or political sectors. The Spanish denomination of "campesino" (peasant), for example, as common as it is in urban, political and scientific contexts, is distinct from the diverse and objective ways the peasants call themselves. They call themselves "labradores": those who plough. Yet a whole host of other terms are also employed: Labregos, lavradores, llauradors, pagès, paisano, peasant, pessant. We dare not attempt to distinguish them in a universal and timeless way, so many years after T. Shanin classified this as a supremely difficult task in his important article published in 1979, "Defining Peasants".[26] But we know that peasants were defined in different ways in the past, which has left traces and sources that allow us to study them and not just the images of them left by ecclesiastic and aristocratic sources.

Finally, it is necessary that we mention the historiographical currents of the *Annales*, who were among the great promoters of the insertion of the peasantry in history, even before World War II: from Marc Bloch to George Lefebvre, who stressed the peasantry as an essential agent in the origins of the French revolution to G. Duby's studies on the medieval peasantry in the early 1960s.[27] The lessons, methods and investigations of Bloch and Lucien Febvre in the 1920s are well integrated within current rural and agrarian global studies as the contributors to this edition of *Workers of the World* amply demonstrate. Other authors cited in this edition, such as Scott, Thompson and Shanin, are incorporated into some of the articles that, without quoting them, include the extent of their conceptual knowledge in practical terms; they have incorporated them as if they were a light rain, falling upon the current scholars of the history of the peasantry and its conflicts.

---

[26] SHANIN, T. "Defining Peasants*:* Conceptualisation and De-conceptualisations, Old and New in a Marxist Debate". *Peasant Studies*. vol. 8, n. 4, 1979, pp. 38-60.

[27] BLOCH, M. *Les caracteres originaux de l'histoire rurale francaise*. Paris: A. Colin, 1952 ; LEFEBVRE, G.. *La Révolution Francaise*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1951 ; DUBY, G.. *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'Occident médiéval*. Paris, Aubier, 1962.

It is also possible to ascertain, in the works gathered here, how the old dichotomies regarding the peasantry (pre-political versus political, modern versus primitive) can be overcome. There is also a need for a more open and plural interpretation, less sociological than the characterizations of B. Moore and T. Skocpol in political science that were so successful in their day. An interpretation that pays closer attention to historical change in a world where change is more common than during the postwar and Cold War eras is therefore necessary. Moreover, after post modernism and the linguistic turn in historiography, a return to the material and the social is as appreciated as it is necessary. It is essential that we bring in, syncretically but eclectically, the methodological and theoretical innovations that have been produced, tested and incorporated in recent decades. It remains the case that using the definition of the peasant without succumbing to ahistorical essentialisms and at the same time being able to incorporate their internal diversity and the multiple local realities (sometimes even within the same country) nevertheless continues to be a challenge.

The eagerness to continue such critical research on the peasantry had been clear since the fall of 2013 when the Histagra research group discussed its call for papers that resulted in this issue of *Workers of the World*. We decided to suggest a number of principal themes or lines of research that the authors could consider as a guide to formalize their proposals. Starting off from an inclusive and global perspective, the six main themes of the issue would be the following:

- Theoretical, methodological and historiographical reflections on the peasant (with all his/her heterogeneity) as a historical subject.
- The conflict between the environmental and the productive. The control and management of productive resources at the heart of the conflict (fiscal, environmental, productive, etc.) in rural areas.
- Ownership, possession and struggle for land, paying particular attention to common peoples.
- The juxtaposition of rural and urban identity, and their multiple forms of expression (in cultural, social or technological contexts).
- The role of peasant societies in the shaping and transformation of the major contemporary political systems and ideologies: liberalism; fascism; socialism; democracy.
- Emigration and conflicts over land.

The time has now come for a brief critical assessment of the responses we received in regard to our proposal to reinterpret rural conflicts in the contemporary world. We begin with a presentation of what the readers will find in this monograph, and we will leave the synthetic diagnosis of the combined contributions to the end. It should be obvious that, among the six themes we mentioned, there are numerous points of contact or, in other words, most of the dozen articles that were chosen may, without much difficulty, be ascribed to two or three of the suggested thematic blocks. We will move from the themes with the least response to the ones with the greatest.

As was somewhat predictable, the texts built around a theoretical/methodological reflection are a minority, which is not to say that the other contributions do not include valuable observations on this topic. Only the piece by Eric Vanhaute: "Globalizing local struggles – Localizing global struggles. Peasant movements from local to global platforms and back again" takes on this perspective, by comparing a current peasant movement (*La Vía Campesina*), and its practices of resistance, with examples from the past, while presenting the current peasant movements as proactive towards the future, and not simply as a defensive response to threats such as environmental degradation and risks as well as the role of multinationals in the control of production and of agricultural markets at a global level. The theoretical debate between the environmentalists and the institutionalists also has a very important place in David Soto's text "Community, institutions and environment in conflicts over common lands in Galicia, NW Spain (18th - 20th centuries)".

The conflict of identities (rural and urban) did not attract much attention from the contributions incorporated into this number either. Peasant identities seep into every text, historically manifesting themselves in a number of different ways, depending on the discourse of the various social groups that make up the peasantry as they define, construct and reshape the context of the political conflicts related to the demand for or access to land. But they almost always appear as an ingredient (almost naturalized) of what is explained and not as an object of study in itself.

In this regard, we would like to draw attention to the text of Domenico Perrotta and Devi Saccheto "Migrant farmworkers in Southern Italy: ghettoes, *caporalato* and collective action", that explores the working conditions of illegal immigrants from Africa (North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans) in the agro-industrial crop farms in southern Italy from a methodological perspective that is halfway between sociology and

anthropology. Their work shows how new social and work identities are created in a rural world replete with acute productive and territorial transformations. Simultaneously, previous labour and social identities from the old system of large land-holdings, such as the *caporali* or gangmasters (which functioned as intermediaries between illegal workers and agricultural employers), were reactivated in the "new" stage of capitalist industrial agriculture. Moreover, this article aims to examine the relations between migration and new forms of conflict.

If there is a "classic" theme in agrarian historiography (from the French Revolution to the Landless Workers' Movement) it is the matter of the access to land by different groups of the peasantry of rural societies, usually highly stratified. Processes such as the vindication of the access of peasants to the exploitation of natural resources, the protection of the common lands and the aim of becoming individual owners have almost always unfolded against the background of social and political conflicts that were explicit, latent, and long-term, with peaks of intensity associated with certain historical conjunctures. Several of the articles in this issue can be inserted into this thematic line: it is the case with the works of Carlos Humberto Durand Alcántara "Hegemony, agrarian problem and Indian peoples in Mexico (A legal perspective)" and Noemí Girbal-Blacha "Land conflicts in Formosa. Argentina (1884-1958)". The contributions of Massimo Asta and Niccolò Mignemi, discussed later in this introduction, may also be included in this theme.

Durand Alcántara examines the historical process of the establishment of agrarian property in Mexico and its relation to the Mexican Revolution and to the intervention of the indigenous peoples as well as the United States. From a legal perspective, the author contrasts the myth of agrarian reform, the totem of the post-revolutionary *ejido* (communal land), with a detailed study of this historical process that is the key to understanding the creation of contemporary Mexican identity. The text by Girbal-Blancha is a good example of the relationship between the two historical processes: the colonization and shaping of the land in South America, taking as an example the case of the province of Formosa (in north-eastern Argentina) and exploring the social unrest arising from this process.

The articles of Massimo Asta "Between "resistance" to the war and social conflict. Revolts and "peasant republics" in southern Italy, 1943-1945" and Niccolò Mignemi "Peasant cooperatives and land occupations in the Sicilian *latifundium* (1944-1950)" look into very similar geographic areas and agrarian systems (southern mainland Italy and Sicily) with a

certain chronological (and historical) proximity. Asta analyzes the events that occurred after the liberation of southern Italy from the Nazi occupation. The emergence of "peasant republics", their claim for immediate access and ownership of the land in a very specific historical moment, and the different discourses (and ways of thinking) in relation to land occupations actually put peasant communities in conflict with left-wing political organizations. Meanwhile, Mignemi also addresses land claims in post-war Sicily, explaining the (partial) distribution of the land of large estates among agricultural workers and small subsistence farmers. In the social conflict around the demands for access to land by the aforementioned groups, he highlights the role played by agricultural cooperatives and their multifunctional nature. Both texts fit not only in the aforementioned thematic lines, but also in a unique and very complex political process: the political and social reconstruction of Italy after the defeat of fascism.

The texts by Mignemi and Asta are not the only ones that may be paired up. The contributions by Cristian Ferrer "Popular empowerment, peasant struggles and political change: Southern Catalonia under late Francoism (1968-1976)" and María Candelaria Fuentes Navarro "The Spanish Communist Party and the Andalusian countryside. Rural mobilization and social empowerment (1956-1979)" address a common time period: the last years of Francoism and the transition to democracy and, above all, they do so from a detailed perspective within the context of current Spanish historiography on the rural world in this period. Ferrer studies an example of fiscal conflict in southern Catalonia as a mechanism for the social and political articulation of the anti-Franco opposition in a rural area, integrating the values and forms of protest characteristic of the peasantry. This perspective of social mobilization from below is also present (at least partially) in the article by Candelaria Fuentes Navarro, who illustrates the success of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in the anti-Franco agrarian mobilization in Andalusia, understanding all the protests as a process of education in democratization.

Finally, we feature three texts that revolve around different manifestations of rural unrest, though in very different historical contexts. Picking up the thread of fiscal unrest, the work of Héctor J. Martínez Covaleda, "Peasants and the revolution of 1781 in the viceroyalty of New Granada (Colombia)" studies peasant revolts of an anti-fiscal nature, undertaking a critical analysis of them and presenting a new multi-causal interpretation, more attentive to the importance of "popular" elements. This text, in addition to the contribution of David Soto, is one that clearly shows the chronology of a conflict that occurred before the twentieth century.

Edouard Lynch, in "The fight against multiple professional land holdings: a new agrarian issue during France's "silent revolution" (1950-1970)" analyses the effects caused by the process of accelerated agrarian modernization in the French rural world during the post-war period of 1950-1980. The author discusses the forms of protest in the French rural world and the interaction between the discontents of the farmers with that of other social groups. The contribution of Pedro Gabriel Silva "Political opportunity and collective mobilization in post-revolutionary Portugal – the case of a socio-environmental conflict in the Portuguese inland (1974-1980)" studies, with the conceptual tools of the theory of collective action and social mobilization, the socio-environmental conflict caused by the exploitation of an open pit mine in the Portuguese town of Gaia, in a very particular sociopolitical context, that of the years of upheaval and reorganization of the political and institutional spheres that followed the Portuguese Revolution of 1974. Together with an anthropological perspective, which in turn leads to constant reconstruction of the identities in the transforming rural communities, the author also addresses factors such as memory and perception. This text and the one by David Soto are the articles that clearly incorporate an environmental perspective into this issue.

A quick look at the texts as a whole brings up a series of questions that illustrate some of the possible weaknesses of this special issue. Even though this was not the wish of the editors, we found ourselves with an issue much more Eurocentric than we wanted. Putting aside the introduction for a while, this monograph has twelve articles, of which at least 8 (or 66%) focus on the examination of European case studies, with an absolute predominance of what we might call Mediterranean (Western, specifically) Europe: three contributions on South Italy; three others look into various "regional" examples in Spain; one article on Portugal and another on France. There are no contributions on Eastern or Central Europe, Scandinavia or Great Britain. Three other items were on Latin America (Colombia, Argentina and Mexico), representing 25% of the articles. We received no articles that had Asia or Africa as their object of study, even though these are continents where the peasantry is, to date, the majority of the population, both in absolute terms (as a workforce) and in terms of analysis, the active population as the peasantry in these continents was, as stated above, central to the theoretical and methodological renewal of history and social sciences over the past half century in terms of the approach to the rural world as an object of study.

Moreover, the chronological concentration of the pieces is noteworthy. Few assumed a historical study with a wide time frame, only

the articles by David Soto and, to a lesser extent, Noemí Girbal. By contrast, half of the work is restricted to a very specific stage, the long post-World War II period that for the purposes of this dossier begins in 1943 (if we start from the Mezzogiorno) to 1980 (ending with the "wave of democratization" that engulfed the countries of the Iberian Peninsula). We might even make more restrictive chronological groupings in the articles of this edition: the period immediately after the war and the transitions from dictatorship to democracy in the 1970s. As has been previously mentioned in this introduction, many of our studies are still children of a post-war period and modernity that we have yet to explain and understand, in order to comprehend ourselves better.

In any case, the twentieth century acts as a chronological marker for the majority of the articles, with exceptional approaches to the chronological borders of the contemporary stage, whether it be from the bottom (the end of the eighteenth century) or from the top, as is the case with the contributions which are related to the present. Our invitation, despite the "contemporary" priority we wanted to give in this monograph, for works focused on the rural conflicts in the Old World or in the Middle Ages, continuously re-examined and interpreted by the Agrarian history of the present, did not have the resonance we thought it deserved.

Finally, we found that, among all the articles we received, some very important themes were missing: none of the proposals we received attempted to examine rural conflicts from a gender studies perspective. No attention was paid to another of the agents of social and cultural transformation, one that is most characteristic of the rural world: youth. Indigenous people were largely ignored (with some exceptions), as well as their relation to the environment and to agricultural practices. We also noted the absence of a closer approach to the urban-rural interaction and to the "market" (in a broad sense) as the point of interconnection – often of conflict – between producers, consumers and intermediaries. Lastly, it is surprising that with the current agenda so full of questions regarding the environmental viability of the planet in the medium term, the relation between this and food production, the use of finite natural resources and land management – all themes in which the rural world will play a determinant role – were barely present in the proposals we received.

In any case, the distance between the proposal made at the time by the editors of this special issue of *Workers of the World* and the specific contributions received may be associated with a wide range of factors: the novelty factor of the journal itself; the type of academic circles where it is

better known (most likely among Europeans); the fact that the labour movement and urban workers have, so far, been the primary object of study, especially in comparison with other types of workers (rural) more heterogeneous and difficult to characterize; and the historiographical impact of the conflicts throughout the twentieth century compared to other historical periods, etc.

Hegemony, the agrarian problem and indigenous peoples in Mexico: a legal perspective

Carlos Humberto Durand Alcántara

Frame of reference

The basic framework of the agrarian question in modern Mexico has been molded by the hegemony of underlying capitalist social and property relationships. Yet one of the complex problems that Mexican agrarianism and its juridical expression in Article 27 of the Constitution created is a chauvinist vision of the capitalist nation state. Ideas about the state and the nation were conceived through diverse myths that entered "in the brain of generations of scholars of agrarian law"[1], as well as the interpretations of certain ideologists in history, sociology, politics, and even the humanities, attributing to Mexican agrarianism the rise of a "national identity" and agrarian law as a *vindicator* of poor people. This is expressed in the common idea that "The Mexican Revolution gave birth to agrarian justice".

In this article, while I use the agrarian question as a descriptive category, I also consider that it has undergone important changes in the context of globalization and the contradictions of neoliberalism. This is due to the concatenation of processes existing in the social relations of production and property in agriculture, which, among other aspects, expresses the intense and avid reproduction of capital by big oligopolies influenced by financial capital. These social, economic and political processes that should be framed in the context of a permanent crisis include: the growth of the agricultural industry and manufacturing production, the expansion of the urban into rural areas and the social associations of the rural with the urban, rural depopulation, the diversification of production, the increase of transnational capital and the complex experiences of indigenous peoples and peasant economies.

---

[1] One of these notions was that agrarian law was "fundamentally social" when in fact we should ask who applied it and for what ends.

The meaning of the agrarian question, particularly in Mexico, may be explained by Foucaultian[2] thought through the phenomenon of power in which the submission of individuals is reified[3] "by the existence of a whole" which in this case is the very Mexican nation in its current neoliberal version. This phenomenon is evident throughout the history of Mexico with precedents originating in the pre-Hispanic period as Paul Kirchhoff explained in his concept of "Mesoamerica".[4]

Yet as Phil Weigand Moore states in regard to the distorted use of Kirchoff's model by the Mexican state:

> …Paul Kirchhoff, Julian Steward's aid, developed a culturist model, underlaid by a Marxist, multilinear evolutionary approach that states the hypothesis of Mesoamerica as a highly cultured civilizational complex that would later be converted into a centralist national identity and ideology, by the agencies of the post-revolutionary Mexican state. That is why the notion of Mesoamerica is the stumbling block such as it is stated by the Nationalist ideology of the PRI and the National Institute of Anthropology and History. This also has other theoretical implications. One of them is the profound questioning of the framework, such as the one proposed by Paul Kirchhoff, in order to delimit the boundaries of Mesoamerica. This approach, when it was retaken by centralist policies as an irreducible theoretical monolith, became the rudest dogmatization…whose effects are felt more than fifty years after. By excluding the higher pre-Hispanic region from Mesoamerican [conceptual] borders, there was a fetishizing and mystification process of Mesoamerica – the splendor of ancient Mexico – that perfectly meets the public target values of the policies of an extreme state centralism, and not with the fundamentals of science.[5]

[2] FOUCAULT, Michel. *Defender la Sociedad.* México D.F.: 2006, pp. 58-59.
[3] We refer to the specific way of losing the consciousness of individuals. See HABERMAS Jürguen. *El discurso filosófico de la modernidad.* Madrid: Katz Editors, 2008, p. 92.
[4] *Mesoamérica. Mesoamérica. Sus límites geográficos, composición étnica y caracteres culturales.* México, D.F.: UNAM, 1970.
[5] LOPÉZ ELÍSEO *et.al. Phil Weigand Moore. Reconocimiento Tenamaztle 2009 CU Norte.* Centro Universitario del Norte. Universidad de Guadalajara. 2010.

Some ideologists – mainly intellectuals, artists and writers[6] – saw revolutionary agrarianism as the source of self-identity, of "being Mexican", with a historical memory linked to the "culture of maize"[7] that also incorporated the indigenous past of Mexico, thereby vindicating the supposed link of American societies with the land. In such a way, the "nation" was basically limited to the establishment of a "retrospective" history of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

The agrarian question and indigenous peoples, some aspects.

The Mexican Revolution framed in an agricultural perspective the repossession of the land as a reconstruction of what colonialism had destroyed, that is, the Indian peoples and peasants of Mexican society, which beyond the juridical discourse constitute the substratum of Mexican agrarianism. The dominated people therefore would claim their lands and resources. This is presented as the opposite of Western agrarian conceptions, a *contrario sensu* within nineteenth century liberalism, which was adapted to mean a "birthright to land". In our opinion, this operated as a kind of "mirage" that was disconnected from the realities of the dominated classes and nuclei of the society. The human right to (land) property was oriented as a wish more than as a task.

The indigenous peoples and peasants who participated in the Revolution went beyond the pragmatic utilitarian sense of rural property, since their agrarian demands did not only circumscribe to a type of "legal formalism, a gracious concession or royalty of rulers", to the ruled. Indigenous peoples aimed to reconstruct and vindicate their own historical origins which had been aggrieved for centuries. They not only attempted to rehabilitate in the economic sense as a means to produce subsistence, but also as a means to recover their cosmogonies in the face of those who had usurped their lands.

---

[6] This critical, multiple, diverse and complex prospective of "Mexican nationalism" was expressed, for example, in the murals of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, among others. In literature, we find it among Mariano Azuela, Narciso Bassols, Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz.

[7] The work of Miguel Ángel Asturias is no less important, intertwined in the conception of magic would note the importance of the Indian cultures and Cosmo visions in the evolution of modernity. His classical work, *Hombres de Maiz* (*Men of Maize*) from 1945, was republished in Madrid in 2005 by Alianza Editorial. In this work, the author delimits the sacralized sense of the earth and its resources for the peoples of America.

The multiplicity of guerrilla movements by communities and peoples against the haciendas,[8] due to the "construction of their own identity", was such a complex phenomenon that it even transcended the context from which these movements arose, that is, from the territories they aimed to liberate. As an example, let us always remember the indigenous opposition to the General Headquarters of the Liberation Army of the South, by the *tlapanecos, mixtecos* or *nahuatl* peoples, who opposed production for export, such as silver in Taxco (in the state of Guerrero), or sugar cane in Morelos, in Tlaxiaco and Oaxaca.[9] For them, the land ("the father and mother of their transformation") would provide maize, considered as their main ally for the development of their endogenous livelihood. However, the state that arose from the Revolution (and its accompanying Article 27 of the Constitution) would actually foster capitalist development in agriculture although apparently using the "peasant model" through agrarian reforms, which we will later discuss.

Reconsidering Constitutional Article 27 from the framework of hegemony

The socio-legal margins of the Mexican Constitutional Article 27 assumed that the state was the *original owner of the land and its resources*. Once the Revolution was consummated, however, the capitalist class that actually took over power of the land, and it was not the nation,[10] became the dominant force and definer of the socioeconomic formation, controlling the relations of property and production in the country and consequently its natural resources.

Yet the emergence of the Mexican state, under the assumption of an "independent political entity", could hardly free it from the regional

[8] In this perspective the work of Adolfo Gilly, *The Interrupted Revolution*. México D.F.: Ed. El Caballito, 1973 is fundamental. He analyzes "the other Revolution", the one of the indigenous peasants.

[9] See WOMACK, John. *Zapata y la Revolución Mexicana.* México D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1989.

[10] In political theory, the state is the instance that exercises power. In the Post-Revolutionary Mexican case it was merely about the political party, (National Revolutionary Party, NRP (in Spanish, PNR), later the Mexican Revolutionary Party MRP (in Spanish, PRM) and from 1941 to the present day, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, IRP, (in Spanish, PRI). In sociological terms, the fact that the first paragraph of Article 27 states that the Nation, that is, all Mexicans, are supposedly owners of the land evidently has ideological features. Landownership in México and its historical process has been controlled by the interests of the dominant classes, including originally Americans. See. CÓRDOBA, Arnaldo. *La ideología de la Revolución Mexicana*. México, D.F.: Ed. Cultura Popular, 1989; WOMACK, John. *Zapata y la Revolución Mexicana.. Op.Cit.;* GILLY, Adolfo. *La Revolución Interrumpida. Op.Cit.*

hegemony of the United States that still maintains control in the Latin American subcontinent, establishing profound social contradictions. To conceive of Mexico under the hypothesis of self-determination fits better as ideological construction than a reality. This circumstance has in turn acquired a certain relevance: for Brandenburg[11] it was about the "Revolutionary Family" that expressed itself through an alliance between the victors of the Revolution and the interests of the United States that since the Virreinato had demonstrated their expansionist zeal throughout Latin America. The dominance of North American economic liberalism as a paradigm was clearly expressed in the *Virginia Declaration* which enshrined the right to private property,[12] in the *Monroe Doctrine*, and particularly for Mexico, in the McLane-Ocampo[13] Treaty, which eventually turned out to be different than what had been originally planned. Thus, control of the Mexican state has become a complex phenomenon due to the role that the political and economic interests of the United States have played. In this light, we find that the advent of the Mexican state was rather ambiguous because of the limits of its policies and the scope of decision-making power exercised by its powerful neighbour to the north. This was particularly the case in the biases, restrictions and contradictions of agrarian reform.

The idea that the Mexican state has created and recreated its property system through what appears to be a monolithic entity that controls its land and resources is simply untrue since the country has faced serious indebtedness problems, besides being practically "besieged" by North American transnational interests that, while affected by "*the other*

---

[11] BRANDENBURG, Frank Ralph. *The making of modern Mexico*. Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964.

[12] This juridical formalism is based in Roman law, and its origin carries two complex aspects: it was founded in imperialist and slave societies and its bases were established in the plundering and looting of conquered peoples. From classical Marxism, this process would be known as the Primitive Accumulation of Capital. See MARX, Carlos. *Capital*. México, D.F.: FCE, 1969, Cap. XXIV. Private property in what is currently Mexico originated in the Castilian law that was imposed upon the American colonies and constituted the "legitimate basis" of New Spain's property regime. In this sense, it is necessary to point out that the modern version of this legal foundation emerged from American Protestantism, becoming Common Law and later affecting all the liberal constitutions of Latin America. See DURAND ALCÁNTARA, Carlos Humberto. *El Derecho Agrario y el Problema Agrario de México.* 2a ed. México: Porrúa, 1999.

[13] While this Treaty was not applied, it planned the partial assignment of territorial sovereignty at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, with rights to passage as well as certain border corridors on behalf of the USA. See COYRO, Ernesto Enríquez. *Los Estados Unidos de América frente al problema agrario de México*. México D.F.: Facultad de Ciencias Politicas y Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1984.

revolution" of the Zapatistas, has still managed to impose their hegemony. Thus, the question arises: how could the Mexican state take charge of its own territory when, in fact, future conditions and commitments with the United States were being imposed one after the other?

Private property in the Mexican countryside from the perspective of the hegemony of the United States

The vision of private property rooted in the North American mentality in itself represents a process that would seem to oppose the survival of the original peoples of America beyond the question of territorial borders themselves. This is expressed in the contradiction between the great centers of economic power and indigenous peoples in such a way that the agrarian problem of Mexico shows, among other aspects, the historic fight for the land, as well as the fact mentioned by Wright Mills[14] of the existence of a lurking enemy who sometimes appears under cover, but whose development and growth patterns *per se* have been found to be ever-present in the consolidation of Mexico as a country.

These patterns found their neoliberal transmission in the reforms of January 6, 1992, promoted by Mexican president, Carlos Salinas, as well as in the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and more recently in the enforcement of the new Bucareli Treaty (2012) signed by President Calderon's administration as well as the latest adaptations made by the current government to Article 27, which foresees, among other aspects, the privatization of Mexican shores and the country´s oil resources.

While the historical context in which the hegemony of the United States has evolved expresses the singularities of the capitalist paradigm, we are also able to find specific aspects that are related to each particular set of historical circumstances. Thus, Article 27 of the Constitution provides for land-ownership relations, but has been adapted to facilitate the reproduction of capital in different instances; today, this may be seen by the way capital is reproduced at all costs under the guidelines of the policies of the United States that have gained strength since the implementation of the Washington Protocol.

[14] WRIGHT MILL, C. *Escucha Yanqui*. México D.F.: FCE, 1961. Wright Mills was particularly referring *to* American economic penetration in Cuba.

From the agricultural discourse of the peasants to neoliberal capitalist politics on the buying and selling of land.

Not only does the hegemony of the United States cut across the agricultural history of Mexico, but it has also operated over the most fundamental of all agricultural subjects in the country: the indigenous peoples, who have been the great losers of the Mexican state, having been denied and separated from their lands despite the circumstantial rights that they possess over these and their resources as the original agricultural producers. In this sense, the socio-historical right corresponding to these peoples and their claims to these lands are unquestionable. The fundamental relationship that exists between the native peoples and their habitat can be found in classic writings such as the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel* or the more widely known *Popol Vuh*, among several other works which speak of the close bonds that the Mayan Indians kept with their lands.

Within the highly complex set of concepts that make up Article 27, we may even "deconstruct"[15] the juridical concept regarding indigenous peoples, given that the constitutional framework included them as "agricultural communities" (based on the confirmation and entitlement the Article has over land ownership).

Such a legal precept offered indigenous peoples the possibility to be recognized as the rightful owners of the land through an administrative procedure named *The Agrarian Restitution*, which was carried out by federal authorities. Despite using this formula, they gained relatively little recognition from the government and were henceforth identified as a "rural population segment" that was seen as disperse and disconnected. They were now without the possibility of consolidating an identity and a culture of their own, for the government's logic only allowed for the existence of certain communities, a designation that did not include the indigenous peoples. Not only that, the state also diverted the demands of the indigenous peoples for the land by formulating other administrative procedures in order to create what would later be known as *ejidos* (land farmed communally

[15] I refer to the classic sense of the concept created by Martín Heidegger and developed by Jacques Derrida. The historical, metaphorical process through the years has dealt with the "construction process of certain concepts", in this case, the hypothesis of the agrarian Indian individual based on factors that are far withdrawn from reality. This is where our statement about deconstruction stems from. Under this idea, the reality of Indian peoples has been "reduced" to the ideology of the state. In this respect, it is interesting to mention the work of CULLER, Jonathan. *On deconstruction: theory and criticism after structuralism*. Madrid: Ed, Cátedra, 1984.

under the direction of the state), a step which, far from being gratuitous, relied heavily on the edifice of an agrarian capitalism that was already casting its shadow over Mexico. This phenomenon, which has scarcely been studied, reveals the problems inherent to hegemonic power in that it alienated native peoples and drove them towards structures that were unknown to them. That is how the "totem of the post-revolutionary, contemporary ejido" came into being as a severe impediment to the multi-cultural consolidation of rural populations.

The romantic idea of the ejido (conceived by the state) as a projection of the Prehispanic *Calpulli* in modernity was actually conceived as an element of capitalist government agricultural policy. The purposes of *ejidalización* (the construction of ejidos) was the expanded reproduction of capital, either by means of renting the land or because above the interests of those who worked the land of the ejidos (both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples) were the state, transnational enterprises and private entrepreneurs.

Another myth surrounding the development of agriculture that needs to be deconstructed concerns the juridical nature that private property holds in Mexico. Private property held by individuals is conceived in an odd way. Article 27 presupposes that there exists private property in the countryside, yet such elements that could be conceived as private property were taken over by the state, that is, the subsoil and its resources, waters, airspace, forests and jungles, among others, that were submitted to control by the prevailing capitalist hegemony. This "hybridization" of private property is culturally opposed by indigenous peoples for whom such natural elements are indivisible, that is, that there should be no such limitations, as it was supposedly foreseen by Article 27.

Avatars of a failed process. An approach to the Mexican agrarian question in post-modernity

National statistics have witnessed the long and winding road of the agrarian question. The "booster" propaganda that for decades was part of the official discourse has been significantly reduced by the serious problems in the agricultural development of Mexico. This is seen, for example, in the granting and expansion of ejidos on lands with no agricultural purpose whatsoever, which is what happened during the distribution of lands in the forests and jungles in south and southeast Mexico. Such policies had negative environmental impacts such as the collapse of lake areas such as Texcoco on the outskirts of Mexico City created by the construction of new

ejido population centers during a drought which prohibited rural development. Instead of tackling the agricultural problems of the *latifundio*, a severe social situation took place when all the people who were given lands in forests or jungles migrated. In fact, land distribution was limited: incumbents received only about 2.5 hectares of bad quality lands and in 1992 (the year of President Carlos Salinas's reforms) there was an agricultural backwardness in which 100,000 certificates were linked to conflicts of land ownership.

On the other hand, it is a surprising fact that the agricultural rights of only 3,500,000 Mexicans, corresponding to 31,500 ejidos and indigenous communities that were basically born during the mandate of President Lazaro Cardenas in the 1930s, were recognized, and not always on good quality lands. Marked by agricultural failures, millions of Mexicans abandoned their lands to seek livelihoods elsewhere in the cities or outside Mexico. 20 million Mexicans are currently living in the United States. Actually the state itself affected the *latifundio*, which proved in certain moments to be convenient for governments. That is how we consider the adaptations and reforms that historically took place during the ruling periods of Miguel Aleman (1946-1952), and in the neoliberal framework of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994), Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) and currently that of Enrique Peña Nieto, which have expanded private property in agricultural production in Mexico under the instructions of the Group of Eight and NAFTA.[16] From a socioeconomic prospective, these policies were designed to construct a "minimum state" and include oligopolies in the national economy, involving an intense rural privatization program[17] that has aimed to concentrate capital in the agricultural sector.

---

[16] The NAFTA has produced awful results for Mexico during the time it has been applied and the three decades of structural adjustment with its abrupt and unilateral trade liberalization, and its severe reduction of the participation of the state in sectorial economic development, phenomena linked with the profound asymmetries in technology, productivity, natural resources and agricultural policies existing between Mexico and the United States. SÁNCHEZ ALBARRÁN, Armando. *El campo no aguanta más.* México: UAMA, 2011.

[17] Against whatever could be implied in the ejido privatization, the number of ejidos did not decrease, notwithstanding the market economic variable on which various spatial scopes of its heritage were positioned, with the reform of Constitutional Article 27. On the contrary, there were now 31,518 ejidos together with the communities. According to the INEGI (National Institute of Geographical Statistics and Information) only 5% of the holders of the ejidos fully sold. Another very revealing data concerning the social situation is the qualitative aspect of ejido lands that are basically all fed by rainwater. See CONCHEIRO, Luciano. *et al*. *Privatización en el Mundo rural*. UAM Xochimilco, 1998.

It is worth mentioning that the traditional canons of Article 27 about the limits concerning private property have suffered a rupture. Thus we found that with the adjustments of the Salinas period, a sole owner can possess up to 60,000 hectares of rangeland soils and the reform of the current president simply ratified what previous governments had made feasible years before through trusts of foreigners in coastal and border areas. If it is a legal truth that the state distributed land in Mexico, there is also the "objective truth" that there has never been fair land distribution in Mexico. According to the 2007 census[18]:

- the rural population in 2005 was 24.5 million
- 10.7 million worked in the rural sector
- 5.7 milion people were farmworkers
- 2.5 million people were labourers
- 164,000 were employees and workers
- 3 million workers were not paid
- 3.7 million worked or used the ejido lands
- Of farm incomes, 44% belonged to non-agricultural sources
- Eight out of ten producers lacked union organization
- 88% of families have at least one member living outside the community
- 97% of rural land is affected by environmental problems; in 60%, the impacts are irreversible
- Only 6 million hectares have irrigation; 10% of the lands have severe salinity problems
- 68% of the cultivated land is dedicated to grains and oilseeds; 5.8% for fruits; 3% for vegetables; and 22.3% for other crops.[19]

[18] In 2012, the INEGI carried out the National Agricultural Survey that was based on a sample of the thirty-three most representative crops of Mexican agricultural production, which qualitatively delimits the projections of the agricultural census on which this essay is based. The results of the survey were published in 2013. It is worth mentioning that between the two aforementioned documents there are *methodological* differences due to the fact that the cited survey was founded on a sample. That is the reason why the data mentioned in this work mainly comes from the 2007 Census cited below.

[19] See INEGI. *Censo Agrícola, ganadero y forestal y Censo Ejidal*. México, INEGI, 2007.

At a macroeconomic level, the rural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) constitutes only about 2.7 % of the total goods and services which are produced in Mexico. This figure shows, among other aspects, that the country is food dependent. At the same time, it is worth mentioning the compulsive expulsion of great sectors of the rural population that after almost eight decades of land distribution have left their homes. This is best known as migration and the reasons may be found in the structural poverty of millions of Mexicans.

Epilogue

In the current context of predatory capitalism, it is important to explore if there are feasible alternatives for rural development in an unquestionably dehumanizing and aggressive framework.

Oligopolies insist on maintaining structures that intensify rural poverty and guarantee the expanded reproduction of capital. In a "neoliberal fashion", they name all their applications and projections as "sustainable". Thus, laws are sustainable, projects are sustainable, but are all the predatory activities in the woods, jungles, aquifers, mines, tourist developments, and agro-industry sustainable?

The power centers use an "ecological" discourse yet environmental catastrophe permeates all neoliberal growth practices. Alejandro Toledo's opinion is that this is a organized strategy applied from the powers above that on the one hand creates deep and irreparable ruptures in the environment and on the other formalizes activities that will "compensate the damage" of something that nature created thousands of years ago. This discourse is used to propagate the "benefits of neoliberal development" to civil society.[20] Hence, everything is coated with this new discourse of sustainable development.

Concerning indigenous peoples in Mexico we consider it an urgent task to interpret the meanings that indigenous rights should have in most of the countries of the continent considering three principal objectives. First, the ratification of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. Second, approval of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indian

[20] TOLEDO OCAMPO, Alejandro. "Towards a political economy of biodiversity and of communitarian ecological movements". *Chiapas Magazine*. n. 6, México: UNAM – IIS, 2003.

Peoples[21] of the United Nations (UN) (declared in September 2007) and, finally, the reform of the state in Latin America with regard to indigenous peoples' rights, that is, the construction of new constitutional frameworks based on the multiethnic and multicultural configuration of the nation state.

Notwithstanding the importance of Convention 169 and the Declaration of Indian Peoples of the UN,[22] it would also be important to study these documents in light of their structural differences, together with the contributions of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in the Mexican context, for example the integrated management of resources by indigenous peoples, as well as those scholars and activists who refer to self-determination, autonomy and the concept of people(s).[23]

Juridically, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indian Peoples of the UN does not require compliance, since it is not a treaty, unlike

[21] The Latin American countries which have ratified Convention 169 are: Argentina (2000), Brasil (2002), Bolivia (1991), Colombia (1991), Costa Rica (1993), Ecuador (1998), Honduras (1995), Guatemala (1996), México (1990), Paraguay (1993), Perú (1994), Venezuela (2002). For effects of this work, it is important to mention that the minimum standard of specific rights of indigenous peoples is synthetized in this Agreement originally approved in 1989.

[22] The approval of the Declaration was preceded by the 60/1 resolution of the UN General Assembly dated October 2005 that on paragraph I-27 stipulates: "We reaffirm our commitment to keep promoting human rights of the Indian peoples of the world, and locally, domestically, regionally and internationally, even by means of the consultation and collaboration with them and to submit, as soon as possible, for approval, a final draft of the UN Declaration of Human Rights for Indian Peoples". This declaration was approved on September 13, 2007. Among the 192 countries represented at the UN, 143 adopted it; eleven refrained and only four opposed (USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) arguing its negative effects on territories and resources.

[23] *Zapatismo* is not only a cultural conception, but also an ethnological and experiential one that seeks to establish human claims concerning the land in an asymmetric context, where hegemonic groups indiscriminately take over the habitat, making the interpretation of the dialogue among humans and between humans and the land more complex. Beyond some conceptions that conceive the Zapatista movement as a "rupture" we find it valid that they make credible and feasible the cognitive practices of peoples who have been victimized by colonialism. In this philosophical respect, the thought that the EZLN has developed becomes important. Zapatismo as an ethnic background can be seen as a cultural tradition, with its peculiar sense, originating from the Zapatistas, in search of the fair distribution of the land and the return of the territories to the Indian peoples, something that could imply a hopeful reference able to influence society so that it acknowledges its values and "humanizes" the most disadvantaged social classes. The EZLN placed the problem of racial autonomy, respect for the demands of their territories and natural resources, the defense of their cultures and regulatory systems, in the international debate among other aspects that transcended beyond these particular struggles, such as the establishment of dialogue and its insertion in the political life of Mexico. Regarding this, we should not forget the intervention of the EZLN at the Unity Congress of Mexico. Since the Mexican Revolution there has not been another social movement that has had such political importance.

Convention 169, that was ratified by the signatory states[24], thus requiring them to respect its provisions. This aspect has gradually become a permanent debate in each of the signatory countries that was provoked by the constant activism of indigenous movements for enforcement of the Conventions' provisions, which has in fact resulted in reforms and adjustments of national legislation in some Latin American countries.

Despite the current limits of indigenous rights, we believe that the rise of indigenous movements in the last three decades[25] has broken with the traditional idea of a mono- ethnical state. We insist that the EZLN has played a significant role in this development.

[24]The special rapporteur of the UN on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indian peoples, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, has sustained the importance of approving the UN Declaration. See OLIVARES, Alonso Emir. "Stavenhagen exhorta al Congreso a incluir el documento en la reforma del Estado". *La Jornada,* octubre 13 de 2007.

[25] Beyond the "economistic" analyzes that identify the objectives of the demands of indigenous movements as eminently socioeconomic, we also find a polychromy in its expressions. In this respect, the classification of Daniel Cazes is interesting: "Productive organizations that refer to the economic field. Organizations of cultural perspective and human rights that refer to the struggles against inequality and discrimination based on differences (genetics, ethics, sexual preferences, etc..) Social organizations that refer to the scope of social rights and political citizenship rights". See CAZÉS, Daniel. *Creación de alternativas y poderes democráticos*. México, D.F.: UNAM, 2008.

Popular empowerment, peasant struggles and political change: Southern Catalonia under late Francoism (1968-1976)[1]

Cristian Ferrer González

1 Rural opposition to Francoism

The peasantry has been often identified as a heterogeneous, conservative and politically apathetic social group. Their demands have been considered as pre-political, individualistic and millenarian. Moreover, it was assumed that the peasantry was a group destined to disappear with the advance of modernity. Recently, however, several studies have thoroughly reconsidered and overcome these conceptions.[2] In the historiography of the Franco regime, particularly surrounding the theme of political change, numerous studies have correctly highlighted the key role of the popular classes in explaining the end of the dictatorship: especially the industrial working class, but also the role of neighbourhood movements, students, professionals and intellectuals. Despite this trend, rural social agents and their interaction with the regime and their role in its downfall have often been ignored. Only recently, a few researchers have begun to pay attention to the dynamics of conflict in rural Spain, highlighting its role as a democratizing force for wider social sectors, a fact that resolutely influenced the overall process of political change.[3]

---

[1] This paper is part of the HAR 2012-31431 project in which the author participates with a scholarship from the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of Spain. E-mail: cristian.ferrer@uab.cat.

[2] For classical studies on the peasantry see HOBSBAWM, Eric J. *Rebeldes primitivos: estudios sobre las formas arcaicas de los movimientos sociales en los siglos XIX y XX.* Barcelona: Ariel, 1983. A critique of Hobsbawm may be found in GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, Manuel. "Los mitos de la modernidad y la protesta campesina. A propósito de *Rebeldes Primitivos* de Eric J. Hobsbawm". *Historia Social*, vol. 25, 1996, pp. 113-157.

[3] Probably the best book on the role of the new social movements during Francoism and the transition to democracy is DOMÈNECH, Xavier. *Cambio político y movimiento obrero bajo el franquismo: lucha de clases, dictadura y democracia (1939-1977).* Madrid: Icaria, 2012. Some pioneering studies on the peasantry and rural areas during the political change are HERRERA, Antonio. *La construcción de la democracia en el campo (1975-1988): el sindicalismo agrario socialista en la Transición española.* Madrid: MAGRAMA, 2007 and

These few studies have offered the first results about rural social conflicts in predominantly agricultural regions, often where large landed estates and wage labour predominated. Yet there is still a lack of analysis about rural areas on the periphery of the main industrial areas such as Catalonia where there was a clear predominance of smaller family farms that coexisted with other types of landownership and employment opportunities that prefigured a great complexity in the social relationships of the region. Many small peasant landholders also supplemented their incomes as wage earners in the large rice plantations and were also attracted by the better salaries of industrial work in the factories located near the countryside. Moonlighting was thus common, aggravating the precariousness of living off small land holdings. In addition, a determining factor in social conflicts was the organizational maturity of the Catalan political opposition to the Franco regime in general. Catalan society, especially in the industrial belt of Barcelona, but not exclusively, was increasingly mobilized and developed a rich associative structure as it grew in the decade before the end of the regime. So much so that by the early 1970s, the Catalan anti-Francoist movement had already established the first unified action platform of the Spanish opposition, the *Assemblea de Catalunya* (Assembly of Catalonia). Without doubt, then, a study of the Catalan rural periphery may help us to fully understand the complexity of post-Francoist political change, as much in Catalonia as in Spain.

MARTÍN, Óscar J. *A tientas con la democracia: movilización, actitudes y cambio en la provincia de Albacete, 1966-1976.* Madrid: Catarata, 2008.

Figure 1: Map of the Lower Ebro Region

This paper analyses social conflicts in southern Catalonia, specifically the regions of Lower Ebro and Montsià, both located on the mouth of the Ebro River in the province of Tarragona [Figure 1].[4] These conflicts were carried out by rural wage workers and proletarianized small farmers who were able to resist and to challenge almost permanently the Francoist agents in the region and, as we shall see, they had a direct impact on weakening the local powers of the dictatorship. Apparently calm, the peasantry was, however, suffering the unwelcome consequences of the so-called *developmentalist* political economy of the 1960s: impoverishment, proletarianization, higher taxation, the necessity to migrate, etc. This led to conflicts not primarily centred on the property of land itself, but on control of the means of production and the final product of the peasants' labour. Franco's *Nuevo Estado* (New State) claimed to be the guarantor of "social peace" so strictly labour conflicts necessarily became larger political struggles, as the latter were defined as crimes in Francoist Spain. Thereby,

[4] An important part of the source material constituting this paper is from FERRER GONZÁLEZ, Cristian. *Lluitadors quotidians: L'antifranquisme, el canvi politic i la construcció de la democràcia al Montsià (1972-1979)*. Lleida: UdL, 2014, pp. 48-51, 67-82 and 91-93. Nevertheless, most of the documentary sources used here are unpublished.

workers learned how to challenge the regime while they were gradually defining and increasing what was and what was not possible under the dictatorship. Peasant struggles were a useful political learning process for those involved, but they also extended beyond rural workers themselves. Indeed, since the late 1960s peasants had become the social and political vanguard of anti-Francoism in villages on the lower Ebro, mobilizing huge segments of the rural population.

2. From the notion of injustice to organized protest

In 1966, the government approved a new *Seguridad Social Agraria* (Agrarian Social Security policy, hereafter SSA). As a result, farmers who employed wageworkers, legally identified as "agricultural entrepreneurs", were required to pay a tax. With the objective of avoiding the development of a black market economy, the government calculated the entrepreneur's tax for the SSA by a theoretical count of the labour needed to work a farm, based on its size instead of the actual number of wage workers employed. This policy demonstrated a profound ignorance of labour in agriculture. Small and mid-sized farms did not utilize wage work, relying instead on the family unit. The SSA tax was thus perceived as deeply unfair because it forced farmers to pay workers that, in fact, did not exist. In addition, from the 1950s onwards family farms ceased to produce for home consumption and were completely integrated in the capitalist market. Thereafter family farms became dependent on the marketing of the agricultural industry and the new social intermediaries that would arise to perform this function. Many families were not able to maintain production at a sufficient level to cope with high taxes and debts. Many of them began to work in regional industries or they migrated to the big cities. Competition in the labour market became a necessity in the struggle to survive. Many small farmers were forced to make large investments to maximize their production and a significant number decided to sell or lease their lands to their more fortunate neighbours who had not opted to migrate.[5]

---

[5] ALONSO, V. L., *et. al. Crisis agrarias y luchas campesinas, 1970-1976*. Madrid: Ayuso, 1976, pp. 41-54; RIQUER, Borja de. *Historia de España. La dictadura de Franco.* vol. 9, Barcelona: Crítica, 2010, pp. 624-627; SIMPSON, James. *La agricultura española (1765-1965): la larga siesta.* Madrid: Alianza, 1997, pp. 321-347; SABIO, Alberto. "Cultivadores de democracia. Politización campesino y sindicalismo agrario progresista en España (1970-1980)", *Historia Social*, vol. 38, 2006, pp. 75-102, especially pp. 76-77; Interview with T.M. (s.a. [1976-77]): peasant trade unionist, in: BENELBAS, León, *et al. Unió de Pagesos: el sindicat del camp.* Barcelona: Alternativa, 1977, pp. 197-199.

Previous studies have alerted us that the perception of injustice involves a central attribution of responsibility. Yet, the subjectivity of a political grievance process also develops within a broader interpretive framework of shared identity that is essential to provide an organized response. According to E. P. Thompson:

> [...] these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices [...]. This in turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute "the moral economy of the poor". An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action.6

However, any action also requires what Klandermans calls a "motivational framework" involving the creation and dissemination of beliefs about the effectiveness of collective action. And along with the grievance itself this is one of the keys to the social construction of protest. Cabana summarizes this as follows "when potential participants in a social movement think strategies and collective actions are useful to change a situation and to reduce its uneasiness, it is when a link between discomfort and the behaviour of protest exists".[7] Since the late 1960s, many sectors of southern Catalan peasants demonstrated that they felt part of a common social body (the peasantry, rural people) with common problems. They perceived the regime's agrarian policy as illegitimate and an attempt to destroy their way of life. In addition, news of the victories and successes from more mobilized regions, especially the triumph of the Workers' Commissions in the main industries in 1966, where, in fact, some of those who immigrated worked, led some peasants to "defend with our hands our interests, which coincide with the general democratic interests of our people".[8] Indeed, some decided to join the *Comissions de Pagesos* (Peasants Commissions, hereafter CCPP) in the struggle against the perspective that

[6] THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. *Costumbres en común*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1995, p. 216.
[7] CABANA, Ana. *La derrota de lo épico.* Valencia: PUV, 2013, p. 53. On the "frameworks theory" see KLANDERMANS, Bert. *The Social Psychology of protest*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
[8] Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya (hereafter ANC), PSUC collection, *Extractes de documents de la Coordinadora de Comissions de Pagesos del Camp de Catalunya*, s.a. [1968], sig. 1552, p. 2. For the workers movement in the Barcelona metropolitan area, see DOMÈNICH, Xavier. *Clase obrera, antifranquismo y cambio político: pequeños grandes cambios, 1956-1969*. Madrid: Catarata, 2008.

"little farmers soon will be wage-workers for intermediaries who eat our fruit like they want to".[9]

The political demands and methods displayed by the CCPP in Catalonia arose from the customs of the "little everyday rebellions" of the peasantry, by consolidating an action that some of them were already practicing, because it was one of "the most felt claims [...] by peasants and land workers": that is, a coordinated boycott against the SSA tax.[10] Actions like the denial to pay a tax are easy to repress by the state unless they count on massive popular support. In a village in Lerida province, in inner Catalonia, twenty-nine peasants were arrested in 1972 and their properties were confiscated. This event provoked solidarity by wide sectors of urban and rural society, the boycott was extended and the regime was forced to drop the charges against the prisoners. Mobilizations against the SSA tax in the Lower Ebro and Montsià, with the always-present agrarian unemployment problem, produced demonstrations of over five hundred rural workers in April 1971 and once again in 1972. Despite the repression suffered, the regime was not able to counter the widespread boycott and the Spanish government was forced to exempt small family farms from the tax in 1973.[11]

---

[9] Arxiu Històric de la Comissió Obrera Nacional de Catalunya (hereafter AHCONC), Clandestine press, "La necessitat de la Reforma Agrària", *Camp: Portaveu de les Comissions de Pagesos de Catalunya*, n. 2, s.a. [September-October of 1969], reg. 00/97, top. 0159C015. It provides information about the emulation of the urban mobilizations by people in the lower Ebro. See the interviews of J.V.E. (July 26, 2012): student, socialist, non-tenured professor; E.E.M. (June 3, 2013): agronomist student, peasant and trade unionist; E.T.A. (June 17, 2013): student, worker, communist; AHCONC, interview of C.L.S. (October 22, 1998 – February 18, 1999): communist interviewed by Javier Tébar, and interview of J.S. (s.a. [1976-77]): peasant and trade unionist, in: BENELBAS, León, *et. al. Unió de Pagesos: el sindicat del camp Op.Cit.,*. pp. 201-202. Also consult the pioneering study on influence of mobilization, the "political mirror", in MARTÍN, Óscar J. *A tientas con la democracia… Op.Cit.* pp. 172-182 and 226-234.

[10] About "little everyday rebellions", see YUSTA, Mercedes. *Guerrilla y resistencia campesina: la resistencia armada contra el franquismo en Aragón (1939-1952)*. Zaragoza: PUZ, 2003, pp. 15-25, quote on p. 18. For a classic study of peasant resistance, see SCOTT, James C. *Los dominados y el arte de la resistencia.* Tafalla: Txalaparta, 2003. Next quote from ANC, PSUC collection, *Extractes de…* sig. 1552, p. 2. We may see the importance of the boycott to SSA tax in AHCONC, Clandestine press, "Continua el problema de la Seguretat Social", *Camp: Portaveu de les Comissions de Pagesos de Catalunya*, n. 3, s.a. [November-December of 1969], reg. 00/97, top. 0159C015. For a study about conflicts around the SSA tax, see CABANA, Ana and LANERO, Daniel. "Movilización social en la Galicia rural del Tardofranquismo (1960-1977)", *Historia Agraria*, vol. 48, 2009, pp. 111-132.

[11] Read a letter sent to the press by peasants of Artesa de Lleida in solidarity with the twenty-nine arrested in Albatárrech: "Las cuotas de la Seguridad Social Agraria", *La Vanguardia Española*, May 10, 1972. The mobilizations in Amposta and its effect on the

The CCPP of the Lower Ebro participated in this massive struggle that involved heterogeneous social sectors with, for example, 50% of the population working as wage labourers. Many of these, however, also "had their piece of land with one or two *jornales*[12] where they planted what was essential for the winter, but they all lived working the land of others". Many of them also participated in Christian social movements that would inspire the CCPP's discourse. Others came from a socialist political culture and, especially, anarcho-syndicalism, which was very present in the region before the civil war. But the major political group in the CCPP were, undoubtedly, the communists of the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, hereafter PSUC), who constituted the most active and organized peasants in Francoist Spain. The very strong presence of wageworkers with a radical political rhetoric hindered the CCPP's relationship with less politicized sectors. In addition to the slogans of the PSUC that differentiated wageworkers from peasants, although the party later rejected them, led the CCPP to have serious difficulties mobilizing non-communist sectors.[13] However, it was repression that smashed the possibility of the consolidation of the CCPP's. As a result of the State of Emergency declared by the regime in 1969, the leadership of the PSUC in the region was dismantled and peasant activists were forced to organize strictly clandestinely for some time.

3. Redefining the possible: transforming the given framework

Despite the CCPP's difficulties, it was able to channel the demands of the peasantry to control the structures of the *Sindicato Vertical*, the official Francoist trade union, known as the "Brotherhood" in the countryside. The CCPP represented a synthesis of the two dominant varieties of Catalan trade unionism that had originated in the 1930s: on the one hand, "reformist" trade unionism with actions like infiltration in the

SSA tax may be found in MAYAYO, Andreu. *De pagesos a ciutadans: cent anys de sindicalisme i cooperativisme agraris a Catalunya, 1893-1994*. Barcelona: Afers, 1995, pp. 199-210; ANC, PSUC collection, *Primera Conferència del Comité Intercomarcal Baix Ebre-Montsià del PSUC*, 1978, sig. 5444, p. 6; Arxiu Històric Provincial de Tarragona (hereafter AHPT), Cámara Oficial Sindical Agraria of Tarragona collection, *Libro de Actas*, March 15, 1973, sig. 58, p. 12.

[12] In Spanish "jornal" means "daily salary", but it is also an ancient land measure equivalent to about 4,080 square metres, a term still used by the peasantry.

[13] First quote in: interview of E.T.A. (June 17, 2013). Interviews of P.F.M. (June 4, 2013): shepherd, labourer and socialist; J.S. (s.a. [1976-77]): peasant trade unionist, in BENELBAS, León, *et. al. Unió de pagesos...Op.Cit.,* pp. 201-202. ANC, PSUC collection, *Acuerdos de la Primera Asamblea General de las Comisiones Obreras Agrícolas y Campesinas*, May 1970, sig. 1552, pp. 2-3.

official trade unions and raising legal grievances with the Francoist authorities; and on the other hand, "revolutionary" trade unionism, using unlawful means like the strike or the boycott, classified as crimes and severely punished by the dictatorship.[14] Indeed, peasants started a struggle for official trade union control even before the industrial working class had launched a similar campaign in 1966. Open activism, assemblies and regular confrontations with the Francoist trade union personnel produced some of the first leaders of peasant activism. Such leaders gained recognition and respect that, in fact, helped to better the standard of living for the majority. Screaming "Long Live Democracy" and "Thieves, Go Home", a growing number of peasants participated in the movement, and when their leaders would suffer repression, solidarity campaigns would serve to further consolidate the movement.[15]

In the 1971 elections for the Workers' Section in Amposta, six peasants in the opposition movement were elected.[16] In spite of such partial victories, the leeway for advancement was narrow and the costs of repression were high. The Workers' Section was not allowed to control the official trade union because of the impediments of Francoist labour law. Despite this, it was the one legal way to raise larger economic and political demands felt by the population. The dictatorship had imposed an unequal union structure on rural workers; landowners and big agrarian entrepreneurs enjoyed absolute and unquestioned power within official union structures, despite representing only 4.6% of its members. This inequality made it virtually impossible for the vast majority in the "producers' section" to control the union. However, some mobilized peasants started to approach more well-off farmers asking them to organize a "democratic candidacy" together representing all wage workers, peasants and farmers in the anti-Francoist movement. Their ultimate target would be control of the official trade union of each segment; but first they would strategically seek to win in

---

[14] ANC, PSUC collection, *Extractes de documents…* sig. 1552, p. 3. We may see how José Antonio Serrano Montalvo, the province's civil governor, perceived the "subversive" peasant actions in Archivo General de la Administración (hereafter AGA), Ministry of Governance collection, *Memoria del Gobierno Civil de Tarragona*, 1968, sig. 52/00487. For more information about the "reformist" and "revolutionary" varieties of the CCPP, see: MAYAYO, Andreu. *De pagesos a ciutadans…Op.Cit.*, pp. 197-199.

[15] ANC, PSUC collecton, *Por una vida mejor*, s.a. [1970], sig. 1552. See what has been called "the conquest of solidarity" in DOMÈNECH, Xavier. *Quan el carrer va deixar de ser seu: moviment obrer, societat civil i canvi polític: Sabadell (1966-1976).* Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 2002, pp. 121-123.

[16] ANC, PSUC collection, *Assemblea de la Coordinadora de les Comissions de Pagesos i Jornalers de Catalunya*, December 5, 1971, sig. 1552, p. 1.

one area, the rice producers' organization, the *Cámara Arrocera*, "the cooperative with the highest trading volume of Spain".[17]

The attempt to bring together the opposition vanguard and entrepreneurs who were opposed to corruption and greedy intermediaries was fraught with difficulties. In 1972, some communist peasants tried to construct an inter-class candidacy to take control of the *Arrocera.* Despite the apparent predisposition of some anti-Francoist entrepreneurs to join with their class enemies, it was difficult to convince communist peasants to ally with better off farmers with different political perspectives. As one activist in the campaign, Comrade R, noted: up until "the last moment […] [they] lack[ed] help from the [PSUC's] Local Committee and from the militant peasant base".[18] Yet the mobilization effort for the elections ended up encouraging the most active peasants to participate in the campaign.

Despite open confrontations in the past, the majority of peasants and rural wage workers could still shelter themselves in the rhetorical concessions inherent to what Scott calls the "self-portrait of dominant elites" and elements of the dominant social discourse from the dictatorship: the *falangist* ideology. For the peasantry, rhetorical concessions offered a surprisingly large arena for political conflict by using a low-intensity discourse based on the "flattering self-image of the elites", despite their actual defenceless situation against a possible open confrontation.[19] Thus, the campaign to win the elections in the *Arrocera* was made openly and within the established legal framework. Peasant activists travelled the region with cars and megaphones, posted up over three hundred posters by all unions and cooperatives in the area, and organized for an agrarian entrepreneur candidate, well regarded by farmers and workers, to challenge the Francoist leadership of the cooperative.[20]

The *Arrocera*'s president understood his power was in danger so he recruited over three hundred non-farmers as new members, especially city shopkeepers, with the promise to offer them low-interest loans from the *Caja Rural,* the rural Building Society, if they voted for him on the

[17] "El Bajo Ebro, en los inicios de un proceso de desarrollo económico", *La Vanguardia Española*, October 26, 1972, p. 53.
[18] ANC, PSUC collection, *Amposta: Junta General de la Cambra Arrossera*, September 3, 1972, sig. 1677, p. 1.
[19] SCOTT, James C. *Los dominados…Op.Cit.*, p. 45. For a study on rhetorical "social justice" from the *falangismo* and Franco's regime, see MOLINERO, Carme. *La captación de las masas: política social y propaganda en el regimen franquista.* Madrid: Cátedra, 2005.
[20] ANC, PSUC collection, Handwritten pamphlet giving instructions on what posters should say and how many copies must be done, 1972, sig. 1677.

cooperative's Board. Apparently, the President "coerced many farmers […], falsified ballots with the clumsy ploy to vote by delegation, […] he did not allow anyone talking during the session and he proved to be a troublemaker". Despite the difficulties, the opposition candidacy won 30% of the votes. The President "went to the polling place with more than a thousand votes under his arm",[21] so it was not possible to defeat him in 1972. However, the 30% electoral support encouraged the anti-Francoist movement in the region.

Indeed, despite their partial defeat, a proof that the opposition campaign generated a heated political conflict was the repression that was soon organized by the Francoist supporters. The renovation of the Board assembly "awoke the interest of Ebro's right wing […]. The meeting, that had started at 4 in the afternoon, [only] ended at midnight". Punishment by Francoist personnel in the *Cámara Arrocera* came quickly and 136 members "considered from the opposition" were "expelled from the *Cámara*" under the pretext of "refusing to register their whole land, including their family's land which does not belong to the *Cámara*". Such irregularities were reported by the press, but censorship was quite strict: "a peasant from Amposta sent a letter to the *Correo Catalán*, reporting the irregularities in the *Cámara Arrocera*". However, "a month has passed and the letter has not yet been published".[22]

4. The expansion of the anti-Francoist social base

In the same period as the peasants' campaign in the *Sindicato Vertical*, the movement also began a process of contact with other sectors of workers. In a natural way, rural and industrial workers in villages met in bars; for those who were Christians and churchgoers, in church on Sundays; in cultural and recreational centres as well as amateur theatres. To sum up, they met in social spaces of all kinds. As Thompson wrote, "the chapel, the tavern and the home were their own". We mean, in that sense, that these spaces were far from the main stage of the class struggle: far from the official trade unions, far from the cooperatives, far from the factories. Nevertheless, these spaces "were their own". They were spaces that contributed to the contact and engagement between different political and

[21] Quotes in ANC, PSUC collection, *Amposta: Junta General*... sig. 1677, p. 2 and interview by E.T.A. (June 17, 2013).
[22] "La Cooperativa de la Cámara Arrocera renovó la mitad de su Junta", *La Vanguardia Española*, September 8th of 1972, p. 28. ANC, PSUC collection, Amposta's Local Committee informative to the PSUC's Central Committee, October 10, 1973, sig. 1677.

cultural sensitivities. Activists met with other non-activists, and sharing anti-Francoist ideas, they created "safe spaces". People hostile to the regime converged with peasants unconnected with the movement to begin an uninhibited exchange of opinions. It is hard to ascertain the extent and limits of such safe spaces, but we can affirm that sites of popular sociability were essential to connect activists, eventually contributing to united actions by social Christians, socialists, Marxists, social democrats, Christian democrats, communists, Catalan nationalists or people without any political affiliation in particular.[23]

Recreational and cultural activities during these years were a good way to attract young people, then still unconnected with the opposition, to the anti-Francoist opposition. Concerts, recitals, expositions, cinema clubs, theatres, hiking clubs, and debates were activities that offered the possibility of popular involvement. Such activities contributed to the construction of a counterhegemonic culture. Faced with the impossibility of always constructing open political activities, cultural activism became the "bait" which allowed opposition movements to "channel alternatives formulated independently from the officialdom".[24] Civic and cultural associations opened tiny cracks that were used by anti-Francoist activists to open up spaces helping to build a dissident political culture that the regime had no doubt in calling "subversive". Political dissent surpassed workplace relations and was expressed by expanded activity among the majority in the popular sectors, arriving, in the words of the Ministry of Labour Relations, to "collectives until now peaceful". The dictatorship, on the other hand, was incapable of promoting an official culture related to their own interests despite counting on the full power of the state apparatus. Official culture was confined to staid commemorations such as the "Liberation of the Village as the National Crusade".[25]

---

[23] Most of the interviewees attest to the importance of recreational association: Interview by J.V.G. (July 3, 2013): cultural activist and worker trade unionist; J.A.B. (July 20, 2012): Christian and later socialist militant; J.L.M.M. (July 9, 2012): bank worker and Catalan separatist leftist; E.E.M. (June 2, 2013); E.T.A. (June 17, 2013); J.V.E. (July 26, 2012). I also wrote about this topic in FERRER GONZÁLEZ, Cristian. "Ulldecona i el canvi polític. Dictadura, contrahegemonia i democràcia (1964-1983)", *Raïls*, vol. 30, 2014, pp. 7-53. Thompson's quote from THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. *La formación de la clase obrera en Inglaterra*. Madrid: Capitán Swing, 2013, p. 74.

[24] JAME, Antonieta. *L'oposició al franquisme a Lleida.* Lerida: Pagès, 1998, pp. 99-152, quote from p. 102; also see MARTÍN, Óscar J. *A tientas con…Op.Cit.*, pp. 269-282 and FERRER GONZÁLEZ, Cristian. *Lluitadors quotidians…Op.Cit.*, pp. 82-89.

[25] On "subversive" political culture, see the north Catalan case in AGA, Ministry of Governance collection, *Memoria del Gobierno Civil de Gerona,* 1976, sig. 32/11454, c. 5. Quote from MARTIN VILLA, Rodolfo. *Al Servicio del Estado.* Barcelona: Planeta, 1985 [1st ed. 1984], p. 16. Institutional commemorations in AHPT, Public Order collection,

The expansion of the social base of the opposition developed beyond the cultural level. Indeed, spaces of popular sociability aided the process of galvanizing different sectors in larger opposition political movements. Moreover, following the example of the *Assemblea de Catalunya*, the rural workers' movement gave up their sectarianism and started to build united actions. So much so that they definitively rejected the most sectarian ideological formulations of the CCPP organization, beginning to

> […] organize collectively around the most essential demands of the peasantry as a whole and its demands for specific formulations in each region according to its peculiarities. The need to promote cadres and peasants to contribute to its development was also considered, as well as the extension of the network of peasant organizations to all of Catalonia that would be the basis of the peasant mobilization.[26]

As a result of this operational shift, the rural workers' movement created a new, more plural and less ideological socio-political movement that was able to unite the whole rural opposition: the *Unió de Pagesos* (Peasants' Union, hereafter UP). Workers from southern Catalonia participated in its foundation. Some of them were linked to the PSUC, but there was also the obvious presence of socialists and Christian democrats. The UP was clearly a more plural organization than the CCPP. It arose among Ebro's peasantry during the last year of the dictator Franco's life. It demonstrated that it had the support of a civil society that had already created social spaces for oppositional ideas and politics. This was expressed for example in a relatively large demonstration – 500 people according to the organizers – on May 1, 1975 in front of the *Cámara Arrocera* demanding assistance against unemployment.[27]

In the early summer of 1975, large assemblies were organized in the local branches of the official trade unions. They debated the precarious economic situation of families who lived off the land. In their opinion, it was the result of government policies. Indeed, the peasantry was not allowed to negotiate directly with the state, a situation equal to that of the industrial working class before the introduction of collective bargaining

---

Programa oficial de actos y festejos, Santa Bàrbara, May of 1976, sig. 2304; "National Crusade" is how fascists called the Spanish Civil War.

[26] ANC, PSUC collection, "Reunión de payeses de 16 comarcas de Cataluña", *Informaciones Campesinas*, s.a. [November of 1974], sig. 1552, p. 1.

[27] Centre Documental de la Comunicació (hereafter CEDOC), Viladot collection, "Notícies", *La Terra*, n. 1, July 1975, sig. 0689GF, p. 11.

agreements in 1958. The only option that rural workers had was to strike to generate enough pressure to win their demands, producing "collective bargaining by riot" in all branches of production. Only in this way could the workers minimize the repressive costs of the strike. Only in this way could they overflow the state capacity to repress the workers' protest and force the state to, in the case of farmers, increase the price of agricultural products.[28] The price rise on the market was unstoppable yet what farmers received each year was lower than the previous year. As the harvesters complained: "canned tomato has increased in price […] except the price received by the farmer".[29]

Compensation to agrarian entrepreneurs that the regime had previously offered was disappearing because of the 1973 oil crisis. The dictatorship lost its base of support, the owners, and it was completely incapable of attracting the popular classes and neutralizing the growing "subversion". The regime was in crisis and the opposition was united and self-assured. The 1975 trade union elections would be the definitive occasion to unseat the "false representatives", while the real level of the opposition's hegemony among workers and civil society could be verified. The main difference in respect to 1972 was that in 1975 "labourers and owners have come together for the first time […]; they have fought together helping to each other to clean up the Brotherhood of false representatives". The opposition had the opportunity to meet and discuss in large assemblies "with frankness and freedom", constructing a unitary programme to confront the local Francoists, before the elections. The list of candidates was horizontally chosen and the program was approved unanimously.[30]

As in the 1972 elections for the *Arrocera*, pro-Francoists tried to buy the votes of labourers and owners, aiming to "stop the struggle that has been developing in the social sphere in the last years". The President of the *Arrocera* President promoted his own candidates in both the labourers' and owners' sections of the trade union. He took advantage of his position as President to use the locals of the cooperative for meetings and attempted to

[28] DOMÈNECH, Xavier. "La otra cara del milagro español. Clase obrera y movimiento obrero en los años del desarrollismo", *Historia Contemporánea*, vol. 26, 2003, pp. 91-112. For the originS of the term "collective bargaining by riot", see HOBSBAWM, Eric J. *Trabajadores: estudios de la historia de la clase obrera.* Barcelona: Crítica, 1979, pp. 16-35.

[29] ANC, PSUC collection, "El campesino cobra hoy menos que en 1973", *Informaciones Campesinas*, s.a. [November 1974], sig. 1552, p. 7.

[30] On Francoism's crisis, see YSÀS, Pere. La crisis de la dictadura franquista. In: MOLINERO, Carme (ed.). *La Transición, treinta años después.* Barcelona: Península, 2006. Quotes from CEDOC, Viladot collection, "Les eleccions sindicals a Amposta", *La Terra*, n. 2, January 1976, sig. 0689GF, p. 4.

buy favours among the workers and owners using the members' own money. He wanted to guarantee his control of the official trade union control at any cost. Such despotic and authoritarian methods produced a double and contradictory effect: on one hand, the President dissuaded workers to take a vindictive attitude fearing sanctions —especially getting fired from work— and suffer political repression; on the other hand, he contributed to the radicalization of attitudes among more and more workers.[31] However, the development of popular empowerment by the opposition made the difference:

> The vanguard of workers and employers of the democratic candidacies were at the door of the Brotherhood [Official Trade Union] at the time of the vote. They completely invalidated the [union] bosses —who were used to doing whatever they wanted at the *Cámara*. This time they were booed by workers and publicly denounced the coercion faced by the Cámara's workers who were threatened with dismissal if they did not vote for him.[32]

This time "democratic candidacies" won in every union section except among the landowners and the union administrative staff who were formed by personnel loyal to the President. The opposition victory reverberated beyond the world of labour relations. Many greeting cards were received by the union from shopkeepers after the democratic candidacies' victory.[33] It showed the degree of support garnered by the anti-Francoist movement among civil society that had become aware of its own power as it worked together united with wider social sectors.

5. The partial defeat of a strike and the success of many struggles: towards political change

The success of the southern Catalan political opposition did not improve the living conditions of the peasantry. The horticultural sector had been the centre of agrarian development during the preceding years in the

---

[31] ANC, PSUC collection, *Elecciones sindicales en Amposta*, July 5, 1975, sig. 1677, p. 1. MOLINERO, Carme and YSÀS, Pere. *Productores disciplinados y minorías subversivas: clase obrera y conflictividad laboral en la España franquista*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998, p. 226.

[32] ANC, PSUC collection, *Elecciones…* sig. 1677, p. 2.

[33] Arxiu Comarcal del Montsià (hereafter ACMO), Amposta's Agrarian Chamber collection, *Llibre de correspondència de l'entitat sindical*, July 17, 1975, sig. 2243014, c. 8.

Ebro region.[34] But the canning industry exercised the monopoly of intermediation between the peasantry and the market. They earned most of the profits and their greed led to increases in the final price of products. This reduced the consumption capacity of the popular classes at a time of severe economic crisis.

From 1973 onwards, Spanish peasants had initiated a wave of diverse conflicts to achieve an improved price for their products and, as was mentioned above, to minimize the possibility of repression. The "Pepper War", for example, took place between October and November 1973. Thanks to massive popular support, it spread along the Ebro Valley, between Navarre and Aragon.

In August 1975, Ebro's Catalan peasants threatened a "tomato pickup" strike unless they received five pesetas per kilo as a minimum price. The so-called "Tomato War" had started in Navarre in the summer of 1973 and it finished with a general rise in tomato prices for the farmers that year. However, inflation during 1974 decreased the real increase. Throughout 1974 and 1975, several conflicts related to inflation and the inability to negotiate the production price of fruits and vegetables broke out: asparagus, peppers and tomatoes were the main crops in the conflict. The 40% decrease in exports to the European Community led to a decrease in demand for tomatoes by the canning industry since they were still using the stock of the previous year's tomatoes. However, the peasantry was not ready to pay for a crisis that was not caused by them. While the prices of their products decreased, they noted a 30% increase in the profits of the seven main Spanish banks, prompting them to rhetorically question: "Who should tighten their belts?"[35]

One democratic workers' commission from the Amposta official trade union met with the *Arrocera*'s President in early August 1975. Workers aimed to control the profit margin from tomato harvesting. The mood was heated and there was no agreement. The next day more than 250 harvesters met at the union offices and harshly criticized the canning industry that was, literally, ruining them. One of the constant and never satisfied demands of the peasant movement was to buy a cannery to

[34] "Marcha ascendente de la sección hortofrutícola", *La Vanguardia Española*, September 8, 1972, p. 28.
[35] ANC, PSUC collection, "Precios percibidos, coste de vida y beneficios bancarios", *Informaciones Campesinas*, s.a. [October 1974], sig. 1552, p. 3. Interview of E.T.A. (June 17, 2013); CEDOC, Viladot collection, "Vaga dels colliters de tomàquets a Amposta", *La Terra*, n. 2, January 1976, sig. 0689GF, p. 6. On these conflicts mentioned see ALONSO, V. L., *et. al. Crisis agrarias…Op.Cit.*, pp. 55-98, especially pp. 81-90 on the "Tomato War" of 1975.

conserve the products they produced. The *Arrocera*'s President "satisfied" their demand at that moment by buying an outdated machine from his nephews' bankrupt industry. They not only were unable to get a better price for their products, but also had to deal with the debt generated by the purchase of obsolete machinery. It was the straw that broke the camel's back and "farmers agreed at the last meeting to stop the harvest in the coming days if they were not given the demanded price".[36]

From the first time in 37 years of dictatorship, the peasantry of the region took massive collection action through a strike. Picketers visited all tomato farms rebuking those who refused to obey the will of the majority expressed in the democratic assembly of August 8. Four days later, the strike appeared to have little chance of success despite the initial enthusiasm of the farmers. The *Arrocera*'s President took advantage of this situation during the weekend to make a bargain unfavourable to the harvesters, acting behind the cooperative's members. A labourer rebuked the President at the assembly of August 11. The President, he said, "breaks the Cámara's rules, he insults a member […] while he expels him from the meeting". Over 240 harvesters, 80% of the members, left the assembly in disgust. Despite this setback, the strike extended to southwestern Spain, in Extremadura, which went on strike from August 12 to 18. Harvesters in other provinces also struck and the action was reactivated in the north of the country. The Ministry of Agriculture, unable to repress such a widespread action, agreed to bargain with the peasantry and offered help to the sector. "Collective bargaining by riot" was thus the only way to force real negotiations. Moreover, media coverage contributed, undoubtedly, to expand solidarity between the peasants and the people.[37]

In spite of the eventual tomato workers' defeat in Catalonia by the hierarchies of the regime, the general mobilizing frame extended to several Spanish regions, indicating that the regime's days in power were numbered. Franco's death in November 1975 produced the perception that the dictatorship could be ended, provoking an increase in social mobilizations: industrial strikes, land occupations in the south and the participation in actions of "new" sectors until then "peaceful". These months — from December 1975 to May 1976 — were crucial in avoiding the perpetuation

[36] "Los agricultores de Amposta, descontentos", *La Vanguardia Española*, August 15, 1975, p. 24.
[37] "Los ingresos de los agricultores de Amposta han disminuido en más de veinticinco millones", *Abc*, September 17, 1975, p. 39. For the tractors' strikes in 1977 and 1978, in a later period, see FERRER GONZÁLEZ, Cristian. *Lluitadors quotidians…Op.Cit.*, pp. 93-97, 102-108 and 135-144.

of Francoism beyond the dictator's death.[38] Popular empowerment was clear and inedited: in a country where strikes were prohibited, between 1973 and 1976 Spain witnessed the largest number of labour conflicts in Europe in relation to the number of workers involved and the hours lost. Demands for democracy and amnesty for political prisoners and those in exile multiplied with the movements demanding to know if the new king Juan Carlos the First would form a government in benefit "of that immense majority, which is not silent but silenced". The isolation of the dictatorship forced the regime to implement restricted reforms, which failed, making it necessary to embark on more ambitious reforms that were finally achieved through the general election in 1977. This would launch a political process that the opposition did not manage, but conditioned; and, finally, it forced the new regime to break with many of the past practices of the Francoist dictatorship. Despite the quantity of ink that has been spent on the "democratic will" of the king and the political staff of the former dictatorship, it is clear that the genesis of the process leading to democracy was rooted in widespread struggles in the labour, social and political spheres.[39]

6. Conclusions

We have analysed here a minor part of rural anti-Francoism in Spain. If it is true that the level of agrarian mobilization in southern Catalonia cannot be compared to the conflicts in cities and industrial areas during this same period, this study enables us to better understand the hegemony eventually achieved by the opposition against the dictatorship. It helps us understand the complexity of activist movements. The complex social relations that characterized the Spanish countryside as a whole, but especially in Catalonia, where there was a huge economic-industrial

[38] YSÀS, Pere. *Disidencia y subversión: la lucha del régimen franquista por su supervivencia.* Barcelona: Crítica, 2004, pp. 205-211. For rural conflicts and its interaction with the political change throughout Spain see HERRERA, Antonio. *La construcción…Op.Cit.*, pp. 79-91 and 187-244; MARTÍN, Óscar J. *A tientas…Op.Cit.*, pp. 215-234 and 282-297; HERNÁNDEZ, Claudio. *Franquismo a ras de suelo: zonas grises, apoyos sociales y actitudes durante la dictadura (1936-1976).* Granada: EUG, 2013, p. 375; FUENTES NAVARRO, María Candelaria. *El Partido Comunista de España y la democratización del mundo rural andaluz: la organización de la protesta jornalera y campesina y la difusión de valores predemocráticos (1956-1983)*. PhD Thesis. Granada: UGR, 2013, pp. 285-332.

[39] Labour information IS from MOLINERO, Carme and YSÀS, Pere. *Productores disciplinados…Op.Cit.*, pp. 120-124. Quote from ANC, PSUC collection, *A su majestad Don Juan Carlos I, Rey de España*, December of 1975, sig. 1677. On political change consult DOMÈNECH, Xavier. *Cambio político y movimiento obrero…Op.Cit.*, pp. 219-223.

development, helps us to observe closely how rural populations in the villages felt in relation to the dictatorship, areas where Francoism was supposedly very strong in its capacity to organize efficient social control. It may also help us to contextualise the supposed "apathy" and "demobilization" that many people attributed to rural populations and, consequently, to qualify or even discard such arguments.

"Little everyday rebellions", or what has also been called the "weapons of the weak", prefigured more substantial actions as described above: they were essential for future collective actions. Furthermore, when these "little rebellions" turned into extended actions or, especially, when they were generalized and coordinated, they represented a huge problem for the dictatorship. The boycott of the SSA tax ended with a victory for the peasants despite the repression. The inability to negotiate issues that pertained to the working conditions and lives of many people led to the political conclusion that it was essential to change the policy framework itself.

The actions that we analysed – supported by documentary and oral sources – allow us to confirm the existence of a shared peasant identity that was essential for an organized response to the grievances of the rural population. Moreover, the successes of actions that were illegal, but supported by the larger community, demonstrated to the workers that it was essential to confront and go beyond the existing structure. Gramsci wrote that ideas cannot live without organization, but this was particularly difficult under the conditions of a dictatorship. Yet despite this, a large group of peasants took up the fight against Francoism. The CCPP was a disciplined group with the clear political ideology and culture of communism. Even though the links with the PSUC assured the rural workers logistical assistance and a clear line of action, the strong communist presence drove away many peasants from the CCPP. Parallel actions in shared spaces, however, contributed to a real extension of the social base of the opposition and overcame the activists' isolation. This was confirmed in the more plural social-political movement of the UP.

It is interesting to pay special attention to the importance of the democratic assembly in this history of struggle. Under the dictatorship, the assembly served as an anti-repressive measure and a way to legitimize the actions of the movement. It was a meeting space where workers could openly discuss their problems and search for solutions. This helped, on the one hand, to legitimize collective actions and, on the other hand, to protect political activists through the anonymity of the crowd. It is no surprise that

the assembly has become the most representative aspect of direct democracy and a form of identity in the recent history of the workers' and popular movement in Spain.

Finally, if it is true that the opposition failed to end Francoism as they had planned — through a general strike that would overthrow the dictatorship and form a provisional government that would restore political autonomy to Catalonia— the truth is that social mobilization prevented the perpetuation of an authoritarian dictatorship after Franco's death. The participation of common people fighting to improve their material conditions produced a profound social and political change: sites of social interaction, networks of political relationships and the process of collective self-organization helped to weaken the Francoist power. Far from being apathetic and demobilized, the rural population knew how to challenge and debilitate the social bases of the dictatorship. Far from being a secondary factor, the weakening of the dictatorship "from below" helps us to understand the political decisions taken "from above" after the death of Franco.

Community, institutions and environment in conflicts over commons in Galicia, Northwest Spain (18th - 20th centuries)[1]

David Soto Fernández

Introduction

The study of common lands has become one of the most widely-discussed aspects in the social sciences in recent decades. The study of this phenomenon is relevant if we are to understand the problems of collective interest in different theoretical traditions and disciplines, especially those interested in collective action.[2] Some of these traditions and debates have influenced the work of historians but, without doubt, the central debate in all of the literature has been the debate on the inefficiency of commons in ensuring the sustainability of natural resources, starting with Garret Harding's 1968 article the "Tragedy of the Commons"[3] and his argument that common lands brought about the exhaustion of resources since there were no restrictions on their overexploitation. A significant part of the debate has centered on the precision of the terminology and the distinction between different common property regimes and common-pool resources, as well as the distinction between these and open access goods or club goods. Institutional analysis, whose leading exponent is Elinor Ostrom, has perhaps been the most influential intellectual tradition in the study of commons, focusing its research on the analysis of the rules that explain the success or failure of communal institutions. Ostrom[4] believes that many communal institutions historically developed complex self-organization

[1] This paper has been possible thanks to the financial support of the projects: "Sistemas agrarios sustentables y transiciones en el metabolismo agrario: desigualdad social y cambios institucionales en España (1750-2010)" HAR2012-38920-C02-01, Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad and "Sustainable Farm Systems: Long-Term Socio-Ecological Metabolism in Western Agriculture", Social Science and Humanities Research Council (Canada). I would like to thank the comments made by A. Herrera. J. Infante, I. Villa, and M. González de Molina as well as two anonymous reviewers.

[2] The state of the question can be found in LAERHOVEN, F. and OSTROM, E. "Traditions and Trends in the Study of the Commons", *International Journal of the Commons*, Vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 3-28.

[3] HARDING, G. 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, n.162, 1968, pp.1243-1248.

[4] OSTROM, E. "A General Framework for Analyzing Sustainability of Social-Ecological Systems", *Science*, 235, 2009, pp. 419-422.

systems which enhanced cooperation and provided an escape from the tragedy of open access. Institutional analysis would, therefore, be a powerful tool to explain the survival of common lands over time. Ostrom's work has been very influential among historians who have explored the organization and regulation of common lands in different historical contexts and the reasons for their survival.[5] A significant contribution to historical literature which has considered the ideas of Ostrom has been to locate social conflict at the centre of the explanation for the survival and change of the regulations of communal institutions.[6]

The other great intellectual tradition that has influenced the work of historians is that of Ecological Economics[7] and, more recently, the implementation of the theory and methodology of Social Metabolism.[8] These schools of thought do not reject the importance of the institutional structure or of the production of rules which ensure sustainable ways of managing resources, but they place the emphasis of research on the material part, on the study of the biophysical flows of energy and materials between nature and society and also on the information flows which regulate them. The physical world is not considered here to be a static figure with which human institutions interact, but an active agent. The relationship between society and nature should, therefore, be understood as a process of co-evolution and mutual interaction. In this regard, attention has been paid to the different ways of organizing the social metabolism (hunting-collecting, agrarian and industrial), to the metabolic profiles of each of these types of organization and the socio-ecological transition processes between them.[9] In this context, the types of property ownership and communal exploitation are

[5] VAN ZANDEN, J.L., "The paradox of the marks. The exploitation of commons in the eastern Netherlands, 1250-1850", *Agricultural History Review*, 47, 1999, pp. 125-144; DE MOOR, T. 2009, "Avoiding tragedies: a Flemish common and its commoners under the pressure of social and economic change during the eighteenth century", *Economic History Review*, 2009, vol. 62, n.1, pp. 1–22.

[6] LANA, J.M. 2008, "From equilibrium to equity. The survival of the commons in the Ebro Basin: Navarra from the 15th to the 20th centuries", *International Journal of the Commons*, vol. 2, no.2, 2008, pp. 162–191; WARDE, P. "Imposition, Emulation and Adaptation: Regulatory Regimes in the Commons of Early Modern Germany", *Environment and History* 19, 2013, pp. 313–337; LANA, J.M. AND LABORDA, M. "El anidamiento institucional y su dinámica histórica en comunidades rurales complejas. Dos estudios de caso (Navarra, siglos XIV-XX)", *Documentos de Trabajo SEHA*, 2013. http://ideas.repec.org/p/seh/wpaper/1307.html.

[7] MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. *El ecologismo de los pobres. Conflictos ambientales y lenguajes de valoración*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2005.

[8] GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. and TOLEDO, V. *Metabolismos, naturaleza e Historia. Hacia una teoría de las transiciones socioecológicas*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2011.

[9] GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. and TOLEDO, V. *Ibid*; KRAUSMANN, F. (ed.) *The socio-metabolic transition. Long term historical trends and patterns in global material and energy use*, Social Ecology Working Paper 131, IFF, Vienna, 2011.

not understood ahistorically as sustainable or unsustainable, but in terms of whether they can contribute to sustainability or not, depending on the organization of the social metabolism in which they exist. This tradition has also paid considerable attention to the role of social conflicts in the maintenance or breakdown of the sustainable use of resources. Conflict again plays a central role in the maintenance of common lands, but also in the socio-ecological transition processes which could bring about changes in their sustainability.[10]

Although both traditions place the emphasis on different aspects of the sustainability of communal goods, they should not be seen as contradictory or irreconcilable. In fact, in one of her latest papers, Elinor Ostrom[11] offered a model for the analysis of the sustainability of Socio-Ecological Systems that integrates institutional, physical and social aspects. Likewise, Political Ecology and Environmental History studies have suggested that the changes seen in common lands since the liberal revolutions would be misunderstood if we only considered public-private-communal tension, that is to say, considering only property rights. Martínez Alier[12] proposed the concept of the disarticulation of common lands in order to explain the changes seen in common lands since the nineteenth century resulting from changes in ownership (privatization), but also including the types of management and the functionality of the commons within the agro-ecosystems, and the social disarticulation of the communities which managed them. This process has been studied by Antonio Ortega[13] in the province of Granada, Spain, between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. This article aims to deepen our comprehension of the processes that affect the relationship between communal institutions and sustainability through a long-term case study: the evolution of commons in Galicia from the eighteenth century until today. We have taken conflict as the centre of our study and we shall demonstrate how conflict is the result of the interaction

---

[10] GUHA, R. *The unquiet wood: Ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989; MARTINÍNEZ ALIER, J. *El ecologismo de los pobres…Op.Cit.;* SOTO, D.; HERRERA, A.; GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. and ORTEGA, A. "La protesta campesina como protesta ambiental, siglos XVIII-XX". *Historia Agraria*, 42, 2007, pp. 277-301.

[11] OSTROM, E. "A General Framework for Analyzing Sustainability of Social-Ecological Systems". Op.Cit., pp-419-422.

[12] MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. "Pobreza y Medio Ambiente. A propósito del Informe Brundtland". In: GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. and GONZÁLEZ ALCANTUD, J.A. (eds.) *La Tierra: Mitos, Ritos y Realidades*. Granada: Anthropos/Diputación Provincial de Granada, 1992 pp. 295-332; MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. "Political Ecology, Distributional Conflicts and Economic Incomensurability" *New Left Review*, n. 211, 1995, pp. 70-88.

[13] ORTEGA, A. *La tragedia de los cerramientos. La desarticulación de la comunalidad en la provincia de Granada*. Valencia: Fundación Instituto de Historia Social, 2002.

of three sets of interrelated variables: the biophysical and material conditions, the rules and the attributes of the community.[14] We shall show how these three sets of variables interacted, explaining conflict and modified by the results of that conflict. In the first part of the article, we shall develop recent theoretical arguments and in the second part, we will conduct a case study.

Beyond institutions: Rules, material conditions and community

One of the contributions of Ostrom's work which has most influenced the historical literature was her identification of the famous "design principles", the basic formative characteristics which explain the success and long-term survival of communal institutions.[15] In the most recent version[16], the eight design principles are: the existence of clear limits both for resources and for those who appropriate the resources; rules for appropriation and provision which are congruent with each other and with the local social and environmental conditions; channels for participation in the formulation and modification of the rules; instruments for the monitoring of resources and of the appropriators of the resources; a graduated scale of sanctions; mechanisms for conflict resolution; recognition of local rights by the governments; and vertical and horizontal institutional nesting systems. As we have indicated, some of the relevant historical research has attempted to project Ostrom's ideas onto the past in order to explain the survival of communal property regimes.[17] However, as Warde argued,[18] this way of addressing the question commits the error of ahistoricity, since the communal institutions do not exist in historical isolation in which the changing conditions lack significance. In his paper, Warde shows how the formulation of rules for the management of commons could be the result of a complex process of conflict where the imposition by external powers, the emulation of neighboring communities or response to a

[14] OSTROM, E. *Comprender la diversidad institucional*. Oviedo: KRK, 2013, pp.48-75.
[15] OSTROM, E. *El gobierno de los bienes comunes. La evolución de las instituciones de acción colectiva*. Mexico: FCE, 2011.
[16] OSTROM, E. "Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems", *American Economic Review*. vol. 100, 2010, pp.641-672.
[17] VAN ZANDEN, J.L., "The paradox of the marks…". Op.Cit.; DE MOOR, T. 2009, "Avoiding tragedies…". *Op.Cit*. The exercise undertaken by Laborda and Lana, applying the concept of institutional nesting to the historical evolution of communes in Navarre, is, in my opinion, particularly interesting. LANA, J.M. AND LABORDA, M. 2013, "El anidamiento institucional y su dinámica histórica en comunidades rurales complejas…" *Op.Cit*.
[18] WARDE, P. "Imposition, Emulation and Adaptation…" Op.Cit.

crisis can affect the institutional design. In fact, Ostrom herself,[19] in response to her critics, underlined the fact that the expression "design principles" did not imply prescription nor that the creators of successful communal systems had those principles in mind, and concluded that perhaps a better term would be "good practices".

In fact, a more careful examination of the general instrument designed by Ostrom for institutional analysis[20] shows that although the analysis of rules has a central role, the same theoretical range of variables, which are exogenous to any situation of action, is occupied by another two elements: the attributes of the community and the biophysical and material conditions. This approach allows not only the reconciliation of the institutional and environmental perspective in the historical study of common lands, but also introduces a third element which has appeared much less in the literature:[21] the role of the identity of the community, the collective construction of objectives and priorities and the evaluation of experiences.[22] Paradoxically, this question has been examined much less by historians despite the enormous development of cultural history in recent years.[23] From our point of view, adequate comprehension of historical transformations in common lands should also examine the set of rules which regulated them (both formal and informal) and the biophysical and material conditions (which, among other things, tell us what it is possible to do and what it is not possible to do in a specific context) as well as the construction of the collective identity (which, among other things, explains the differences between what two different societies might understand to be rational).

But communities, rules and biophysical and material conditions are interrelated in historical contexts that are potentially conflictive. In fact, a significant part of the literature indicates that conflict is a central element to explain the emergence of institutions for the management of common resources. For example, McCay[24] states that concern for the exhaustion or

---

[19] OSTROM, E. "Beyond Markets and States…" Op.Cit.
[20] OSTROM, E. *Comprender la diversidad institucional*. Op.Cit.
[21] In Ostrom's 2013 book, this aspect is covered in just one point, despite having the same theoretical hierarchy as the other two variables.
[22] GALLEGO, D. "Las distintas caras de la economía institucional", XIII Congreso de la SEHA, Badajoz, 2013.
[23] A notable exception is to be found in IZQUIERDO, J. *El rostro de la comunidad. La identidad del campesino en la Castilla del antiguo régimen*. Madrid: CES, 2002.
[24] McCAY, B. 2002, "Emergence of Institutions for the Commons: Contexts, Situations, and Events". In: OSTROM, E., DIETZ, T., DOLSAK, N., STERN, P. C., STONICH, S. and WEBER, E. U. (eds.), *The Drama of the Commons*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 2002, pp.361-402.

degradation of resources does not explain the emergence of communal institutions, but rather conflict over access to resources, coinciding with the view of Paul Warde mentioned above. These approaches also agree with today's widespread theory on environmental conflict and, especially, with the idea of the environmentalism of the poor put forward by Joan Martínez Alier and Ramachandra Guha.[25] According to these authors, ecological struggle has existed in the past and exists today in communities that, regardless of whether or not they hold an ecological ideology, defend access and the egalitarian distribution of natural resources. In accordance with this idea, conflicts over common pool resources, both today and in the past, are a variation on ecological-distributive conflicts.[26] Although we agree with the idea that conflicts over resources are environmental conflicts, regardless of whether or not they are conceived as such by the communities involved, we do not agree with the idea that access and distribution are the only relevant characteristics in the evaluation of the role of a conflict with regard to sustainability. Elsewhere,[27] we have indicated that those conflicts in which, as well as access and distribution, a change in the method of managing the resources is at stake are more relevant in terms of sustainability.[28] In those cases, the result of the conflict will affect not only the amount of the resource appropriated, or the groups who appropriate it, but also the way in which the resource is appropriated (reproductive conflicts), for example, in the case that the results of a conflict over common lands changes a system of agro-silvo-pastoral management by peasants for an intensive industrial management system. The hypotheses we wish to develop in this article is that it is precisely this type of conflict that is present in the process of the disarticulation of commons seen in many places at the end of the eighteenth century and that they have decisively influenced the transformation of the logic of communal institutions. From the case study of common lands in Galicia, we intend to demonstrate how the changes in the community, the biophysical conditions and the regulations have influenced in the appearance of conflicts and, in turn, have been modified by the results of those conflicts.

[25] GUHA, R. *The unquiet Wood…Op.Cit.*; MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. *El ecologismo de los pobres*...Op.Cit.
[26] MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. *El ecologismo de los pobres*...Op.Cit.
[27] SOTO, D.; HERRERA, A.; GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. and ORTEGA, A. "La protesta campesina como protesta ambiental…" Op.Cit.
[28] The work cited makes a conceptual distinction between environmental conflicts (those in which only access or distribution is in question), environmentalist conflicts (in which, in addition to access and distribution, the method of management is also in question) and ecological conflicts (where there is also an explicit ecological language).

Common lands in Galicia in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century

The region chosen for this study displays unusual characteristics in the Spanish context. Galicia, the northwestern region of the country, does not match the recognizable characteristics of the greater part of the country. It has an Atlantic climate, small-scale peasant farming and an increasing specialization in livestock farming during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its specific characteristics include the great importance of the *monte*,[29] a considerable part of which has been under communal ownership regimes until today (Table 1). Despite the large-scale migration processes seen in the second half of the nineteenth century, the region has been densely populated by Spanish standards. In 1860, the population density in Galicia was 61 inhabitants per km^2, though with significant variations. The provinces of Pontevedra and A Coruña had 98 and 61 inhabitants per km^2, whereas the inland provinces of Lugo and Ourense had 44 and 50 respectively. The livestock density was also very high. The first livestock census, in 1865, showed a density of 22.9 livestock units of 500 kg per km^2 (mainly cattle), which contrasts with the Mediterranean model. In some municipalities in Andalusia, the livestock density was no more than 8 units per km^2 in the mid-nineteenth century.[30] How can such a high density be explained with such a small area devoted to crops? Firstly, it should be noted that there are serious edapho-climatic limitations on the expansion of the cultivated crop area. Secondly, Atlantic agriculture allows high physical productivity of the land. For example, while Spanish agriculture as a whole produced 1.5 tons of dry matter per cultivated hectare in 1900, with the province of Cordoba being characteristic of the Mediterranean model, with 0.9 tons of dry matter.[31] Yet the productivity of the land in the province of A Coruña was 3.7 tons of dry matter per hectare in 1900 and 5.8 in 1933.[32]

---

[29] The Spanish term "monte" is difficult to translate into English since it does not refer exclusively to forests, but also includes wooded landscapes, scrub, pastureland and even shifting crops. See

[30] GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M.; HERRERA, A.; SOTO, D.; CRUZ, S.; ACOSTA, F., *Historia, identidad y construcción de la ciudadanía. Por una relectura de la Historia Contemporánea de Andalucía*, Centro de Estudios Andaluces, Sevilla, 2007. http://www.centrodeestudiosandaluces.es/datos/paginas/factoria/ideas/historia_identidad_y construccion_ciudadania.pdf

[31] SOTO, D.; INFANTE, Juan; AGUILERA, Eduardo; CID, Antonio; GARCÍA, Gloria Guzmán Roberto; GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, Manuel. "The social metabolism of Spanish agriculture, 1900-2010: First results". Paper presented at the Congress of the European Society for Environmental History, "Circulating Natures: Water-Food-Energy", Munich, August 21-24, 2013.

[32] FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, Lourenzo; SOTO, David; CABO VILLAVERDE, Miguel; LANERO TÁBOAS, Daniel. "Diffusion of agricultural science and technologies: the

These figures put Galician agriculture among the most productive in Europe at that time.[33]

Table 1

The *monte* area and common lands in Galicia, 1750-1989 (thousands of hectares)

	1	2	3	%	%
	Total Area	*Monte*	Communal	2/1	3/2
1752	2957	2425	2050	82	85
1950	2957	2004	943	68	47
1989	2957	1968	674	67	34

Source: 1752 data: estimates based on Saavedra[34] and Pérez García[35]. 1950 and 1989 data based on Soto[36].

The difference in yields between Atlantic and Mediterranean agriculture is explained by the differences in net primary productivity due to the climate, but the high productivity cannot be explained without taking into account agro-silvo-pastoral integration. The area of *monte* plays a central role in the agro-ecosystems of the North West, being the basis for feeding the livestock, the maintenance of fertility and the provision of complements to the human diet. In this regard, the role of the *monte* in peasant agriculture before the liberal revolution has been defined by historians as a *support* for the agrarian system.[37] As well as animal feed and the production of food by shifting cultivation, it has been established that one of the main functions of the *monte* was the transfer of fertilization to

innovation system in Galicia (Spain), 1880 – 1936". Paper presented at the Rural History Conference, BERN. August 19-22, 2013.

[33] KRAUSMANN, F.; SCHANDL, H.; SIEFERLE, R. P. "Socio-ecological regime transitions in Austria and the United Kingdom", *Ecological Economics*, 65, 2008, pp.187-201.

[34] SAAVEDRA, P. "O que non se pode medir: Os recursos do comunal nas economías campesiñas de Galicia de 1600 a 1850". Actas do Congreso de Montes Veciñais, 14-16 de Decembro de 1995, Xunta de Galicia, Santiago.

[35] PÉREZ GARCÍA, J. M. "Las utilidades del inculto y la lucha por sus aprovechamientos en la Galicia meridional (1650-1850). *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 9, 2000.

[36] SOTO, D. *Historia dunha agricultura sustentábel. Transformacións productivas na agricultura galega contemporánea*. Santiago de Compostela: Soto Xunta de Galicia, 2006.

[37] BALBOA, Xesús L. *O Monte en Galicia*. Vigo: Xerais, 1990; BOUHIER, Abel. *La Galice. Essay geographique d´annalyse et d´interpretation d´un vieux complexe agraire*. La Roche-Sur-Yon (Vendée): Imprimeirie Yonaisse, 1979, 2 vols.

crops through the collection of high-nutrient scrub species (gorse, *ulex europeus*).

The importance of the *monte* in the context of peasant agro-ecosystems in preindustrial Galicia is shown in Table 1. But equally significant is the fact that most of these resources were subject to some form of communal ownership or management. Apart from the insignificant *montes de propios*, (municipal property which was common in other parts of Spain) and the somewhat more frequent *montes de varas* (a type of club good), most of the *montes* in Galicia were held under a specific type of ownership, the *Montes Vecinales en Mano Común* (MVMC), a kind of common land under neighborhood ownership, and this ownership formula is what interests us here.[38] Until the liberal revolution in Galicia, there were very few municipalities and so municipally owned *montes* were also scarce. Ownership of the MVMC was allocated to the neighbors in the territory (usually a parish) to which the *monte* belonged. They were normally defined as neighborhood-owned, common *montes* where property rights were obtained by being a neighbor and lost by ceasing to be so. In institutional terms, ownership was collectively held by the peasant community, did not prescribe and could not be embargoed.

What type of community and institutional arrangements managed these resources? Xesús Balboa[39] noted that although Galicia was an area of small peasant farms, this did not in any way mean that they were homogenous communities. Social differences, related to different degrees of access to land and livestock (and, therefore, to the ability to work), also affected the capacity for appropriation of commons during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although ownership was held by all of the neighbors without distinction and use was legally equal, exploitation was greater in the case of those farms with more land, livestock and workforce. Even in the case of areas devoted to shifting cultivation, Balboa found examples of the allocation of plots which were strictly equitable, but also examples of unequal distribution, depending on the capacity of each farm. This led him to conclude that although the neighborhood-owned common *monte* played a central role in maintaining the balance of agro-ecosystems, it was not at all an equitable or democratic model (since social differences also supposed a different capacity to influence their management). This

[38] The *montes de varas* all disappeared through privatization in the nineteenth century. See BALBOA, Xesús L. *O Monte en Galicia*. *Op.Cit*.
[39] *Ibid*.

coincides with the opinion of Lana[40] in Navarre, where the notion of equitable common access was very recent. Although there can be no doubt that these communities were far from homogenous, and much less equitable, I believe that the conclusion is based on an excessively restrictive view of equity and democracy.[41] Although access is not equitable, it does play an essential role in the maintenance of the most disadvantaged sectors of society[42] with these institutions, therefore, being important instruments for equity. Obviously, both the importance of the resources to the peasants and the high population density of the territory explain that the history of *montes vecinales* under the Old Regime was plagued with intra-community and inter-community conflict.[43] These conflicts served to clarify limits and to adjust and modify rules. In all events, the institutional organization of the commons matched the criteria laid down by Ostrom fairly well. We believe, though, that its success was due not only to that, but also to the existence of a strong, cohesive, though heterogenous, community, and that it played a central role in maintaining the balance of the agro-ecosystems. The fact that the *montes* were functional for different sectors of the community (landless peasants, landed peasants, wealthy peasants) and outside the community (minor nobility, religious institutions) explains the social consensus in favor of their survival during the liberal revolution and the success of the peasants' resistance to disentailment of municipal property.

Neighborhood-owned common *montes* between the liberal revolution and the Civil War

Two great changes were to take place in the nineteenth century that would alter both the institutional arrangements and the functionality of the *montes*. The first of these changes was related to institutional transformations resulting from the liberal revolution and from the construction of the nation state in Spain that would lead to the *de iure*, though not *de facto*, disappearance of the MVMC. The second was related to the transformation in production brought about in the transition from an organic agriculture model to an advanced organic agriculture model between the mid-eighteenth century and the agrarian crisis of the turn of the

[40] LANA, J.M. "From equilibrium to equity. The survival of the commons in the Ebro Basin: Navarra from the 15th to the 20th centuries". *International Journal of the Commons*. vol. 2, no 2, 2008, pp. 162–191.
[41] GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M.; HERRERA, A.; SOTO, D.; CRUZ, S.; ACOSTA, F., *Historia, identidad y construcción de la ciudadanía…Op.Cit.*.
[42] SAAVEDRA, P. "O que non se pode medir…" *Op.Cit*.
[43] REY CASTELAO, O. *Montes y política forestal en la Galicia del Antiguo Régimen*. Santiago: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1995.

century and the beginning of the industrialization of agriculture with the introduction of chemical fertilizers between this period and the Civil War (these being the first two waves of the socio-ecological transition in agriculture). These changes brought about an agricultural intensification that increased productive pressure on the *monte* and significant changes in management.

Table 2

Main legislation governing the MVMC since the liberal revolution

Regulation	Effects
Royal Decree 14-I-1812	Ownership legally given to the municipalities
Royal Order 22-V-1848	Confirmation of municipal ownership
General Law on disentailment 1855	Privatization of commons
Montes Law 24-V-1863	State responsibility for the management of *montes*
Creation of the PFE 1-III-1941	Effective expropriation of neighborhood-owned common *montes*/reforestation program
Montes Law 8-VI-1957	First explicit mention in Spanish legislation of neighborhood-owned common *montes*
Law on Neighborhood-Owned Commons 27-VI-1968	Recognition of private, collective neighborhood ownership
Law on Neighborhood-Owned Commons 11-XI-1980	Acceleration of the devolution of ownership
Regional Government's Law on Neighborhood-Owned Commons 10-X-1989	Competence taken on by the Galician Regional Government

The Spanish liberal revolution, among other results, was to bring a profound change in territorial organization, standardizing the administrative division into provinces and municipalities along the French model. At the same time, it would also cause profound legal changes in the ownership structure which, among many other institutions, would affect neighborhood-owned common *montes* in Galicia. From very early on in the legislation enacted by the Cadiz Parliament, the neighborhood-owned common *montes*

legally disappeared on being converted to municipally owned *montes* (Table 2). From this moment on and until 1968, the neighborhood-owned *montes* were legally public and their management was the responsibility of the local councils. But here, there is an interesting paradox in that, despite not legally existing, the management remained, in practice, in the hands of the neighbours. The existence of significant social consensus regarding the central role of the *montes*, between peasant communities, the elites and the newly created local councils, which did little to exercise their competence, meant that the action of the nation-state on the *montes* was ineffective.[44] The existence of conflicting interests within the administration, which varied from privatization (the disentailment of 1855) to the public management of resources by the State forestry services (Law of 1863) contributed to this. The fact that these actions were not successful does not mean that institutional change did not very significantly affect communal ownership. In fact, one of the main instruments adopted by many communities to safeguard ownership and resolve the conflict in their favor was the individualization of ownership in the hands of the peasants.[45] From the point of view of the peasant community, individualization would accentuate internal differences since, although in many cases the distribution was equitable, there was no small number of cases in which the distribution took into account the varying productive capacity of the neighbors.[46] In this way, and although the disentailment of common lands would not be very relevant, in institutional terms, many *montes* were privatized (as shown in Table 1), but remained in the hands of the peasants.

At the same time, though, there was to be a productive change that would heighten the importance of the *monte* in the peasant economy. Between 1752 and 1900, agricultural production in Galicia (in monetary terms) grew by 1.15% annually and the productivity of labor by 0.88%, compared with 0.9 and 0.24 in the provinces of the old Kingdom of Castile as a whole.[47] Between 1900 and 1933, growth accelerated as a result of the

[44] BALBOA, Xesús L. *O Monte en Galicia*. *Op.Cit*.
[45]ARTEAGA, A.; BALBOA, X., "La individualización de la propiedad colectiva. Aproximación e interpretación del proceso en los montes vecinales de Galicia". *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 65, 1992, pp. 101-120.
[46] BALBOA, Xesús L. *O Monte en Galicia*. *Op.Cit*.
[47] FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, L.; SOTO, D. "El Atlântico no es El Mediterráneo. El cambio agrario al otro extremo de la Península Ibérica: El mismo Estado, otros paisajes, ¿Los mismos campesinos? In: ROBREDO, Ricardo (ed.), *Ramón Garrabou. Sombras del progreso. Las huellas de la Historia Agraria*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2010, pp. 231-264.

introduction of chemical fertilizers.[48] This growth is partly explained by the increase in the crop area, but also by the intensification of crop rotation (adoption of mixed farming) and the growth in the productivity of the land. In both processes, neighborhood-owned common *montes* played a central role, becoming the driving force behind intensification.[49] The *montes* also saw the intensification of some usages and the disappearance of others. On privatized land, the conversion of *montes* into pastureland began (though it was limited) but, fundamentally, there was an increase in the production of scrub from the time when it began to be cultivated as, until then, it had been collected directly from the communal *monte*. This intensification also allowed the development of an incipient private reforestation that increased the area of woodland and allowed the development of the timber industry in the first third of the twentieth century. In this way, changes in production represented a stimulus for the individualization among peasants of common lands at the same time that they were incentivized by that individualization. In all events, and despite this intensification, the *monte* remained fully integrated into the agrarian system without losing its functionality within the peasant economy. In the same way, in those areas where the *monte* remained neighborhood-owned, the previous means of exploitation and use survived and even intensified, though not to the same extent as on the privatized land. Without the *montes*, in short, it is impossible to understand not just the maintenance of the peasant economy in Galicia, but also its intensification in the context of the development of capitalism in the countryside.

The neighborhood-owned common *montes* under Franco and during the transition. The definitive (?) disarticulation of the *montes*. The management conflict

The changes brought about by the liberal revolution significantly modified the institutional architecture of the neighborhood-owned common *montes*, their productive functionality and even, in many cases, their very existence. In practice, however, control of the management of the *montes* remained in peasant hands until the Civil War. Franco's dictatorship decisively changed this situation, forcibly taking control of management and imposing an intensive reforestation policy from the 1940s onwards which definitively broke the agro-silvo-pastoral balance, decisively promoting the

[48] FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, Lourenzo; SOTO, David; CABO VILLAVERDE, Miguel; LANERO TÁBOAS, Daniel. "Diffusion of agricultural science and technologies…" Op.Cit.
[49] SOTO, D. *Historia dunha agricultura sustentábel*...Op.Cit.

industrialization of agriculture from 1960 onwards. Reforestation was one of the most substantial manifestations of Spanish fascism in the rural world. In historical terms, it is also possibly the most well known tip of the iceberg of this historical development thanks to successive generations of researchers.[50]

Over the two decades in which autarchy was the main feature of the Francoist economy, the integrated territorial management typical of prewar Galician agriculture would be impossible. In 1964, consortiums between the PFE (State Forests Administration) and local councils occupied 475,000 hectares of *monte* in Galicia, the immense majority of which was neighborhood-owned common land, and over 270,000 hectares had been reforested.[51] But reforestation also led to considerable protests among the rural communities which have been closely studied by historians, and which combined many different resistance strategies, from the most direct and violent to legal challenges and the use of strategies exploiting the "weapons of the weak". These conflicts were widespread throughout the territory of Galicia and this is especially significant, since they occurred during a dictatorship. This process throws light on several questions that are relevant for the understanding of the maintenance of communal institutions. In the first place because, in a way, the protests would be successful and Franco's

[50] The evolution of the neighborhood-owned common *monte* in Galicia under Franco and, especially, the conflicts, have been minutely studied by historians, including RICO BOQUETE, E. *Politica Forestal en Repoboacions en Galicia (1941-1971)*. Monografías de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, n. 187, Santiago de Compostela, 1985; RICO BOQUETE, E. *Montes e industria forestal en la provincia de Pontevedra (1900-1975). Antecedentes y desarrollo de la Empresa Nacional de Celulosas, SA*. Santiago: Tórculo, 1999; RICO BOQUETE, E., "Política forestal y conflictividad social en el noroeste de España durante el primer franquismo, 1939-1959", *Historia Social*, 38, 2000, pp. 117-140; SOTO, D.; FERNÁNDEZ PRIETO, L. "Política forestal e conflictividade nas terras comunais de Galicia durante o franquismo (1939-1975)". In: DULCE, Freire; FONSECA, Inês and GODINHO, Paula (eds.) *Mundo Rural, Transformaçao e resistencia na Península Ibérica (século XX)* Lisboa: Colibri, 2004, pp.225-249; GEPC. "La devolución de la propiedad vecinal en Galicia (1960-1985). Modos de uso y conflicto de propiedad", *Historia Agraria*, 33, 2004, pp. 105-130; GEPC. *Os montes veciñais en man común: o patrimonio silente. Naturaleza, economía, identidade e democracia na Galicia rural*. Vigo: Xerais, 2006; SOTO, D. *Historia dunha agricultura sustentábel...Op.Cit;* CABANA IGLESIA, A. "Minar la paz social. Retrato de la conflictividad rural en Galicia durante el primer franquismo", *Ayer*, 61, 2006, pp. 267-288;
CABANA IGLESIA, A. *Entre a resistencia e a adaptación: a sociedade rural galega no franquismo (1936-1960)*. Santiago de Compostela, Tesis doctoral, USC-Editora Universitária, 2006; FREIRE, A. 2011, *En defensa de lo suyo. Propiedad forestal y conflictividad social durante el franquismo: los montes vecinales de Cerceda (A Coruña)*. Universidade de Santiago de Compostela/Fundación Juana de Vega, Santiago de Compostela; DOMÍNGUEZ, D., SOTO, D. "From an "integrated" to a "dismantled" landscape". In: VAN DER HEIDE, C. Martijn and HEIJMAN, Wim. (eds). *The Economic Value of Landscapes*. London, Routledge, 2012, pp. 204-223.
[51] SOTO, D. *Historia dunha agricultura sustentábel*...Op.Cit.

regime would be forced to recognize the ownership of the *montes* in the 1968 law (Table 2). But at the same time, this success occurred in a context of profound social and economic changes that altered the characteristics of the peasant community and the very functionality of the neighborhood-owned common *montes*.

Firstly, the peasant community that protested against reforestation had the same characteristics as it had during previous times and, in this regard, the traditional role of the *monte* in the peasant economy was being defended. However, in the 1960s and 1970s the region witnessed great changes, among which the more significant were emigration, abandonment of rural activity, and the disarticulation of many communities, but there was also the industrialization of agriculture and the commercial specialization in dairy farming. In the 1960s, this resulted in the conflict being less about the maintenance of peasant usage rather than forestry usage and more about the conflict between forestry and livestock farming use of the *monte* (through the creation of grasslands). In this case, it was a conflict over access to resources, but also about the different means of management of this resource. As in the nineteenth century, the success of the peasantry is not explained solely by endogenous reasons, but by the support enjoyed by some of the elites of the Franco regime with interests in livestock farming.

But here arises one last paradox and that is that although the people won recognition of their ownership and, in a long, conflictive process, the effective devolution of the *montes*, this did not suppose an impossible return to previous management methods of the *monte* (by now decoupled from agriculture), but it also meant the victory of the livestock farming alternative. On the contrary, changes in international markets and, especially, in the price of animal feed would end up making it more profitable to feed livestock on imported industrial animal feed than by using fodder, a process which is characteristic of the third wave of the socio-ecological transition in agriculture.[52] From this moment on, two models of community would live side-by-side: the eroded traditional model, characterized by a progressive ageing and abandonment of farming and the model of specialized industrial livestock farming.[53] The relevant aspect, from the point of view of the *montes*, is that both types of community were either incapable of or uninterested in the management of the *montes*. In this

[52] GEPC. "La devolución de la propiedad vecinal en Galicia (1960-1985)…" Op.Cit.
[53] An accurate analysis of this process, which is also much more nuanced than is possible here, can be found in DÍAZ GEADÁS, A. *Mudar en común. Cambios económicos, sociais e culturais dorural galego do franquismo e da transición (1959-1982)*, Tesis Doctoral, Universidade De Santiago de Compostela, 2013.

way, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a significant number of communities of neighborhood owners had not set up management organs. This was despite the fact that successive regulations had clarified the institutional structure of the MVMC. Only since the end of the 1990s can the appearance be detected of a new model of community, made up of young people with no links with nor tradition of farming, usually in areas near cities and with a concern for the resources based more on recreation, conservation or the dynamization of the community than on production. This new model of community is also reinventing the meaning of the communal institution in a more democratic and equitable manner, which contrasts vividly (and sometimes conflicts) with the logic of the traditional community.[54]

Conclusion

The analysis of the long-term evolution of Galician commons (the neighborhood-owned common *montes*) shows that the reasons for the long-term stability (or the disarticulation) of the institutions which manage the commonly-used resources owe much to the manner in which they adopt their regulations and, especially, to the design principles described by Ostrom. But it also shows that institutional analysis is not enough, on its own, and that complex factors should be taken into account, in which the articulation of the community (including the construction of the community identity) must play a central role. Likewise, material and biophysical factors cannot be viewed simply as static factors or factors which depend exclusively on the rate of extraction, but that the long-term changes in the means of management and the organization of the social metabolism play a central role in our understanding of the functionality of communal institutions. Since the end of the Old Regime until the mid-twentieth century, the neighborhood-owned common *montes* were essential to the reproduction of peasant agro-ecosystems and, as such, they were at the centre of peasant concerns. Since the process of agricultural industrialization, however, the *montes* in general and, among them, the neighborhood-owned common *montes*, have been disconnected from agricultural and livestock farming activities, putting their survival in doubt. Lastly, the historical change in communal institutions depends directly on the results of social conflicts, which are not only about ownership or about access to and distribution of the resources, but also

[54] GEPC. *Os montes veciñais en man común*…Op.Cit.

about the manner in which those resources are managed and perceived by the community.

Migrant farmworkers in Southern Italy: ghettoes, *caporalato* and collective action

Domenico Perrotta and Devi Sacchetto

1. Introduction

This article discusses the condition of agricultural migrant workers in southern Italy. After a brief description of the general background, we will analyse two key features regarding the current situation: the state of segregation in which the workers live, and the organization of recruitment and work through the *caporalato* (gang-master system). To understand the importance of these aspects two areas will be compared, that of Boreano (Basilicata) and that of Nardò (Apulia), which both exemplify the central role of segregation and the illegal hiring methods of migrant workers. In the case of Nardò, we focus on the strike that involved several hundred African workers in August 2011. The analysis is based on material collected during qualitative research – in particular 54 in-depth interviews, and observations of living and working conditions, and the daily struggle of migrant workers - conducted in 2010, 2011, and 2012 in the two areas.

2. Context

The presence of foreign workers in Southern Italy' agriculture is a phenomenon that began in the 1970s, when many Tunisians first found work in Sicily[1] and has increased many fold since then. North African migrants started to arrive in the 1970s, those from sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and East Europeans in the 1990s. Consequently, migrants of different nationalities and with different legal statuses are present in Italy, both those from new EU member states and non-EU states: a situation similar to that in France and Spain.[2] The non-EU migrants can be grouped by those who have

---

[1] COLE, J.E. and BOOTH, S.S. *Dirty Work. Immigrants in Domestic Service, Agriculture, and Prostitution in Sicily*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007.

[2] POTOT, S. (2010), "La précarité sous toutes ses formes: concurrence entre travailleurs étrangers dans l'agriculture française". In: MORÍCE, A. and POTOT, S. eds. *De l'ouvrier sans-papiers au travailleur détaché: les migrants dans la "modernisation" du salariat*.

a residence permit for seasonal work, those who have a work permit for full time employment (who may sometimes also work in other regions of Italy and in other sectors), those who are applying for asylum seekers, and the many who have no documents whatsoever.

The areas most affected by these arrivals are the coastal plains in which an intensive agricultural industry has developed. They require a large labour supply, with features similar to the "California model"[3]: a model that is widespread also in other areas of Europe.[4] According to official statistics, in 2007 almost 76,000 foreign farm workers (both EU and non-EU) were employed with temporary or permanent contracts in Southern Italy.[5] However, this is an underestimate, largely because it does not include the widespread use of work off the book.

Research conducted in recent years[6] has shown that the migrant workers' experience is particularly harsh in rural areas of Southern Italy. Their work situation is characterized by seasonality, long periods of unemployment, irregular employment conditions, hiring through the illegal mediation of gang-masters, wages lower than those established by collective bargaining agreements, piece-rate payment, long working hours, high physical exertion, unhealthy working conditions and exposure to occupational hazards. As for the actual work, several thousand people follow the harvest of different crops. Some of these come from the new EU member states specifically for the harvest and stay for short periods of times. They work alongside those who are relatively stable in the area or who are in fact local residents. In some areas, instances of racism and

---

Paris: Karthala, pp. 201-224;. Cabellero, E.G. and GARCIA, M.R. "Migraciòn femenina de Europa del Est y mercato de trabajo agricola en la provincia de Huleva, España". *Migraciones Internacionales*. vol. 2, n.4, Julio-Diciembre, 2004, pp. 36-65; HELLIO, E. "Importer des femmes pour exporter des fraises (Huelva)". *Études rurales*. n.182, 2008, pp. 185-200.

[3] BERLAN, J.P. "Agriculture et migrations". *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*. vol. 2, n. 3, décembre, 1986, pp. 9-31; BERLAN, J.P. "La longue histoire du modèle californien". In: *Le goût amer de nos fruits et légumes*. Limans: Forum civique européen, 2002, pp. 15-22; ROTHENBERG, D. *With these Hands: The Hidden Word of Migrant Farmworkers Today*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

[4] MICHALON, B. and MORICE, A. eds. *Travailleurs saisonniers dans l'agriculture européenne. Études rurales*. n. 182, 2008.

[5] In Italy in 2007 there was a total of 231,663 migrant agricultural workers. Inps, Idos. *IV Rapporto sui lavoratori di origine immigrate negli archivi Inps. La regolarità del lavoro come fattore di integrazione*. Roma: Inps/Idos, 2011.

[6] BROVIA, C. "Sous la férule des *caporali*. Les saisonniers de la tomate dans les Pouilles". *Études rurales*, n.182, 2008, pp. 153-168; CORRADO A. "*Clandestini* in the Orange Towns: Migrations and Racisms in Calabria's Agriculture". *Race/Ethnicity*. vol. 4, n. 2, 2011, pp. 191-201.

violence have occurred, such as those that led to the revolt of the Africans in Rosarno (Calabria) in January 2010.

3. Segregation

Agricultural labour processes in the south of Italy are directly linked to the daily reproduction of the work force. The segregation of housing is a central factor in the management of the labour market and workforce. The transient farmworkers usually resolve the problem of their reproduction in one of three ways[7]: a) they live in reception centres set up by the local institutions, which are usually open only for a limited number of migrants with documents; b) many workers - especially the Eastern Europeans - find shelter in uninhabited houses in the countryside, which are often without electricity, water and heating, c) many African migrants with and without documents live in large "ghettos" - as the migrants themselves call their living area - i.e. concentrations of several hundred workers living in self-built shacks, abandoned houses, factories and other derelict buildings. These ghettos are often located far away from population centres, such as the "Grand Ghetto" in the countryside of the province of Foggia (Apulia)[8] - the largest African shanty town in southern Italy – or sometimes close to the villages, as in the case of the abandoned factories in Rosarno (Calabria).

Among the different settlements described, the ghetto seems the most suitable for analysis of the connection between the workplace and the living place in Southern Italian agriculture. These settlement patterns produce a clear separation, in particular between the African farmworkers, and the local population. This division can be described as 1) spatial: migrants live in often difficult to reach settlements far from population centres, 2) economic: public job centres do not provide an efficient mediation between workers and employers, 3) cultural: migrants live in ghettos also in an attempt to rebuild community bonds with their

[7] Reference is not made here to the workers that are established within an area and do not move to follow agricultural work. They usually live within the town and often find work, not only in agriculture, but in other sectors (catering, building, commerce).

[8] This and other ghettos where the subject of a study carried out by the anthropologist Benoit Hazard. HAZARD, B. L'aventure des Bisa dans les ghettos de «l'Or rouge» (Burkina Faso – Italie). Trajectoire historique et recomposition des réseaux migratoires burkinabé dans la région des Pouilles. Thèse de doctorat en anthropologie sociale et ethnologie, Paris, Ehess, 2007; HAZARD, B. "Le costellazioni migratorie burkinabé e la riproduzione del contesto locale". In: RICCIO, B. ed. *Migrazioni transnazionali dall'Africa: etnografie multilocali a confronto*. Torino: UTET, 2008, pp. 132-154; HAZARD, B. "Réinventer les ruralités. La diaspora burkinabé en Italie dans la reconfiguration des territoires ruraux : l'exemple de Beguedo". *Cahiers d'études africaines*. n.198-199-200, 2010, pp. 507-528.

compatriots, while in towns they would be afraid of racism and violence, and 4) political: the migrants are considered as people with no legal rights, neither by employers, who consider that they are granting the workers a favour by hiring them, nor, paradoxically, by local institutions and voluntary associations, which usually intervene only on an "humanitarian" or an "emergency" basis.

These different types of accommodations appear to be extremely important in understanding agricultural production in Southern Italy. The system of agricultural labour in these regions takes the form of *seclusion*, that is, a "spatial arrangement that reinforces the overlap of work, leisure, rest and more generally all aspects of daily reproduction of an individual or a group in one place, from which they are formally free to leave".[9] It is an organization of everyday life and work, that is, at least formally, different from internment. The workers do not technically lack the right to spatial liberty as they are not prevented from moving away from the ghettos or farmhouses, but effectively they are "trapped".

The conditions of seclusion in the "green factory" of Southern Italy are caused at least in part by the legislation regarding migration and work. The so-called Bossi-Fini Law (No. 189 of July 30, 2002 and its subsequent amendments) makes it extremely difficult for anyone without documents to obtain a residence permit. And once obtained, it is quite easy to lose, especially in times of economic crisis.

Since 1998, undocumented migrants in Italy have been hosted in reception centres for asylum seekers or imprisoned in detention centres. Reception and detention centre have become commonplace in Italy and they are often located in southern agricultural areas. These structures should function to identify migrants and then if necessary deport them to their country of origin. Actually, many of the farm labourers pass through these centres before ending up in the ghettos and in the black labour market where official checks, during harvest time, are rare. In fact, once the migrant leaves the reception and detention centres, s/he often looks for work in the surrounding areas, either through friends and relatives or by contacting a gang-master or *caporale*. Therefore these centres serve also as an interface and a filter for the labour market and to provide migrants a temporary accommodation, according to the needs of the labour market. The centres fulfil an important role in regulating the just-in-time supply of a workforce according to the needs of the local or regional job market. Detention centres

[9] GAMBINO, F. *Migranti nella tempesta. Avvistamenti per l'inizio del nuovo millennio*. Verona: Ombre Corte, 2003, pp.104-105.

act as a 'lung' for the black labour market and also a 'training centre' where migrants 'learn' to accept appalling working conditions and low wages even before finding a job. This is the case of Diawara from Senegal:

> When I arrived in Lampedusa, I was with other people from Gambia; all people said "Gambia, Gambia," then I also said "Gambia", thinking that in this way it was possible to have political asylum. In Gambia people speak English, but all of us speak also Wolof. Then they took me to [the Centre for asylum seekers] Borgo Mezzanone for asylum application. [...] But I failed. I applied again, but failed again. Now I'm waiting for the answer to another application. I still have a few months' time. If I have a negative answer again, I will go back to Africa. [...] I stayed eight months at the centre of Borgo Mezzanone, and then I came out, I had no place to go and I went to the Grand Ghetto (of Rignano Garganico, Foggia). I stayed there for many months. For a long time I was unemployed. Then I came to Nardò to look for a job. But I have not yet found a job. I returned to the Ghetto. I did not have a penny. A "capo nero" (black boss) who spoke Wolof like me because he was Senegalese, asked me if I wanted to work for him. I accepted.[10]

A large proportion of the farmworkers in ghettos are undocumented or may rely upon a humanitarian aid permit. Therefore, on the one hand they are vulnerable and subject to blackmail because they are "deportable"[11] but on the other hand they are "stuck" in these areas because they are waiting for a response to their application for the residence permit.

The migrant farmworkers end up in ghettos for both social and economic reasons. Renting a house in a village or town is complicated because of the low wages earned and the inbred racism of the local population. While the ghetto, as well as ensuring greater protection for undocumented migrants, allows the construction of a kind of African (or, sometimes, more specifically Burkinabe, Ghanaian, Ivorian, Sudanese, Moroccan) "community", as they can find themself with friends, family and compatriots. It is also easier to find a job in the ghetto, and this arrangement makes it easier to organize work and transportation to the field by the gang-master.

[10] Interview with Diawara, Senegalese farm labourer, Foggia, August 2011.
[11] DE GENOVA, N. "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life". *Annual Review of Anthropology*. V. 31, 2002, pp. 419-47.

These spatial politics of the labour process greatly influence working and social relationships among the workers.[12] The presence of both large and small ghettos for the migrant workforce facilitates brokers and entrepreneurs in accessing new reserves of workers and at the same time limits wage demands and the workers' bargaining power. Also, farmers are not obliged either to consider workers' daily reproduction or to improve their working conditions. As the farmworkers are employed mainly for short periods, the accommodation in the shantytowns does not constitute any sort of link between the worker and the company. Socialization in their daily reproduction takes place in the realm of co-habitation with co-workers; farm labourers do not have personal space and personal effects are usually kept in a bag next to the bed. Often, the gang-masters actually live in the ghettos, thus enabling them also to continue to manage their workforce even when they are not working.

As we shall see, even a partial breakup in the system of seclusion undermines the efficiency of the workforce management itself and allows the propagation of forms of self-organization among the workers. However, it is necessary to first describe the people who hold the most power in the ghettos: the gang-master or *caporale.*

4. The gang-master system

Caporale is a term that has been used for decades in Italy, and can be translated as gang-master. It means a person who is engaged in the illegal intermediation of labour, especially in agriculture, but also in other sectors such as construction. The caporali were present not only in the South, but also in the North of Italy (e.g. in organizing the work of women rice pickers in the Po Valley, the so called *mondine*). In the rural South, the Italian gang-master used to transport teams of farmworkers, mostly impoverished women from the mountain areas, to work in the farms on the coastal plains. The Italian Agrarian Reform in the 1950s pushed for a reorganization both of the large farms, and of the role of the land agent or the "man of respect". The land agent organized the team of workers for the farmers, but after Land Reform he progressively became replaced by the more dynamic gang-master. Since the 1990s, the gradual replacement of Italians by foreign farm workers went hand in hand with that of Italians by migrant gang-masters.

[12] For an analysis about the importance of space in the labour process, see PUN, Ngai and SMITH, C. "Putting transnational labour process in its place: the dormitory labour regime in post-socialist China". *Work, Employment and Society*, vo. 21, n. 1, March 2007, pp. 27-45.

Nevertheless, in many cases the Italian gang-master remains at the head of more structured organizations, managing in turn the foreign gang-master.

Migrant farmworkers use the word caporale only after they have learned it from Italian people, more often they use the terms “capo” or “capo nero” that means “boss” or “black boss” (or, in other cases, captain). Farmworkers refer to any African migrant who takes a portion of their wages as a black boss: labour contractors, drivers, foremen and supervisors. In the countryside of Southern Italy anyone who has a car or a van can take on the role of caporale. On the other hand, the words "white boss," are used to label Italian farmers and brokers.

In the more structured ghettos a "grey area" develops between farmworkers and the black boss. This “grey area” is made up of people who are engaged in informal economic activities, taking advantage of the presence of a large number of farmworkers living in places far from town. In the ghettos it is possible to find restaurants, bars, clothing and grocery stores, hairdressers, mechanics for cars and vans, disco clubs and brothels. These informal activities are not carried out directly by the black bosses, but rather by fellow migrants who are explicitly entrusted by them, or even by those who enjoy a good relationship with the black (or white) bosses.

In the realm of seclusion, the figure of the gang-master is central to both the production and reproduction processes. The caporali are often described by the press as slave drivers ready to use violence to force labourers to work for low wages and for long hours. In fact, there are several different types of gang-masters, depending on nationality and on the area in which they operate, and the slave-driving gang-master is in fact an exception.[13]

In some cases, the gang-master completely controls the worker’s lives, from housing and food, to transport to the fields and the supervision of the harvest. In other cases, however, they merely negotiate with the employer and transport the workers. Many Central and Eastern European gang-masters (especially Romanians, but also Bulgarians and, in recent years, Poles) organize the migrant’s transport from the country of origin and their stay over the entire period of employment. Generally, he or she provides other services, such as transportation to hospitals, railway stations

[13] The Anti-Mafia Directorate of Bari conducted an investigation that traced an organisation of Polish, Ukraine and Algerian gang-masters between 2006 and 2008, leading to numerous convictions for slavery. The District Anti-Mafia Directorate of Lecce is currently engaged in a similar investigation.

and supermarkets etc., the supply of food and water and the provision of credit for the workers' needs.

The gang-master draws power and profit from seclusion: he acts as social mediator or *social broker* who provides a "communication channel" between migrant farmworkers and local farmers, resulting in trust, respect and friendship developing on both sides. He is in fact an intermediary, a "friend of friends",[14] providing paid services and holding a monopoly over such services. He generally hires workers illegally, following a tradition that characterizes the political, social, and economic structure of Southern Italy. This has caused some authors to speak of "broker capitalism".[15]

The gang-master contributes actively to segregation between the workers and the local population. He exercises control not only over production, but also over all aspects of his teams' daily lives – it is not by chance that the workers do not find accommodation in towns. He also attempts to monopolize all communication with the local population, as well as with voluntary associations, journalists and, of course, social researchers. Usually, these social brokers do not base their power on violence, but rather through establishing a sense of a community. They form their own teams of farmworkers in the first place with relatives and friends, in the second place with neighbours or countrymen and only on days of high labour demand with other workers from the ghettos. They also manipulate community codes, manifesting their relationship with workers through the language of friendship, family ties and trust, as in the case of this gang-master from Burkina Faso operating in Boreano:

> [The owner] *trusts me*. Assan, since you're here, I can relax, I know the job will be done well." So then I must make sure that the job is done well. [...] I must give a little attention to everyone, and *convince my friends*, "we have to work well, because this year is like this and so on." And for someone who understands, one word is enough. He does not need a thousand words. And *as we are all friends and family*, in fact all the people I work with are my relatives, we speak the same language and we make ourselves understood. [...] *All my friends are people you can trust*, even if am not actually with them in the fields they work well. The owner is happy and we too are happy, and the work goes on.[16]

---

[14]BOISSEVAIN, J. *Friends of friends*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974.
[15] SCHNEIDER, J. and P. *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*. New York: Academic Press, 1976.
[16] Interview with gang-master Assan, August 2010.

The gang-master often takes on the role of protecting the migrant workers who live in unfavourable conditions. These community dynamics cover potential conflicts regarding wage levels and, more generally, working conditions. Many workers, especially those without documents, are aware that the gang-master is the only person that can grant them access to a scarce resource (i.e. employment), and so they often feel the need for the "protection" that he can provide.

The gang-master's power, on the other hand, is rarely indisputable. Even if his inner circle pays him "respect", the many individually operating workers see him as a "monopolistic mediator", stripping him of the words 'honour and community'. The power of the gang-master is not "absolute" and may be taken away if the degree of seclusion slackens, as was clearly shown during the strike of African farmworkers in Nardò in the summer of 2011 which will be described shortly.

5. Some typologies of caporale

In this section, different specific categories of *caporalato* (gang-master systems) are described which relate to specific areas (Foggia province and the north of Lucania) characterized by the cultivation of tomatoes for the canning industry and the associated need for a large workforce especially for the summer harvest. These typologies were identified during our field research, conducted through informal conversations and in-depth interviews with farmworkers, gang-masters and experts. These types can be compared when different key features are considered:

- working period of the gang-master - seasonal or annual,

- the relationship between the worker and the gang-master – economic or community based,

- the working pattern – monopolistic or competitive – of the role of the gang-master

- the reproduction pattern – the influence of the gang-master on the labourer's life outside the workplace.

The degree of influence of these features depends on many factors, such as 1) the type of agricultural sector; 2) the characteristics of migratory

patterns; 3) the change in the migrants' settlement; 4) the individual choices made by the gang-master and his business acumen (his establishment in a specific area, if he works exclusively as a gang-master or does other additional jobs, and if he chooses, or not, to develop relationships with other local brokers or other migrants).

The various forms of gang-master systems overlap and coexist in the largest and more structured ghettos; at the same time in the big ghettos it is likely that such organizations develop contacts with local criminals. In other Southern Italian areas, similar forms of exploitation can be found.

Firstly, the role of a Romanian woman gang-master who works all year round in a town in the Northern part of the province of Foggia will be described. Secondly, the three types of seasonal illegal hiring systems used by Burkina Faso and other African gang-masters operating in the Northern part of Lucania and in some of the southern areas of the Foggia province will be discussed.

5.1. Full time gang-masters

In many towns in the province of Foggia, where the demand for farm labourers is high, not only during the summer, the gang-masters – mostly from Eastern Europe - intermediate illegal hiring throughout the year. Irina and Paul, two gang-masters from Romania, were interviewed in September 2010 in a small town in the north of Foggia province. Irina, about 50 years old, had already transported three teams to the field by 7 in the morning: one to pick tomatoes, another to pick aubergines, and finally one to sow fennels.

In this town, the labour market for gang-masters is highly competitive: there are five Romanian gang-masters active throughout the year; three of them collaborate actively with each other. Others work only in the summer, during the tomato harvest. In the same area other "colleagues" of different nationalities operate, on which, however, Irina and Paul do not provide any information. It seems that the Romanian gang-masters are not answerable to any Italian brokers.

Irina stated that the labour turnover of farmworkers in her team is quite high: the migrants often leave her team for purely economic reasons or due to arguments regarding wages. These workers, however, usually do not change only the gang-master, but also leave the town, moving to another area or returning to Romania. Irina is upset about the high labour turnover because some farmers ask for the same workers each day. The service provided by Irina involves transport to the workplace and some kind of control over the "reliability" of the workers.

The organization of production is based on a core of Irina's employees who are in fact related to her, some of which drive the cars and vans to transport the teams to work. Irina also provides her services to many other Romanians with whom she has no community ties. Paul says that he has even three Moroccan farmworkers in his team.

Irina provides accommodation - in the town or in abandoned houses in the countryside – for many Romanian workers and also lends them money. Irina does not seem be very concerned about their reproductive life.

5.2. The coexistence of "communal" black bosses within the Boreano ghetto

In the ghetto of Boreano, there is a situation of coexistence, competition, and more or less peaceful collaboration between six or seven gang-masters that work between August and October, exclusively for the tomato harvest. They control no more than two or three teams of workers each. Each black boss sets up camp in an abandoned house, where he also "hosts" the workers of his team. Often his wife is in charge of the cooking for everyone. In one case, a mobile canteen was observed, organized by a gang-master to serve his farmworkers who were actually living in another house. The teams are usually made up of more or less the same people each year, who may even be related to the gang master, so a strong feeling of community develops. On the other hand, a black boss can also hire workers that live in other houses and, conversely, those that live in his house can work for other gang-masters. In some cases, two or three black bosses live in the same building and work in partnership. However, it is not uncommon for farmworkers to change teams, even during the harvest season, if they are not satisfied with the treatment received.

The Boreano labour market seems to be open to any aspiring black boss. According to a farmworkers, "anyone who comes here for two years and has a car, can become gang-master".[17] Other black bosses that work in neighbouring areas may also recruit farmworkers in Boreano itself and compete against the Boreano gang masters.

[17] Field notes, August 16, 2011.

5.3. The monopoly of the mediation of farmworkers in the Borgo San Nicola area

Fifteen kilometres from Boreano, in Borgo San Nicola, the organization of the gang-master system is strongly hierarchical. In 2010 and 2011, the farmworkers lived in abandoned houses very far away from each other. But in 2012 a new "ghetto" was established just a few kilometres from the town, concentrating the African workers, thus facilitating this new kind of organization. At the head of the organization there was a white gang-master – Michele, a resident in the town, known as a local "gangster", who deals with the farmers and supplies them with workers – and Idris, a Sudanese black boss, who managed the workers themselves. Idris directly controlled two or three teams, but recruited and managed many other workers from different countries (Sudan, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone) and dealt with other black bosses and drivers. The two bosses shared the profit of the harvest equally: 25 cents each for every harvested box. The income from the transport (between 3.50 and 5 Euros) was kept by the driver. In some cases, they also paid some supervisors. The farmworkers estimated that Idris and Michele – at the peak of harvest – managed at least 15 teams simultaneously (i.e. several hundred farmworkers) with a considerable profit (in a day they can earn more than 1,000 Euros each). Anyone who owned a car could act as a driver for Idris. In this context, Idris did not get involved with the worker's daily life. They made their purchases informally in restaurants and shops in the ghettos or did their shopping in the local town. There were no community ties between Idris and the farmworkers; in a few cases drivers or black bosses organized teams with friends and parents, who then sold their "services" to Idris.

Idris and Michele attempted to maintain a monopoly on the labour market, even if some farmworkers tried to work freely both individually and as a team. In 2012, for example, some migrants from different parts of Africa organized a team of 15 harvesters. They harvested tomatoes for several weeks without paying anything to a broker and paid only the cost of transport to a driver, even though they and the farmers that employed them were threatened by the two gang-masters.

5.4. The "father-master" black boss

A Burkina Faso gang-master nicknamed "Berlusconi" worked in the Southern part of the province of Foggia during the summer. He housed his team – in 2012 made up of about sixty workers, all from Burkina Faso and almost all young people – in an old house, lacking any utilities, located on a

farm. From this farm "Berlusconi" controlled the labour market for harvesting tomatoes in a wide area, and his labourers worked almost every day. His wife and children also lived in this house and she cooked for all the workers, who paid for this service.

As in the case of the Boreano, "Berlusconi" has built a sort of "community" and provides food and accommodation to his team. However, his house is not located near to other houses or to other gang-masters. "Berlusconi", like Idris, controlled and monopolized the workforce supply in a wide area, due to a special relationship he had with a large local farmer. Farmworkers say "Berlusconi" was an unfair gang-master, as he lowered the price of the box. In the summer of 2012 he was one of the few gang-master paying €3 instead of €3.50 per box. His strategy was to compete with other gang-masters in the neighbouring areas, looking to take over other markets.

6. How the African farmworkers view the black bosses

The relationship between African farmworkers and black bosses can be varied. Here are some common beliefs held by farmworkers towards the black bosses and more generally towards the system of illegal hiring which were highlighted from the interviews:

1. "We are all together" (We are a community). One of the most important pillars of the system of illegal hiring is the construction of a sense of "community" that binds the black boss with "his" workers. It is a "community" made up by bonds of kinship, friendship, respect and trust. The workers closer to the black boss (brothers, children, grandchildren, childhood friends) do not question his role and profits, or the organization of his home and daily life. Farmworkers are bound to him by ties that go beyond mere economic considerations.

2. "The black boss is indispensable but you should find the best one". Some farmworkers consider that the black boss is crucial in finding a job, as it is difficult to have a direct relationship with the farmers or the white bosses. They affirm that as the black boss guarantees constant work, he is entitled to be paid, and only the white boss is guilty of exploitation. They often have a comparative approach to the black bosses and say that the best ones are those that keep their promises and respect their obligations. An aspect positively valued is that of ensuring the transparency of the bargaining with the white bosses.

3. "A black boss will never be any good. We have to take collective action". Many labourers, however, do not agree with the black bosses deducting their wages for whatever reason and even consider it as an unacceptable abuse of power. They fully understand the situation and for them the gang-master system is the most important issue in relation to agricultural work. Some of these migrants expressed themselves in more moralistic terms, explaining that the money earned by the black bosses, through the exploitation of African "brothers", is immoral. This "moral reprobation" is also expressed by some Romanian farmworkers toward the Romanian gang-masters. At the same time, farm labourers, especially the document migrants try (individually or collectively) to find alternative methods to get a job, or they engage in direct action: as was the case of the strikers in Nardò in the summer of 2011 who wanted to abolish the role of the gang-master.

Even though the labourers' situation is very disadvantageous (housing segregation and difficulties with residence permits), they have a certain freedom in choosing whether and with whom to work. Some farmworkers change teams several times during the year, and can decide on which black boss they want to work for. They are also able to speak out and organise direct action and protest against this gang-master system.

7. The ghetto of Boreano

The Boreano ghetto, located in Basilicata[18] consists of a handful of buildings and a church with about twenty isolated houses in the surrounding fields. Most were built in the 1950s as a result of Agrarian Reform and were abandoned and dilapidated. However, since the early 1990s, between July and October, they have been used as dwellings - in conditions of severe overcrowding - for about 400-500 African workers, mainly from Burkina Faso, who arrive from various parts of Italy (the Naples and Rosarno areas and some cities in northern Italy) to work on the tomato harvest. The houses are immersed in the countryside, about six kilometres from the nearest town (Venosa), but are close to the tomato fields. The inhabitants are almost all male, and mostly young. The few women present do not work in the fields, contrary to the situation of the large number of Romanian women who also

[18] See WASLEY, A. "Scandal of the 'tomato slaves' harvesting crop exported to UK". *Ecologist*. Sept.1, 2001. http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/1033179/scandal_of_the_tomato_slaves_harvesting_crop_exported_to_uk.html

work in this area, and often come to Italy with their husbands over a short migratory route.

The topography of the ghetto is unstable. Every year, some houses are knocked down or walled-up by the owners and migrants will "open up" new ones. They gradually move into less visible houses further from the road. Between 1999 and 2009, a reception centre was run by the local institutions in the nearby city of Palazzo San Gervasio, but since its closure many of the workers who were housed there now go to Boreano or other more isolated houses. African workers have been assisted by voluntary organizations, coordinated since 2011 by the provincial administration, in the provision of basic needs (such as drinking water, health care and legal aid). This humanitarian aid, however, does not change the substance of the condition of seclusion in which the migrants live.

The Boreano farmworkers work mainly in the harvest of tomatoes for the canning industry. They are paid on piece rate: before work begins, the gang-master bargains the rate for each box of 300kg of tomatoes, both with the owner of the land and with the workers. A "standard" rate is from €3.50 to €4 per box, from which the gang-master deducts 50 cents to €1. However, this can vary depending on the quality of the product, the weather conditions (when it rains the piece rate increases), the ground conditions, the use of competing harvesting machines or other teams of farmworkers, and the farmer's requirements. The gang-master also takes €5 per farmworker for transportation.

A portion of the ghetto inhabitants does not work in the fields, but offer a range of services, contributing to a thriving informal economy. A place like Boreano is not without conflicts. In our interviews we collected stories of short spontaneous strikes held in order to force the gang-master or farmer for the payment of wage arrears and conducted small acts of sabotage affecting the quality of the harvest.

> If I have to work well and remove waste, I go slower and it is much harder and I earn less. If I want to earn 50 euro I need to do 15 boxes and I need to work faster, but the quality of work worsens. Usually the quality of my work is better if I am well paid [...] [But] if I want, in three minutes I am able to fill a box. Even 60 boxes per day I can do! [...] It is easy: I fill the box in three minutes and then I take off the green tomatoes only from above, so that nobody sees.[19]

[19] Interview with Amidou, Congolese laborer, Boreano, August 2011.

However, the situation of seclusion facilitates the gang-master to maintain control and makes it extremely difficult for these conflicts to develop into a wider mobilization for better working and living conditions.

8. The strike of African farmworkers at Nardò

About 400 kilometres to the south of Boreano, the area around Nardò in Salento (in the southern part of Puglia) is a common destination for African migrants. Every year, from June to August, about 600-700 seasonal farmworkers arrive in Nardò for the harvest of watermelons and tomatoes. This number is similar to that of Boreano, but much lower than that of the province of Foggia, which has an estimated 15 to 18,000 migrant farmworkers for the tomato harvest.

Nardò is known by social scientists because of one of the most important studies of the most influential Italian anthropologist, Ernesto de Martino, whose research was conducted in the 1950s, regarding the folk religion of "tarantism" which manifested itself through the "crisis of presence", whose victims were mostly poor and landless farmworkers who lived in Salento in that period.[20] In August 2011, when the "tarantella" had become a phenomenon of dance, costumes and consequently marketing and the Salento area had developed into one of the busiest tourist areas in Italy. Other farmworkers in Nardò, this time with black skin, gained the attention of public opinion and social researchers.[21]

In Nardò, there are six or seven big farms, each covering an area of 600 to 700 hectare; some of these enterprises often lease out the harvest to other companies. These farms have little incentive to mechanise the harvest, and they try to reduce labour costs. In the summer 2011, the farmworkers initially arrived, as usual, to harvest watermelons, but they were disappointed that due to low market prices some farmers refused to pick up the fruit. After one month of few job opportunities, they hoped that with the tomato harvest, starting one month after that of watermelons, they would be able to find an employment. Their hope was dashed because the piece-rate wages in tomato harvest dropped to below that of the previous year.

---

[20] The text, published in Italy in 1961, has recently been translated into English with a foreword by Vincent Crapanzano. DE MARTINO, E. *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism*. London: Free Association Books, 2005.

[21] SACCHETOO, D. and PERROTTA, M. "Tomato Harvest in Nardò, Apulia – The First Self-Organised Strike of the Day Labourers". *Wildcat*, no. 91, Autumn 2011, http://www.wildcat-www.de/en/wildcat/91/e_w91_nardo.html

The strike began at dawn on July 30, 2011, when a group of about forty workers of various nationalities refused to continue harvesting tomatoes: they opposed the demand made by a gang-master to perform the additional task of separating and discarding the green tomatoes for the same piece rate of €3.50 per box of 300 kg. The workers knew that they should receive a higher piece rate for the job requested, and as the gang-master did not grant the increase, they left the field and returned to the reception centre. Here, with the help of other farmworkers, they organized the first roadblock.

Even if the conflict that turned into a large-scale strike developed in the workplace, it is in the area where farm labourers lived that we must look to understand what made the long strike possible and how the migrants gained such a powerful voice. Migrants lived in a tent city set up in the area of "Masseria Boncuri", an old rural building not far from the town. It was neither an isolated ghetto in the countryside nor one of the controlled reception centres run by local institutions to organize the reception of migrant farmworkers as often found in other areas of Southern Italy. Rather, it was a place open also to undocumented migrants that had been operated since 2010 by two associations, Finis Terrae and the Brigate di Solidarietà attiva (Active Solidarity Brigade), with small contributions from the local council. The construction of the reception centre close to the town broke, at least in part, the segregation of the African migrants and enabled them to move away from the state of seclusion. The spatial separation from the native population was weakened, as the farmworkers lived near to the town, where they could move independently, and were in daily contact with supportive volunteers. The two associations sustained the "rights of migrants" facilitating their access to legal assistance, medical care and Italian language courses, and running a campaign "Hire me (officially)! Against illegal employment!". The political separation was broken, as in the camp migrants workers were treated as people with rights. The Masseria Boncuri weakened the power of the gang-masters (at Nardò, they were Tunisians, Sudanese and Ghanaians) because it broke down the segregation on which the farmers and gang-masters relied for the exploitation of migrant workers.

Yet even the activists of those associations were surprised by the strike in terms of its organization and dimension. In this corner of Italy, conditions of the farmworkers had not seemed to have changed much during the last 20 years and were comparable to the conditions in other regions of the South.

The 400-500 worker migrants in Nardò were of full working age, mostly between the ages of 18 and 40. They all emigrated from an African

country and the three principal nationalities that accounted for 70% of the workers were Tunisians, Sudanese and Ghanaians. Others came from Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Senegal and Togo. About half of the migrants had a permit for protection reasons (on humanitarian grounds, subsidiary protection, asylum seekers); one out of three had a work permit while just under 10% were undocumented. Finally, at the Masseria Boncuri centre, there were another dozen people, including a couple of women who ran the small "restaurants" adapted from shacks built at the rear of the property.

Amongst the African workers, there were people with very different work and life experiences. The majority of them were modern precarious workers, who know "the journey through hell" well enough, meaning that they were accustomed to move from one area to another in South Italy, following the different harvests throughout Southern Italy in Foggia, Palazzo, San Gervasio, Rosarno and Castelvolturno. At times, they combined work in agriculture with other jobs in industry, construction or logistics. They were "precarious" workers in the truest sense of the word.

Hassan, a 26 year old Sudanese, was one of the first supporters of the strike. He had a beautiful smile and during the strike was often seen with his laptop in the Massera Boncuri office browsing the Arabic version of Facebook.

> I arrived in Lampedusa in 2009, but I left Sudan six years ago. I lived four years in Libya, working in construction and as welder in a small factory ... When I arrived in Italy I didn't work for four or five months. Then I worked in Sicily, in agriculture picking up strawberries, I had 42 Euros [per day] ... with the labour contract. I obtained the residence permit and I moved to Rome, where I worked in a small factory, making meat for kebabs. I am here for the first time... I worked in Palazzo San Gervasio for two weeks last year, but here the conditions are better. They pay you four Euros for a box [of 300 kilos], in Palazzo three Euros and fifty cents, and also in Palazzo there are the black bosses... When the harvest finishes here I will go to Foggia, Palazzo, then I will go back to Caltanissetta. I lived there with three other Sudanese boys… I have not yet returned to Sudan, I have no money.[22]

A small but important part of the migrants were former factory workers who had been fired from factories in Northern Italy and who were

[22] Interview with Hassan, farm labourer, Nardò, August 2011.

looking for a wage during the summer; they contributed with their industrial and sometimes trade union experiences to the struggle. Fouad is a 44-year-old Tunisian who arrived in Italy in 1988. He worked in a lot of factories in the North of Italy, but with the economic crisis he was unemployed at the time.

> I came here to find a job, because I was unemployed. I wanted to work in the watermelon harvest. It is hard, very hard work. Thirty kilos of watermelon to throw on the truck, it is not easy, but you can earn something, 80, 90, 100 Euros [per day], it depends. One might work for twenty days and earn 2,000 Euros. I came just for that, but I didn't find a job... and I have also some debts now, I am still in a shitty situation ... now we were trying to work in the tomato harvest... I hope that the situation can go better. We are fighting to change this system. I went to work and I collected 12 boxes for € 4 Euros each... a pack of cigarettes costs 4 Euros, a sandwich in the field costs 3 Euros and an orange drink costs 4 Euros. At the end of the working day I found myself with 36 Euros... and maybe the black boss earned € 264... What did he do more than me, to earn € 264?

Also the "wind" of the revolts in Northern Africa helped the migrants because in Nardò there were young Tunisians who had arrived in Italy only a few months before, and asylum seekers from sub-Saharan countries, who escaped from the conflict in Libya. They affirmed that you can enforce change by struggle. Finally, some of the strikers were young students or people who had just finished technical college in Italy and were looking for a temporary job.

Migrant strikers had experienced the different economic policies in their countries of origin, and in other countries. By leaving the country of origin the migrants tried to escape from the precariousness that they were subjected to in their "home-countries". For many farmworkers the main way to improve their conditions in Italy was not struggle, but individual emancipation from the agro-sector in the South, e.g. by finding better jobs in other sectors or other regions. But the economic crisis was pushing them back, so they understood that a mere "escape" (to vote with one's feet) would not be enough.

At the same time, we also have to consider that the struggles and demands of recent years slowly left their traces in the memory of this workforce: the mobilizations of the Maghreb farmworkers in the ghetto of San Nicola Varco (Salerno) in autumn 2006; the two revolts of African citrus pickers in Rosarno in December 2008 and January 2010; the

blockading of the roundabouts in Castelvolturno and the surrounding villages (the places where the gang-masters picked up migrants to take them to work) in October 2010.

At least for the first week of the uprising, all 400-500 migrant workers housed in Masseria Boncuri participated in the strike. The most determined farmworkers, a group of about 30 people, mounted street blockades with piled-up stones from 3 am onwards for six consecutive days. These blockades were erected around the camp in order to prevent gang-masters' vans from coming and pick up workers. Every evening meetings were held with the participation of migrants of many nationalities, thus illustrating a weakening of the difference between workers of different nationalities and "communities" who now had shared objectives in the cause of the uprising.

Both during and after the strike, there were many individual and collective cases filed against the gang-masters: "I was the first to file a case and bring a gang-master to the police station", relates Monchef from Tunisia. This aspect of the struggle touches a central issue: as we have seen, many gang-masters, most of all those from Africa, try to disguise their role in the chain of exploitation behind a network of family and community relations with the farmworkers, who are often their "fellow countrymen" or "friends". But many migrants hate the figure of the gang-masters: "You pay 3 Euros for transport and on the fields, they want you to pay for sandwiches, water or cigarettes", says Abdellah, from Tunisia; but the gang-master is able to find a job for many migrants, and therefore it remains a difficult undertaking to break with this relation.

Initially, the strikers demanded an increase of the price of a box of picked tomatoes and the stipulation of work contracts. Almost immediately they asked also to remove the black bosses and they demanded a public job centre in the camp. From the beginning, therefore, the migrants fought for a complex range of issues regarding general working conditions: the wage and contract systems, the organization of work and management of the labour market. A problematic element was the request to increase the piece rate. Even though it is an illegal payment method, the strikers, at least initially, did not ask to receive an hourly wage, but an increase in piece rates.[23] However, the strike did not affect housing or the reproductive sphere. Not that complaints regarding accommodation in the camp were

[23] In May 2012 the main trade unions (CGIL-CISL-UIL) signed a new local collective bargaining which provides piecework, hitherto illegal: 1 cent per kilo for watermelons, 2 cents per kilo for large tomatoes (i.e. 6 per box of 300 pounds) and not more than three cents a kilo for small tomatoes (that is, 10 per box).

lacking (in fact, many workers sleep outdoors), but it seemed to be less of a problem: “better together here than in the abandoned and isolated farms in Foggia”, Salim from Tunisia said.

The strike was largely self-organized by the migrants themselves. The associations that managed the camp decided to influence as little as possible the demands and practices of the migrant’s fight, but supported them through a "strike fund". However, the local CGIL, the main Italian trade union, which had initially opposed the reception centre, intervened more firmly in the strike, attempting to involve, that is to take on board, the emerging leaders and to focus on an institutional resolution with the Prefect of Lecce and the Apulian Regional administration office. The employers' associations, both those that sat at the negotiation table and those that were not present, simply denied that their associations were in any way responsible for the irregular exploitation, referring solely to the responsibility of the gang-masters. At the negotiation table, guidelines were signed for the operation of public job centres, but they had no particular effect. Institutional negotiations, on the other hand, partially distracted attention from the strike "in the field", which was gradually fading.

Meanwhile, after the initial surprise, the gang-masters tried to break-up the protest, while the farmers remained in the background. The gang-masters employed several strategies: they directly or indirectly threatened the more active strikers; they recruited a few dozen scabs from the Foggia ghettos; and they exerted strong pressure against their fellow countrymen to make them return to work since they were trusted men from within the camp. They also moved some workers into abandoned houses in the countryside to get around the pickets at Masseria. The gang-masters found fertile ground especially among undocumented migrants, as they were easier to blackmail and had less hope of achieving anything from the strike. On the other hand, the gang-masters hired some workers with a legal contract and in some cases even the piece rate was increased. Farmers and gang-masters, who in the end continued to control work organisation, managed to re-orientate themselves after the initial confusion, but they also understood that something had changed and that at least for that harvest season they were compelled to accept this fact.

A critical element of the strike was the isolation of a dozen or so migrants, the spokesmen, into the farmhouse itself, away from the other workers who lived in the tents, in order to protect them from the threats of the gang-masters. In the long run, this physical separation between the leaders and other migrants became an element of weakness since the

separation insinuated doubts regarding possible privileges given to the strike leaders.

The camp was a space of socialization, exchange and support during the strike and it operated as a driving force, but the camp was also a limit, when the gang-masters managed to undermine the protest "from within", by using some of "their men" inside the tent city. Nevertheless, the possibility of permanent social relationships in the camp brought people closer together. An interesting impact of the strike was the overcoming of the separation into different ethnic groups, given that spokesperson were not elected according to nationality, but according to their language skills - in order for them to be able to communicate with as many migrant groups as possible. The common struggle then encouraged further exchange between people, as Mohamed from Sudan said: "usually people just went to work and then to sleep, without knowing what was happening in the camp. Since the beginning of the strike there is more communication and discussion taking place."

After the first week, a hundred or so farmworkers started working again and the strike essentially ended in mid-August, even though some workers declared that they would abstain from work until the beginning of September, after the official closure of the camp. From the legislative point of view, the main result of the strike was the approval by the Government of a Law Decree (No. 138 of August 13, 2011) that makes illegal hiring through the gang-master system a criminal offense and not merely an administrative offense.

Not unusually, after the strike ended, envy and suspicion amongst people again entered the foreground, partly instigated by the gang-master and their entourage in the reception centre – conflicts which were less important during the protest.

In any case, this struggle made the migrants involved increasingly aware of their power, although this was a work force "that immediately thinks about the present, and not the future", as affirmed by Yvan Sagnet, the student from Cameroons that became the spokesman for the uprising. The strike changed social relationships and allowed the development of forms of subjectivity that were also expressed on questions that went beyond the object of the uprising. At the same time, the protagonists of the strike were able to present and to stand up for their mobilization in front of various social groups: during the "Night of Taranta" concert in Melpignano, during various assemblies and in the Grand Ghetto in Rignano. The leader of the strike, Yvan Sagnet, started to work with the trade union (Cgil),

participated in some television programs and wrote a book entitled in English, *Love your dream. Life and rebellion in the land of the red gold*.[24]

But we also believe that there were other results: migrant workers who were used to hard labour, miserable pay and poor living conditions tried to change their conditions. They created levels of communication which were unthinkable only a few weeks before and they showed that they were more than "arms", just good enough to bring in the harvest. After the events in Rosarno in January 2010, the strike in Nardo confirmed that a latent conflict permeated the rural areas of southern Italy. The economic crisis, which is a burden on both migrants and Italians, aggravated the conflict. With their strike the farmworkers questioned the consensus that the worst working and living conditions were predestined for the migrants, particularly those from Africa. The struggle seems to have resulted in a clearer consciousness about their own power.

Conclusions

In this article some of the main features of migrant labour in southern Italian agriculture have been highlighted. With reference to two case studies, that of the Boreano ghetto and that of Masseria Boncuri in Nardo, we sustained that the "caporalato" system and the condition of seclusion in which the seasonal migrant farmworkers, especially Africans, find themselves during the harvest of agricultural products, represented the key factors in the functioning of this productive sector, the management of the workforce and the labour market.

The gang-master draws his lifeblood from the isolation of the workforce. In fact, both the living and working conditions worsen when the workers are placed in isolated ghettos in the countryside and away from a town, as we learned from the Boreano experience. In the reception centre at Masseria Boncuri in Nardò, the situation of seclusion was broken: new social relationships and groupings have developed among migrants themselves and between them and the volunteers, as has a reciprocal trend in recognizing a common objective. In fact, Masseria Boncuri became a public space for discussion, with its open structure form, and thanks to the presence of volunteers and activists, has allowed the emergence of new subjectivities.

[24] SAGNET, Yvan. *Ama il tuo sogno. Vita e rivolta nella terra dell'oro rosso*. Fandango, 2012.

In August 2012, the situation in Nardo changed again. After two years of experimentation in Masseria Boncuri and after the strike of 2011, local institutions no longer allowed the two above-mentioned organizations to open the reception centre. The farmworkers in search of day work in the watermelon and tomato harvest have returned to live in the olive groves and the many abandoned houses in the countryside, a long way from the city. In the area around Nardò, migrant farmworkers were again segregated in ghettos, the gang-master's vans could move unhindered and the harvesting of agricultural products progressed smoothly. However, the experience of the strike remains as a symbol of the ability of the self-organization of migrant workers in Italy, something that seemed to become more common throughout 2012, fielding articulated and stronger forms of struggle for the improvement of their working conditions.

The fight against multiple professional land holdings: a new agrarian issue during France's "silent revolution" (1950-1970)

Édouard Lynch

Between 1950 and 1980, French agriculture experienced a complete transformation. This "second revolution" turned an over-staffed and unproductive sector into a fully mechanized and export-driven farming industry. This dramatic change triggered significant social tensions in the countryside. Dubbed the "silent revolution" by the young farm union leader Michel Debatisse, [1] this evolution was in many respects a "noisy "process, underpinned by a united and well-organized trade union movement which put pressure on the authorities in a very effective way.

One of the distinguishing features of this period was the resurgence in the farming community of the issue of control of the land. Access to land by farm workers, sharecroppers and farmers is a key facet of contemporary social and political history. It was crystallized as the "agrarian issue" and by the deployment of farming reforms enabling land redistribution. France followed an original path: in spite of the continued high number of agricultural employees, workers and servants, their struggles and protests remained only secondary.

Since 1907, and in the 1930s, French farmers mobilized almost exclusively to maintain price levels or to protect their production. After WWII and the food shortages due to the German occupation, food prices were once again the reason for new protests. The focus from 1953, under the Fourth Republic, was the linking of food prices to inflation. This period saw the introduction of a whole menu of modern protest methods, which continued into the first two decades of the Fifth Republic. They included street demonstrations as well as direct action, which took the form of roadblocks, physical attacks and the destruction of private and public properties.

---

[1] DEBATISSE, Michel. *La révolution silencieuse. Le combat des paysans*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1963.

While price parity remained a central demand, the reforms put in place at the start of the 5th Republic generated new concerns related to land access, control and ownership – all prerequisites to agricultural modernization. By putting the spotlight on the ways in which farmers conducted their protests, this article focuses on the rise of this new agrarian issue and how it fitted with the changing French ideological landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. It is based on original sources from the Ministry of Justice and from the media – both press and TV – at a time when the latter was becoming increasingly influential.

I – Fighting multiple occupations: an unintended consequence of De Gaulle's reforms

1. The struggle for land in France: a long but disjointed journey

Social struggles in contemporary rural France had special characteristics. After the French revolution of 1789, protests were recurrent, and usually linked to wheat shortages and short-term crises. They took on a more overtly political hue as the social and political effects flowing from the revolution became felt. [2] The last mass uprising of peasants took place in December 1851: a clearly politically motivated protest, it attempted, in vain, to stop the coup d'état driven by the Prince President.[3] Throughout this period, the issue of land ownership did arise, mostly in relation to the changing use of communal assets, which became more restrictive or were withdrawn. The situation calmed down after the Second Republic – a calm that lasted for over a century. [4]

In spite of the existence of large farms, notably for wheat growing around Paris and in the North East, the French agricultural proletariat contributed only minimally to mass protest. Much more than land ownership or access, the issues of food price and market protection were the triggers for the most serious protests. In the wine-growing South, for example, the farm workers strikes of 1904-05 were vastly overshadowed by the major inter-class mobilisation of 1907. Similarly, in 1936-37, even in the

---

[2] BOURGUINAT, Nicolas. *Les grains du désordre*. Paris: EHESS, 2002.
[3] MARGADANT, Ted. *French peasants in revolt. The insurrection of 1851*. Princeton: Princeton University Presss, 1979.
[4] VIVIER, Nadine. *Propriété collective et identité communale. Les biens communaux en France (1750 1914)*. Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998.

favourable context of the Popular Front, the strikes by agricultural workers in the Paris region only had a minor impact.[5]

However, limited visibility did not equate with an absence of workers' demands with regards to land issues. These issues were of interest to small and medium landowners, farm managers and sharecroppers, who collectively accounted for a substantial minority of rural France's active population.[6] Their objective was not land ownership. Rather, the workers' demands centred on revenue sharing and tenant's rights, which in the long term would challenge the landowners' rights. Farmers who did not own land the entered into the collective struggle quite early, as in the example of the tenant farmers in the Landes and Adour region, who challenged the unfair breakdown of the revenue from the land.[7] A few other clashes also took place before 1914 in the Allier and the Bourbonnais, and rose to fame through the works of peasant-writer Emile Guillaumin.[8] These remained localized and isolated occasions, even during the mass uprisings related to the Great Depression of 1930s, when the entire farming community fought to gain a rise in the price of wheat.

However, with the Popular Front coming to power, draft legislation favourable to farmers was pushed through by the new ministerial team for agriculture, led by Renaud and Tanguy-Prigent. The draft was rejected by the Senate, but eventually passed into law in 1946, given the new political context of the Liberation. Among its many clauses, the law led to the foundation of arbitration commissions for rural leases, in order to manage case between tenant farmers and landowners. Yet tensions continued to exist from time to time, especially in the South West.

Unrest resumed in 1953, starting in the wine-growing South, then spread to the South West before reaching the rest of the country. The National Federation of Farming Unions (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Expoitants d'Agricoles - FNSEA) orchestrated the turmoil. The main issue as the heart of the conflict was wholesale farming prices, falling behind industrial prices and squeezed by the rising costs of modernization,

---

[5] HUBSCHER, Ronald and FARCY, Jean-Claude Farcy. Eds., *La moisson des autres. Les salariés agricoles aux XIXe - XXe siècles*, Actes du colloque international de Royaumont, 13-14 novembre 1992. Paris: Éditions Créaphis, 1996.

[6] In both agricultural surveys of 1892 and 1929, landowners represented 75% of the total population, tenant farmers 20% and sharecroppers 5% - the latter however managed 40% of the farming land.

[7] DUPUY, Francis. *Le pin de la discorde. Les rapports de métayage dans la Grande Lande*. Paris : Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1996.

[8] GUILLAUMIN, Emile. *The Life of a Simple Man*. Boston: University Press of New England, 1982.

against the backdrop of an emerging common agricultural market. The activists' protests did lead to the creation of mechanisms of state intervention for farming and the linking of food prices to inflation in the autumn of 1957.

2. From price demands to structural reform

General de Gaulle's return to power and the creation of the Fifth Republic marked a tipping point in France's agricultural policy. In order to get public finances – greatly weakened by the Algerian conflict – back on their feet, the new regime immediately stopped the automatic link between foodstuff prices and inflation. This decision triggered a mass mobilization in the rural world not since seen since 1945. Led by the FNSEA, the wave of protest, in the form of demonstration-petitions staged in large cities was unprecedented. In Amiens in February 1960, protesters and police clashed, leaving one casualty on the farmers' side.

Faced with the peasant movement, Michel Debré's government was unyielding on the matter of prices, and put forward instead a much-needed transformation of the agricultural sector. The modernization of France's farms was underpinned by the acceleration of structural reforms and required a rise in the size of farms to increase both production and productivity, against the backdrop of the emerging European agricultural market.[9] Over the medium term, the so-called "Green Law " would support the evolution of agriculture in a number of ways: a radical reform of farming schools, a reduction in the active farming population facilitated by the retirement of the oldest farmers and the strengthening of farm managers, even at the price of curtailing the freedom of landowners. The key innovation of the legislation was the creation of the Societies of Financial Management and Rural Establishments (Sociétés d'Aménagement Fonciers et d'Etablissement Rural-SAFER). The SAFER gained the power to purchase farming lands for sale in order to restructure or create viable farms, primarily destined for young farmers. [10]

---

[9] LYNCH, Édouard. Le "moment Debré" et la genèse d'une nouvelle politique agraire. In : BERSTEIN, Serge; MILZA, Pierre ; SIRINELLI, Jean-François. Eds., *Michel Debré Premier ministre, 1959-1962*. Paris: PUF, 2005, pp. 335-363.

[10] COULOMB, Pierre. La politique foncière agricole en France : une politique foncière "à part" ? La déstabilisation de la politique des structures. La transmission du patrimoine de l'exploitation agricole familiale en France. In : JOUVE, A. And BOUDERBALA, N. eds., *Politiques foncières et aménagement des structures agricoles dans les pays méditerranéens : à la mémoire de Pierre Coulomb*. Montpellier: CIHEAM. *Cahiers Options Méditerranéennes*. n.36, 1999, pp. 69-94.

Such interventionism was a real departure from the inefficient land reform laws passed since the start of the twentieth century. It was made possible by the congruence of goals between new trade unions – the National Centre of Young Agricultural Workers (Centre National des Jeunes Agriculteurs-CNJA) heralded a younger and more modern movement, but had to contend with the more conservative and reticent FNSEA – and the government, whose strategy aimed to side step the price issue raised by farming professionals.[11]

Such a compromise proved to be fragile. The first agricultural law passed in July 1960, but took a while to be enforced, even though its short-term impacts were minimal. This triggered a new wave of protest driven by young farmers, which led to a complementary law voted in August 1962. The alliance between professionals and ministers succeeded in founding the SAFER and in irritating the conservative majority backing the government. The reform also introduced the issue of land ownership and access, as well as the practice of holding multiple land holdings at the heart of the collective struggles.

Started in August 1962, what became the Gabin[12] affair revealed the depth of the struggle and the sophistication of the farmers, who favoured direct action and sought maximum media coverage. At 5 a.m., around a hundred farmers invaded, without violence, the property of the cinema star, Jean Gabin. Their aim was to get Gabin to give up two farms he had recently purchased to train his racehorses. The actor first agreed to the farmers' request. However, he later decided to start a legal action against the intruders, hence starting a long running judicial and media saga.

Not only was the choice of a highly popular figure significant, the intrusion took place precisely when the complementary legislation was going through parliament. The parliamentarians from the majority party were at the time attempting to tone down the government's draft, which they judged to be threatening to the rights of the landowners. They objected in particular to the powers vested in the SAFER and to the state's right to purchase land left in fallow.[13] The initiative against Gabin was all the more powerful as it attacked a tangible case of multiple occupation and pitted a leisure pursuit – horseracing – against the labour of farmers.

---

[11] BRUNETEAU, Bernard. *Les paysans dans l'État : le gaullisme et le syndicalisme agricole sous la V^e^ République*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994.
[12] Jean Gabin was a famous French cinema actor, (1904-1976).
[13] *Carrefour*, Aug. 1, 1962. "The complementary agricultural legislation did not convince them. Will the peasants go for direct action?".

Still photograph from Gaumont News during the Gabin affair trial[14] – November 1964

However cleverly orchestrated, the media exposure was only the tip of the iceberg. A deep and increasing exasperation, reflecting the difficulties in recovering land, could be observed across many French regions, particularly in the West of the country. In these regions where sharecropping was dominant, the real core of the issue was not so much land ownership as land use. The "Duval-Lemmonier" affair was a perfect demonstration of this. As with the Gabin case, farmers invaded the home of a landowner. Having just acquired a grazing pasture, he had not renewed the lease of the tenant who worked/exploited it. Contacted by telephone, the landowner refused to change his decision. The intruders caused major damage. This incident was but one among a string of mobilizations which shook the departments of Manche and Orne from the winter of 1961-1962 onwards. In this particular case, the tensions were crystallized by the practice of "*bannies*" which were the annual allocation of pastures. The uncertainty created by this annual cycle jeopardized the increase in farmed surfaces so necessary to the expansion or creation of farms.[15] Faced with

[14] The board reads: "do not exploit land for leisure, others want it to work".
[15] Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC), 198000175 art 58, Affaire Duval-Lemmonier, rapport du Procureur Général de Caen, 29 août 1962.

unfair access to land, agricultural workers protested and used force against auctions or put pressure on the landowners through acts of collective intimidation. These initiatives mixed modern media exposure, amplified by the press and television, and more traditional collective resistance methods that had been in use over a number of centuries.

It was not only the meandering political reforms and the mood of the professional farming bodies that underpinned the rise of the agrarian issue. The problem was fuelled by the growing tensions within the farming land market. Between 1955 and 1970, the number of farms dropped drastically, from 2.2 million to 1.5. The mix between landowners and land workers remained roughly the same in that time (52% of the land was farmed by its owners, 48% by tenant farmers). What changed was the proportion of mixed farms (comprising a combination of owned and rented land) – this grew from 25% in 1955 to reach 43.6% in 1970. It was this group of farmers who, as they looked to increase their land and keep the land rental and purchase market active, fed the protests. Nevertheless, land was not the only root cause of the collective struggle. The agricultural revolution in France also transformed production methods and market access.

3. The varied range of multiple land holdings

Further protests took place in the following months. They threw into sharp relief the acute issue of land access as well as the wide range of multiple land holding practices. The main cause of conflict arose from grazing pastures. These were much prized by non-farming landowners, such as butchers, against whom multiple actions took place. The following case took place in the Morbihan, in July 1962: "On 2 July, after a peasant demonstration which took place in the village of Bigan, protesters made their way to the village of Villeneuve in the commune of Saint-Allouestre where they entered a farm belonging Mr [M], Marcel, Esq., estate agent in Pontivy, who rents a pasture to Mr [N] Benjamin, Esq., butcher in the village of Moreac, who permanently keeps there a herd of cattle."[16]

The aggression against multiple holdings also targeted industrial farms, especially in Brittany. Farm workers saw these as a disloyal and unacceptable competition, especially when they were the basis of double holdings:

[16] CAC, 198000175 art 68, 62 – 1110, Manifestations paysannes Morbihan des 2, 12 et 20 juillet à Rennes et Vannes, rapport du Procureur général de Rennes au Garde des sceaux, 25 juillet 1972.

> On 20 July 1962, at about 2am, hundreds of farmers entered a poultry farm co-owned in Lanouée by Mrs [O], spouse of a veterinary doctor, and Mrs [P], which includes 8 chicken houses with 12,500 chickens to eat, 2,000 guinea-fowls and 4,500 egg-laying hens. Whilst some of the intruders restrained the farm managers and his family, others destroyed the hen houses, the water supply, the feeding trays and the water troughs. Over one tonne of special feed was spoiled with manure and approximately 2,000 chickens were destroyed. Before leaving, the participants wrote on the road: "To those who have more than one occupation. Final Warning".[17]

While remaining centred on the West of France, the attacks against multiple occupations spread to other regions, and grew in scope too. Thus, farmers destroyed an apple plantation in Corrèze and left behind a flyer explaining their motivation:

> EACH TO THEIR OWN JOB
>
> No more orchards in the hands of fruit transporters and exporters
>
> No more fields or lands for cattle sellers
>
> No more speculative forests for shopkeepers or professionals […]
>
> Should they remain unheard, the peasants of Corrèze will move on to less peaceful actions.[18]

Without vanishing entirely, the number of multiple holdings-related cases – at least those significant enough to generate major public disorder – dropped dramatically after 1964. This was a time when the SAFER were being set up and started to become effective. This reduction could also be explained by the reluctance of moderate and conservative union leaders to condone further challenges to landowners' rights.

---

[17] CAC, 198000175 art 68, 62 – 1110, Manifestations paysannes Morbihan des 2, 12 et 20 juillet à Rennes et Vannes, rapport du PG de Rennes au Garde des sceaux, 25 juillet 1972.
[18] CAC 198000175 art 71, 62 – 1205 – Destruction de récoltes (fruits et légumes) en Corrèze, 21 août 1962.

II – Resurgence in the 1970s: a more political agenda?

1. The impact of May 1968

The new rise in land-related tensions, which resumed at the start of the 1970s, took place in a new economic and trade union context. Almost ten years had passed since the vote on agricultural legislation and new sources of discontent were appearing. Undoubtedly, the SAFER played a role in land redistribution, hence facilitating the creation and growth of farms. But their effect remained limited to about 50,000 to 75,000 hectares annually. Such a volume was seen, in the 1970s, as insufficient to impact a tense land market.[19] In addition, even though the SAFER were co-managed by union representatives and by professional farmers, their interventions were not consistent from region to region and did not always prevent local tensions from flaring up.

In Angoulême, for example, young farmers interrupted a committee meeting to protest against one of its allocation decisions:

> On 6 March 1972, the regional technical committee of the Poitou Charentes SAFER met in Niort to agree the allocation of land acquired by the SAFER in Abzac (Charente). The proposal put forward by the departmental technical committee of Charente had not been endorsed by all the professional bodies. During the meeting of the regional committee of the SAFER, members of the CNJA from the Departements of Vienne, Charente, Charente Maritime, Deux-Sèvres, and Vendée stormed the SAFER office, occupied the telephone exchange and demanded an allocation of the land in line with their requirements. The regional committee, judging that it could not decide under threat, referred the matter to the consultative committee of Charente for a second opinion, to be agreed on 8 March. At the end of the demonstration in Niort, about a hundred farmers made their way to Abzac, where they occupied symbolically the property in question and ploughed furrows, after which they left without incident and without the need for the gendarmerie to intervene.[20]

[19] GERVAIS, Michel ; JOLLIVET, Marcel ; TAVERNIER, Yves. *Histoire de la France rurale. T. 4. Depuis 1914*. Paris: Seuil, 1992 [1977], p. 657.
[20] CAC, 19860684 art 40, rapport du procureur général de Bordeaux au Garde des Sceaux, 30 mars 1972.

The union and ideological context also changed, driven by endogenous and exogenous factors. In the sector, new generations of young militants were much more critical of the modernizing agenda supported by the previous generation, as its effects on small farmers were perceived to be negative. In sharecropping and tenant farming regions of the South West, the Movement for the Defence of Family Farmers (MODEF), originally launched by communists in 1959, kept the protests active. Influenced as well by the Marxist left of Bernard Lambert and the Unified Socialist Party, young farmers were more left leaning than their forebears[21] From the end of the 1960s, Marxist militants took control of an array of union bodies, such as the departmental branches of the young farmers. They spread a new ideology attacking the dominance of capitalism in rural France and mocking the so-called independence of food producers. At the same time, they resumed direct action in the field.[22]

May 1968 did not have an immediate impact. Nevertheless, it contributed to the spread of new Marxist themes, refreshed the ideological framework of the struggle on the land and modified the tactics to include more direct actions.[23] Meanwhile, far-left organizations focused more on rural struggles, which had been traditionally discounted as not fitting the theoretical framework of working class struggles.

2. A new wave of land-related conflicts (1970-1978)

Collective action was on the rise from the start of the 1970s and reused the methods of the early 1960s, including pressurising landowners at lease renewal time to the detriment of incumbent tenants. The following report covered such an incident in 1971 in the Lot et Garonne:

> I respectfully report the peaceful demonstration organized by young farmers on the occasion of the hearing at the arbitration tribunal of Sarlat, on Thursday 14 May, of a case of farming lease renewal and right to recover between a landlord, Mr X, merchant and landowner in Eyrignac and his farmer, Mr [Y], president of the CETA[24] of Saint Genies. […] The

[21] KERMALEGENN, Tudi ; PRIGENT, François ; RICHARD, Gilles ; SAINCLIVIER, Jacqueline. eds., *Le PSU vu d'en bas. Réseaux sociaux, mouvement politique, laboratoire d'idées (années 1950-années 1980)*. Rennes : PUR, 2010..
[22] LAMBERT, Bernard. *Les paysans dans la lutte des classes*. Paris : Seuil, 1970.
[23] BRUNEAU, Ivan. Quand des paysans deviennent "soixante-huitards". In : PUDAL, Bernard ; GOBILLE, Boris ; MATONTI, Frédérique ; DAMAMME, Dominique. eds., *Mai-Juin 1968*. Paris, Editions de l'Atelier, 2008, pp. 344-356.
[24] Centre d'Etudes Techniques Agricoles (Centre for Technical Agricultural Studies).

> Dordogne branch of the FSEA de Dordogne and the Centre des jeunes agriculteurs [CNJA] have sent 25 of their members to the tribunal to mark their solidarity with the tenant. […] Neither gathering nor demonstration has been organized. Four small boards were placed on the ground at the end of the court session: "Farmers have the right to live". "Say no to cumulative jobs". "Mr [X] owner 'yes', farmer 'no'". "If you are the Nansac family, we'll be the croquants".[25]

This last slogan alluded to the novel by Eugène Le Roy, "Jacquou le Croquant".[26] Adapted for television in September 1969, the series was a popular success and the CNJA demonstrations rode on this wave during the autumn of 1969.

Direct action resumed too, taking place at the homes of landowners accused of holding multiple jobs. From time to time, these initiatives were complemented by demonstrations and sit-ins in public spaces, as happened in Loire-Atlantique:

> I respectfully report that on 17 September 1971, around 14hrs, following an appeal from the leaders of the Loire-Atlantique branch of the FDSEA, 300 farmers gathered in the village square of Lège to protest against the cumulative farming jobs held by Mr [Z] Michel, a butcher of Poiré sur Vie (Vendée). Their grievance was that he manages the lands of his father [Z] Marcel as well as 3 hectares leased by Mrs [T], a widow, to the aforementioned [Z] Marcel. After speeches by Mr [V], the sub-departmental head of FDSEA and by Mr [W], local head of FDSEA to explain the reasons for the demonstration, a convoy of 95 tractors, headed by Mr [Y] department head for FDSEA. This cortege paraded throughout Lège and then proceeded to the house of Mr [Z] Marcel who let a delegation in.

The negotiation having stalled or failed, a 1960s method was re-ignited and became much more systematic: field ploughing, sometimes enhanced by seed-planting:

[25] CAC, 19800367 art 24 - 70 – 16 – Manifestation à Sarlat le 14 mai 1970, Rapport du préfet de la Dordogne au ministre de l'Intérieur, 20 mai 1970.
[26] Published in 1899, it tells the story of a young peasant who led, under the Monarchy of July, a revolt against an evil nobleman.

> The three FDSEA union leaders then decided to have a disputed strip of land ploughed. Hence, on their instructions, 95 peasants went with their tractors to a field of stubble of about 2 hectares, of which half had been prepared for seeding an artificial prairie. Once the barbed-wire fence was cut in six different places, the peasants entered the field and ploughed it entirely. [27]

Such an approach mirrored the increasing attacks against agricultural products. As the output of their labours lost its political and symbolic nature, farmers had no compunction in destroying it, as they did during the milk strike of 1972.[28]

3. The increasing role of politics

Land struggles in the 1970s were different: they lasted longer and took on an ideological dimension. Unlike their often short-lived 1960s precursors, some cases went on for years, marked by deeper militant commitment and more pervasive actions. Their political dimension was deeper and was supported by connections to other unions or political parties of urban origin. The fight for the Larzac, which started in 1971, provided an exemplary backdrop. The central issue was not multiple holdings. However, land ownership was at the very heart of the conflict: the fight of the 103 peasants aimed to defend the land against the extension of the nearby military zone, and drew support from peasants of the Aveyron and militants from all over the country. The network of working peasants was critical in the nationalization of the protest.[29]

The Ameteau affair mobilised the farmers of the Deux-Sèvres over many years and illustrated the new customs in the struggle for land. R. Ameteau was a butcher who exploited over 80 hectares of land, the Epinay farm. Since 1967, he had been convicted repeatedly for breaking the law against multiple holdings. Still, he refused to leave his farm. This refusal led to a series of incidents, particularly during the spring of 1971. In March, during a first demonstration, shots were fired by the butcher-farmer who

---

[27] CAC, 19800444, art 70, 71 – 31 – Manifestation du CDJA le 1er mai 71, affaire Ameteau Robert

[28] LYNCH, Edouard. Détruire pour exister : les grèves du lait en France (1964, 1972 et 2009). *Politix*. n. 103, 2013.

[29] TERRAL, Pierre Marie. *Larzac, de la lutte paysanne à l'altermondialisme*. Toulouse: Privat, 2011.

was subsequently thrown in a pond. A few weeks later, on May 1, fields were ploughed, and the police intervened:

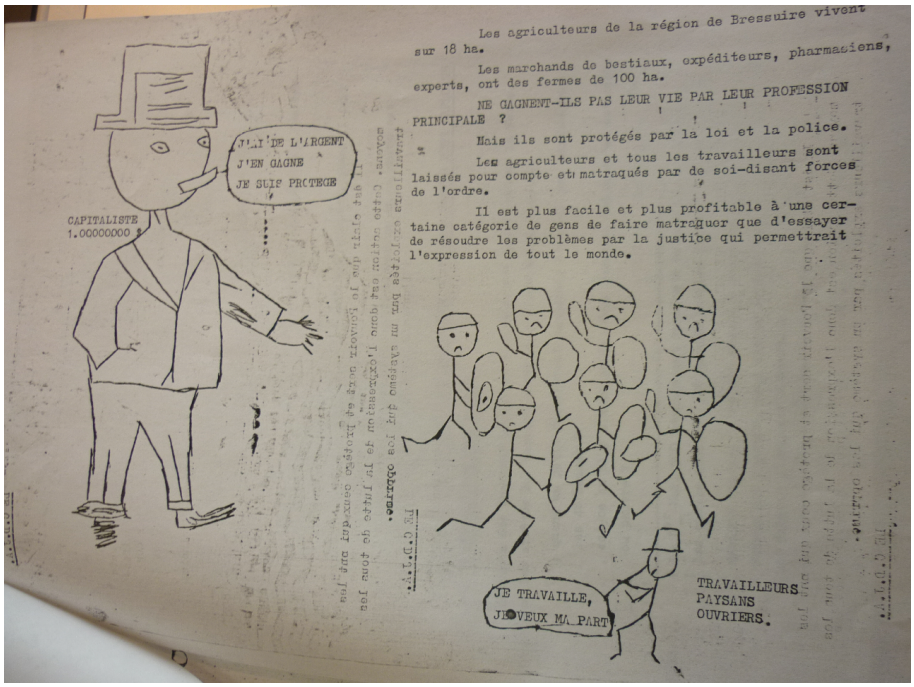
> Around 10 o'clock, two groups of around 20 tractors pulling farming ploughs made their way to Noireterre via the road of Cerisay. The owners of 8 of these machines could be identified in spite of the vehicles' number plates being camouflaged. Thereafter, roughly 50 cars and a hundred pedestrians gathered about 2km from the Ameteau farm. The number of protesters kept on growing to reach around 400 at the start of the afternoon. At that point, three trees at the edge of the farmhouse were cut and a number of tractors ploughed 3 hectares of sown fields.[30]

As well as evidencing the new forms of class struggle, these operations revealed too the underlying ideological and union tensions. The labour day demonstration of May 1 was supported by industrial workers' unions and militant student groups, as the CDJA of Deux-Sèvres failed to be endorsed by the FDSEA, worried about "leftist deviance". A flyer published on this occasion by the CDJA was crystal clear:

> On 4th March, with the support of the FDSEA, 400 people turned up at the Farm of Epinay. On 1st May, without the FDSEA support, 600 people with tractors. That day, the going got tougher. Three fields were ploughed in all directions and a few fences were pulled down. At the farmhouse, 300 riot police and a helicopter were stationed to protect Ameteau, an outlaw but who had the means to pay. They attacked the demonstrators savagely, injuring a few and taking one prisoner. The riot police handed over the prisoner to Ameteau's sons who hurt him some more…

By way of conclusion, the flyer read: "The authorities serve and protect those who can pay. This movement is therefore the expression of the struggle of all the workers being exploited by an oppressive system".[31]

[30] CAC, 19800444, art 70, 71 – 31 – Manifestation du CDJA le 1er mai 71, affaire Ameteau Robert.
[31] CAC, 19800444 art 70 - 71 – 31 – Manifestation du CDJA le 1er mai 1971, affaire Ameteau Robert, tract CDJA, sd (mai 1971].



Flyer published during the Ameteau affair, May 1971

The sudden burst of activities against multiple land holdings during the first ten years of the Fifth Republic accompanied a deep change in agrarian structures, itself a consequence of the integration of French agriculture into European and global commerce. The shockwave that followed the modernization of French agriculture surfaced underlying tensions, which had, until then, remained a secondary concern in French farmers' demands. At a time when strong demographic growth counter-balanced rural exodus, the need to quickly extend farm sizes started a period of novel conflicts. This was particularly true in regions where indirect farming was important and where the specialization of production, especially for cattle, was accelerating.

Choosing direct action against multiple holdings and land concentration was based on twin factors. First, a new generation of trade unions, started by the French Catholic Youth (JAC) and the CNJA in the early 1960s, emphasized structural reforms and, with their modernizing and entrepreneurial ideology, challenged the traditional view of landownership still upheld by the conservative elites. In addition, the refreshed struggle for land was based on more egalitarian principles, which had originated in nineteenth century moral economics and had been reinvigorated in the 1960s by influential Marxist theories.

From the viewpoint of the types of action chosen, these struggles included modern practices started in the 1960s – direct actions and the invasion of public space which shocked public opinion and the media. These were combined with more subtle local forms of collective pressure against the "master" or the "lord of the manor" which were reminiscent of traditional acts of intimidation, resistance and pressure.

Protests against the limited access to land gradually reduced during the 1970s. This was because concerns about pricing, by then regulated at the European level, returned as one of the key drivers of the agricultural opposition, as illustrated by the "cattle crisis" of the summer of 1974. Dozens of often very violent demonstrations took place in July that year. Nevertheless, the land issue could still come back to the fore. A particular battleground focused on the access to grazing pastures – this triggered new unrest, especially in the Doubs, during the acute drought of the summer of 1976.

Overall, the combination of the continued drop in the number of farms and the growing effect of the Common Agricultural Policy (PAC) on food production meant the land issue fell in importance. From the end of the 1970s, the market for rural land went into reverse: the volume of transactions went down and the price of land either stagnated or dropped.[32]

From the 1990s, the reforms of the PAC failed to prevent over-production and led to the serious consideration of putting farm lands to fallow.[33] This was a strong signal, even if the forced stoppage would first target the least productive areas. All the same, it did not put a complete end to competition for land. Throughout the period, the break-even point for farms kept going up. The number of farmers was decreasing but they needed ever-larger surfaces to make a living.[34]

[32] SERVOLIN, Claude. Où va le marché foncier ? *La Semaine Vétérinaire*. *n*.372, Paris, 27 avril 1985.
[33] Fallow land covered 1.4 million hectares in 1950, fell to 230,000 in 1990, before climbing back to 1.2 million in 2000.
[34] The average size of a farm grew from 14 hectares to 19 between 1955 and 1979, then to 28 in 1988, and 55 in 2010.

Globalizing local struggles – Localizing global struggles. Peasant movements from local to global platforms and back

Eric Vanhaute

In the 21th century, new peasant movements have entered the global stage. What can we learn from this fundamental shift from local to global platforms? This article presents a historical-comparative analysis about the scale and range of peasant actions in the globalizing world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We focus on former types of peasant movements and on the twenty-first century transnational peasant movement *La Vía Campesina*. How were and are peasant actions organized? What were and are their demands and expectations? Who did and do they see as their enemies and adversaries? This comparative exercise questions peasant actions between the local, transnational and global scales. How have the new peasant movements redefined local resistance within a global context?

1. The return of the peasant movement

Understanding old and new peasantries requires new historical knowledge about the role of peasantries and peasant movements within the long-term transformations of historical capitalism. For more than a century, debates about the "peasant question" have been dominated by two groups of protagonists.[1] On the one hand, the "disappearance thesis" defends the viewpoint that the expansion of capitalism will lead to an extermination of the peasantry. Lenin and Kautsky transformed a previously undifferentiated class of peasants into new, distinct groups: capital owners (capitalist farmers) and wage laborers. On the other hand, advocates of the "permanence thesis" argue in favor of Chayanov's peasant mode of

[1] VANHAUTE, E. "Peasants, peasantries and (de)peasantization in the capitalist world-system". In: CHASE DUNN, C. and BABONES, S. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis*. Oxford: Routledge, 2012, pp. 313-321; ARAGHI, F. "Global depeasantization, 1945-1990". *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 36, n. 2, 1995, pp. 601-632.

production in which peasant societies have a distinct development logic that supports the survival of the peasantry within capitalism. Araghi has labeled the first option as teleological and the second as essentialist; both suffer from a-historical and often functionalistic presumptions. According to Araghi, "depeasantization has been neither a unilinear process, nor has it taken the historically particular form of differentiation in the countryside within each and every nation-state."

The biggest problem with the concept of depeasantization is its predominantly inherent and often unexplained link with urbanization, industrialization, development and marginalization. What is often regarded as "depeasantization" is, in essence, part of the peasantry's diversified labor and income strategy. The marginalization of a growing portion of the world's population makes these mixed survival strategies more important than ever.[2]

The peasantry has to be understood as a set of social relationships. The household is the basic economic unit and gateway to the wider world. It engages in economic transactions in order to secure a level of subsistence within the framework of a broader market economy. That is why the concept of the peasant needs to be redefined contextually, without framing it in capitalist-non-capitalist dualisms.[3] Within this framework, the peasantry is an open concept that interacts within multiple forms and scales of action and conflict, thus leaving room for different levels of autonomy. Depeasantization and peasantization are ongoing processes of adaptation and of resistance: "like every social entity, the peasantry exists in fact only as a process."[4]

In his groundbreaking book *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, anthropologist Eric Wolf analyzed the destructive impact of capitalism on peasant communities. Not only has capitalism generated ecological pressure and overpopulation in the twentieth century, it has also caused a fundamental crisis in the exercise of power relations within rural communities. The traditional methods that peasants use to answer societal tensions no longer suffice: "The peasant rebellions of the twentieth century are no longer simple responses to local problems, if indeed they ever were.

---

[2] VAN DER PLOEG, J.D. "The peasantries of the twenty-first century: the commoditisation debate revisited". *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 37, n. 1, 2010, pp. 20-23.

[3] OWEN, J.R. "In defense of the 'peasant'". *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. vol. 35, 2005, p. 382.

[4] SHANIN, T. "Introduction. Peasantry as a concept". In: SHANIN, T. (ed.), *Peasants and peasant societies. Selected readings*. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987, p. 6.

They are but the parochial reactions to major social dislocations, set in motion by overwhelming societal change. The spread of the market has torn men up by their roots […].”[5] The old strategies and institutions have been undermined by the same forces against which the peasants were fighting.[6] In this new, more globalized world, peasants were no longer able to independently combat the systematic weakening of their bases for survival, nor formulate alternatives. The main causes are thought to be a lack of leadership and organization. Eric Hobsbawm stated that peasants could still be a decisive factor in the twentieth century, but only when united under an external leader. Usually, the changes they could realize did not improve their living circumstances.[7] The role of peasants as an independent social actor seemed to be over.

But is this correct? At the beginning of the twenty-first century, after three decennia of fast globalization, peasant resistance is once again on the social agenda. Peasant movements of all kinds are part of alter-globalization movements.[8] The new food crisis since 2007-2008 has put the agrarian producer on the international agenda once again.[9] Several countries are faced with new forms of rural and agrarian resistance. This ranges from European farmers pouring their milk on their fields to land occupations in Central America and Latin America, Africa, India and China. People who need to live from the land express themselves loudly amidst a world of increasing food insecurity.[10] In today’s world, peasants are still the largest social group. Of the seven billion people on our planet, half still live in the countryside and 42 percent of all active women work the land.[11] It is not surprising that international organizations such as the World Bank are reconsidering the importance of the small peasant. Agriculture is no longer

---

[5] WOLF, E. R. *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969, p. 295.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 282.
[7] HOBSBAWM, E. “Peasants and politics”. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, n.1, 1973, pp. 3-22.
[8] BORRAS JR., S.M.; EDELMAN, M; KAY, C. “Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact”. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, n.2-3, 2008, pp. 169-204.
[9] For example, consult *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (http://wdronline.worldbank.org), was the first report of the World Bank in 25 years putting agriculture in the centre.
10 HOLT-GIMÉNEZ, E. and PATEL, R. Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice. The real story behind the world food crisis and what we can do about it. Oakland: Food First Books, 2009.
[11] According to the statistics of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), see: http://faostat.fao.org.

perceived as an impediment, but as an important *road to development.*[12] Recent studies of both the United Nations and the World Bank illustrate that small-scale agriculture practiced by the peasantry can provide a good answer to today's challenges.[13]

In this contribution, we review the literature in order to analyze contemporary peasant resistance in a comparative-historical perspective. We focus on former peasant movements, using peasant resistance under Stalinist collectivization in the 1930's as an example, and today's transnational peasant movement La Vía Campesina. We question how peasants have been reacting in two very different societal contexts to changes to their land and lives. How do they organize themselves? Which demands do they pose? Whom do they consider to be their adversary, and which methods and actions do they use? The forms and methods of peasant resistance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have changed considerably. Do peasant movements succeed in adapting to new spatial and social contexts: "Globalizing local struggles – Localizing global struggles"?[14]

2. Old and new peasant movements: from 'parochial reactions' to 'globalizing the struggle'?

Organization: from "movements without leaders" to "a global grassroots movement"

Over time, social observers and historians have been unanimous: naturally, the peasantry was not able to organize themselves independently and on a long-term basis.[15] Any cooperation would and could only be temporary and targeted at specific goals.[16] At the same time, historical research illustrates that a lack of formal organization does not mean a lack of direction and association. Secret meetings and gatherings were held, and

[12] VANHAUTE, E. "The End of Peasantries? Rethinking the Role of Peasantries in a World-Historical View". *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, n.1, 2008, pp. 39-59; VANHAUTE, E. "From famine to food crisis: what history can teach us about local and global subsistence crises". *Journal of Peasant Studies*, n.1, 2011, pp. 47-65.
[13] ALTIERI, M. A. "Small farms as a planetary ecological asset. Five key reasons why we should support the revitalization of small farms in the Global South". Website *Food First, Institute for Food & Development Policy*, http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2115, 2008.
[14] DESMARAIS, A.A. "United in the Via Campensina". Published 18/11/2006 on http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/foodfirst_final_via_campesina_backgrounder.pdf
[15] SHANIN, T. *Defining Peasants*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 152; HILL, I. "The End of the Russian Peasantry?" *Soviet Studies*, vol. 27, n.1, 1975, p. 111; HOBSBAWM, E. *Bandits*. London: Leidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969, p. 13.
[16] WOLF, E. R. *Peasants*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 108; HOBSBAWM, E. *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959, p. 18.

headquarters were erected.[17] There was internal consultation concerning demands and strategies.[18] In times of external threat, peasants were capable of cooperating and leaving their internal differences behind.[19] Nevertheless, many authors consider these forms of informal organization and coordination as weak and temporary.[20] The main problem is that observers, mostly outsiders and historians, have a distinct, often modern or urban perception of collective rebellions and protests. This obscures a better understanding of the basic structures behind apparently loose forms of protest.[21] There were no public leaders, membership rolls, manifests or public activities. According to James Scott, these movements can be considered social movements despite this institutional invisibility.[22] A lack of formal organization is the norm due to the danger and permanent threat of repression.[23] Peasants usually acted individually or in small groups. [24] This necessitated only small-scale, informal organization and coordination. The traditional pattern of a peasant revolt consisted of a sequence of smaller, more or less isolated eruptions, internally coordinated, but without visible

---

[17] McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin's Russia: The Pitelinskii Uprising, Riazan 1930". *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, n.1, 2001, pp. 125-128 (22); VIOLA, L.; DANILOV, P; IVNITSKLII, N.A.; KOZLOV, D. (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930. The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 258.

[18] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. London: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 301.

[19] BERCE, Y.M. "Rural Unrest". In: BLUM, J.(ed.) *Our Forgotten Past. Seven centuries of life on the land*. London: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 142.

[20] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 5-7; SHANIN, T. *Defining Peasants… Op.Cit.* pp. 151-152.

[21] During the peasant uprisings in the 1930s, the Soviet authorities put forward two groups as being responsible for the rebellion: outsiders and rich farmers or kulaks. However, neither historical research nor the few remaining testimonies confirm this thesis, 'et je suis sure que personne ne la dirigeait'. GRIGORENKO, P. *Mémoires*. Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1980, p. 135. Nevertheless Lynn Viola stresses the strong and structural forms of organization amongst Russian peasants. See also McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 130-131, 133; VIOLA, L.; DANILOV, P; IVNITSKLII, N.A.; KOZLOV, D. (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930…Op.Cit.,* p. 257; FITZPATRICK, S. *Stalin's peasants. Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 3-4; CONQUEST, R. *The Harvest of Sorrow. Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 4; VIOLA, L. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin. Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 113-114; VIOLA, L. "Bab'I Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization". *Russian Review*, vol. 45, n.1, 1986, pp. 36-40.

[22] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 200.

[23] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit.,* pp. 35, 297-298, xv, 297-299, 301, 273 (25).

[24] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* p. 200.

leadership.[25] Small-scale actions did not require clear leadership, diminishing the possibility of repression. Leadership was concealed from contemporaries and remains concealed for historians.[26]

Current changes in the global food chain and the position of food producers have thoroughly redefined the areas of action and resistance of peasant movements. Peasant movements have adopted a clear identity and agenda. Today's peasants are represented by several formal, permanent organizations, with a board of directors, membership rolls, public activities and an identifiable structure. They are defined as small and medium-scale agricultural producers. They cultivate the land and act as global citizens. They protest against globalization in its current form, in mutual consultation and solidarity. Agreements are no longer only made on a local and regional level, but also within national and global networks. *La Vía Campesina*, founded in 1993, is a global peasant movement uniting millions of peasants from America, Africa, Europe and Asia.[27] This movement is built on the mutual recognition of and solidarity between peasants from all parts of the world.[28] Until recently, the huge diversity between the peasants was seen as a significant weakness.[29] Now it is believed that, despite the big differences in living and working conditions, new transnational movements can create new forms of cohesion. All workers of the land are presumed to fight for the same goals and to share the same values. This results from a growing consciousness that the problems they face are similar and transcend local and regional boundaries.[30] From its start, *La Vía Campesina* has expressed itself as a transnational movement, an international alliance of peasant and family farmer organizations. It aims to be a conglomerate of local, regional or national organizations. This makes it fragile and vulnerable, and confronts it with internal tensions and contradictions.[31] That is why *La Vía Campesina* is working on a common identity, strengthened by the

[25] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., p. 9; BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*. p. 143.
[26] SHANIN, T. *Defining Peasants…Op.Cit.,* pp. 151-153; SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* p. 139.
[27] See: http://viacampesina.org, where the movement presents itself as "the international peasant's voice: globalizing hope, globalizing the struggle!".
[28] EDELMAN, M. "Bringing the Moral Economy back in … to the Study of 21st-Century Transnational Peasant Movements". *American Anthropologist*, vol. 107, n.3, 2005, p. 338; PATEL, R. "International Agrarian Restructuring and the Practical Ethics of Peasant Movement Solidarity". *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 39, n.1, 2008, pp. 85, 87.
[29] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 6-7.
[30] PATEL, R. "International Agrarian Restructuring…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 85,87; DESMARAIS, A. A. "The power of peasants: reflections on the meanings of La Vía Campesina". *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 24, n.2, 2008, pp. 141-142.

conviction that all peasants have the same problems and adversaries despite their social and spatial differences. The need for global unity relates to an exchange of experiences, the need to educate people, and the strengthening of local peasant organizations, as expressed in their central slogan "Globalizing Hope. Globalizing the Struggle!".

Demands: from "confirmation of local conventions" to 'another modernity'

Rebellious peasants have often put forward their demands only implicitly, so historians can only derive them from their concrete actions.[32] Although peasants could be quite extremist in their world views (for example, by imagining a reversal in the distribution of riches and status), generally these views were not directly translated in their concrete demands and actions. Peasants did not ask for radical societal changes; on the contrary, their demands derived from daily experiences.[33] Scott summarizes their claims as a cry for bread, land and fewer or no taxes.[34] For example, Russian and Ukrainian peasants repeatedly demanded the restitution of their recently confiscated grain, cattle and machinery.[35] Furthermore, they asked for fair wages for their work on the *kolkhozes*, rebelled against the partition of land, and were concerned about the shortages of food resulting from collectivization.[36] On the whole, their demands covered fundamental material and physical needs. Authorities liked to describe the resistance as irrational and hysterical, especially when it was led by women. Yet women were responsible for the survival of their families. This causes most authors to conclude that peasants normally fought for rather modest demands. Their aim was not the abolishment of the existing social order, but a fight against specific changes in their way of life. Their goal was not to topple the dominant system, but to facilitate their survival within that system: 'the usual goal of peasants […] is "working the system to their minimum

---

[32] MEGILL, A. "Some Aspects of the Ethics of History-Writing: Reflections on Edith Wyschogrod's An Ethics of Remembering". In: CARR, D.; FLYNN, T.R.; MAKKREELL, R. A. (eds.), *The ethics of history*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2004, p. 67; BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., p. 148.
[33] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit.,* pp. 326, 331,348-350.
[34] *Ibid*., pp. 295.
[35] McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 127-128; GRAZIOSI, A. "Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d'Ukraine de février-mars 1930". *Cahiers du monde Russe*, vol. 35, 1994, p. 456.
[36] McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 129; VIOLA, L.; DANILOV, P; IVNITSKLII, N.A.; KOZLOV, D. (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930…Op.Cit.,*p. 320.

disadvantage"'.[37] Furthermore, the demands of peasant movements were often based on their sense of justice.[38] Their perception of a fairer social order frequently formed the base for protest movements.[39] The - imagined - past constituted another important breeding ground for resistance. This was often translated into a desire to return to the former way of life, to old customs and traditions.[40] This past was often reconstructed in function of the present; old conventions, disadvantageous for the peasantry, were left out.[41] Resistance was also a consequence of their loss of status and their role in cultural life.[42]

La Vía Campesina fiercely reclaims the identity of the *campesino*, the peasant. The movement shows the important contribution that small peasants make to twenty-first century global society, especially regarding food production and food security. It points out the social and ecological stability and sustainability of local, small-scale agriculture.[43] The movement does not aim to return to a romanticized past. On the contrary, it strives for a new and different modernity.[44] Today's world economy creates the social space in which this movement operates. The main ambitions of *La Vía Campesina* include the end of the neoliberal world system, the withdrawal of agriculture as one of the policy domains of the World Trade Organization, the idea of food sovereignty, and the protection of regional food systems. In order to realize this, a reversal in the current world order is necessary. The goals are definitely radical and peasants no longer put forward their demands within the existing social order, as their ancestors

[37] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit.,* pp. 301, 341-343. As such, the Russian peasantry in the 1930s did not try to topple the Soviet authorities; they tried to get the most unfavorable measures abolished. This was translated in slogans across the Russian countryside: "We welcome Soviet power without collective farms, grain collections, and local communists", "Soviet Power, but without Collective Farms", "We Are for Soviet Power, but against the communists". After all, Russian peasants were already used to communist power, which was established in 1917. Collectivization, however, was new. The primary goal of their resistance was to protect as much of their independence as they could. See BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., p. 129; VIOLA, L.; DANILOV, P; IVNITSKLII, N.A.; KOZLOV, D. (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930…Op.Cit.*, p. 258

[38] BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., p. 135.

[39] WOLF, E. R. *Peasant Wars…Op.Cit*., p. 295; WOLF, E. R. *Peasants…Op.Cit.,* p. 106 .

[40] McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 127, 134.

[41] BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 136, 148, 139; SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit* pp. 318, 179, 345-347.

[42] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit.*, pp. 236, 239; McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., p. 130.

[43] DESMARAIS, A. A. "The power of peasants…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 139-141.

[44] DESMARAIS, A. A. "Peasants Speak – The Vía Campesina: Consolidating an International Peasant and Farm Movement". *Journal of Rural Studies*. vol. 29, n.2, 2002, p. 101.

did. Justice is currently more than simply a moral right; it is the goal of a global social struggle.[45] The program of *La Vía Campesina* combines a global analysis of the basic problems with locally oriented solutions. "What are we fighting against?": imperialism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism and patriarchy, and all systems that impoverish life, resources and eco-systems, and agents that promote the above such as international financial institutions, the World Trade Organization, free trade agreements, transnational corporations, and governments that are antagonistic to their peoples. "What do we defend?": Peasant, family farm-based production and people's food sovereignty, organized according to the needs of local communities and via decentralized food production and supply chains.

Opponents: from "a local logic of accusation" to "agents of neo-liberal globalization"

When Russian peasants switched to direct action in the form of destroying properties, breaking windows and attacking people physically, their actions were almost always directed against local representatives of Soviet power and members of the local Soviet, including their family and property.[46] The Russian uprisings of the 1930s confirmed the tradition of peasant rebellions, focusing almost exclusively on local targets. Peasants were aware of the bigger processes, but they experienced and combated those in personal, specific and local forms. Their adversaries became real people, actors responsible for their deeds. This kind of personification canalized anger and provoked actions that would have been less likely if the causes were considered to be impersonal and inevitable. James Scott calls this redirection of anger, the *local logic of accusation*. Members of the local community bore obligations towards each other and could be advised about their responsibility. Strangers, on the other hand, could not be held responsible since local moral conventions could not be applied to them.[47] This also explains why the distant symbol of suppressive power, the sovereign, was typically not a victim of peasant rebellions.[48] Myths about the sincere king express the belief that, if only he knew about the injustices, he would set things right.[49] The same pattern can be seen in the USSR of the 1930s. Peasants directed their grievances to central authorities in the vain

[45] WOLF, E. R. *Peasant Wars…Op.Cit*., p. 295.
[46] McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 126, 136; VIOLA, L. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin…Op.Cit.,* pp. 111-113.
[47] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit.*, pp. 168-169, 181-183, 347-348.
[48] HOBSBAWM, E. *Primitive Rebels…Op.Cit.,* p. 22, 26.
[49] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 12, 14.

hope that Stalin or the Central Committee of the Communist Party would defend them against the local Soviet powers.[50] Stalin became a hero of the Russian peasantry after publication of the article *Dizzy with success* in March 1930, in which he accused local staff members of committing excesses during collectivization. They felt supported by Stalin in their struggle against local Soviet members. Stalin was considered the good tsar residing in far-away Moscow.[51] Instead of being a victim of the peasantry's anger, Stalin succeeded in becoming the "good leader".[52]

La Vía Campesina no longer focuses exclusively on local, regional or even national governments. Justice needs to be realized on a global level, primarily by correcting the skewed global food regime.[53] First, *La Vía Campesina* directs its actions against the institutional supports of the global system, as stated in The Maputo Declaration: "Our reflections have made it clear to us that multinational corporations and international finance capital are our most important common enemies, and that as such, we have to bring our struggle to them more directly. They are the ones behind the other enemies of peasants, like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the FTAs and EPAs, neoliberal governments, as well as aggressive economic expansionism, imperialism and militarism. Now is the time to redouble our struggle against FTAs and EPAs, and against the WTO, but this time more clearly indicating the central role played by the TNCs." At the same time, *La Vía Campesina* also fights the big transnational corporations dominating the global food system, such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Du Pont, Bayer, Cargill, BASF and Dow.

Actions: from "weapons of the weak" to "act local, aim global"

Just like their demands and targets, the peasantry's actions were usually modest, careful and realistic. These low-profile forms of resistance have been coined *everyday forms of resistance*[54], *infrapolitics*[55] or passive resistance. They appeared to have been an effective strategy, especially in

[50] VIOLA, L. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin…Op.Cit.* p. 4.
[51] VIOLA, L.; DANILOV, P; IVNITSKLII, N.A.; KOZLOV, D. (eds.) *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930…Op.Cit*., p. 267; VIOLA, L. "Bab'I Bunty…" *Op.Cit*., p. 40.
[52] McDERMOTT, K. *Stalin. Revolutionary in an Era of War*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, pp. 65, 71.
[53] McMICHAEL, P. "Peasant Prospects in the Neoliberal Age". *New Political Economy*. vol. 11, n.3, 2006, p. 409.
[54] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. XVI, 348.
[55] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* p. 19.

rural settings. The simple act of not understanding an order gave peasants enormous power. They could use the system to their maximal advantage and minimum disadvantage.[56] Rebellious peasants could work "carelessly and inefficiently. They could intentionally or unconsciously feign illness, ignorance and incompetence", which made their resistance "nearly unbeatable".[57] Language and cultural patterns are part of these "infrapolitics". Since exploitation and domination was legitimated by ideology, the resistance needed a counter-ideology.[58] It made use of contradictions and openings within the dominant culture.[59] Such symbolic inversions were typical for peasant resistance, although normally only expressed in drawings and stories. While there was no cooperation in the traditional sense, this cultural atmosphere made a minimal form of coordination possible. It created a *climate of opinion*, a silent support of each other's actions.

An additional advantage was the oral character of popular culture, which made it almost impossible for the authorities to trace who was saying what. This enabled peasants to express dangerous opinions in relative security. Another way of securing the anonymity of a speaker was by spreading false rumors.[60] When it was not possible to guarantee the anonymity of a speaker, they concealed the message, for example by making use of euphemisms, metaphors and other linguistic tricks.[61] Those silent actions were hidden behind a public façade of obedience and respect.[62] More sporadically, resistance turned violent and open. In rural

---

[56] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 13, 20.

[57] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. 273, 282, xvii, 22, 227-230, 248-251, 265, 33. This disorder and inertia was also a widespread phenomenon in the USSR. The peasants only worked a minimum number of days on the kolkhoz, tools and machinery were scattered around and abandoned. The cattle was neglected and sold or slaughtered. Socialist properties were damaged and destroyed, nobody bothered to repair it. Absenteeism was endemic in the 1930s. Peasants simply refused to do a certain task, or they needed to be bribed. Robbery was omnipresent. See SHIMOTOMAI, N. "A Note on the Kuban Affair (1932-1933)". *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, n.1, 1983, p. 47; KRAVCHENKO, V. *I Chose Freedom. The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official*. New York: Garden City, 1946, p. 99; LOZOVY, S. "What happened in Hadyach County". In: SANDUL, I.I.; STEPOVY, S.O.; PIDHAINY, S.O. (eds.), *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin. A White Book, vol. i. Book of Testimonies*. Toronto: The Basilian Press, 1953, p. 247; VIOLA, L. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin…Op.Cit*., p. 218; WERTH, N. *La vie quotidienne des paysans Russes de la révolution à la collectivisation (1917-1939)*. Paris: Hachette Litt., 1984, pp. 360, 369.

[58] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 118, 136-137, 139, 152.

[59] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. 336-339.

[60] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 140, 144-145, 160, 162, 166-167, 171; SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. 300-301.

[61] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 136-137, 139, 152, 166-167, 171.

[62] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. xvii, 26, 304.

society, violence remained just beneath the surface. What was necessary to cause it to erupt?[63] According to Scott, the moment of eruption was difficult to predict since it cannot always be seen as an act of rebellion; it is often somebody's failure to control themselves. Nevertheless, some structural features can be identified, making the transition from passive to active rebellion more likely.[64] When changes were carried out gradually, they did not affect everyone equally. On the contrary, when changes were a sudden attack against all daily routines, active rebellion became more probable.[65] Open rebellion became more likely when peasants had the feeling that changes violated their basic rights, when they interpreted something as an act of aggression or provocation, and when they felt humiliated or exploited.[66] During the first months of the 1930s, peasant uprisings in the USSR radicalized. Communists were beaten up, chased away, and killed. Peasants took back their grain, destroyed portraits, windows, and buildings.[67] Repression was another factor that influenced the probability of outright rebellion.[68] When the government made all other forms of resistance impossible, open resistance was the only option left.[69] Active rebellion mostly occurred during huge crises,[70] when there was nothing left to lose.[71] It was a sign of despair; it illustrated the failure of hidden forms of resistance.[72] These *infrapolitics* were not a substitute for open resistance or an outlet for their anger; they formed the basis for rebellions or revolutions that only erupted after a long, yet hidden struggle.[73]

The actions of today's peasant movements are in line with peasant traditions. Many of their actions are still locally oriented, such as the occupation of a McDonald's in France or the attack of offices of the multinational Cargill by East Indian peasants.[74] The objectives, however, supersede this regional focus. Peasant movements claim a transcending

[63] BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., p. 148.
[64] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 210, 217-219.
[65] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., p. 242.
[66] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* p. 219; BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 139, 148, 142-143, 150, 135.
[67] McDONALD, T. "A Peasant Rebellion…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 126, 128, 134-135.
[68] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., p. 299.
[69] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., p. 15; SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 216-217.
[70] WOLF, E. R. "On Peasant Rebellions". In: SHANIN, T. (ed.), *Peasants and peasant societies, selected readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 265-267.
[71] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 156, 190.
[72] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. xvi, 29, 37, 273, 297.
[73] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* pp. 184, 186-187, 227.
[74] EDELMAN, M. "Bringing the Moral Economy back in…" *Op.Cit*., p. 339.

peasant identity and make demands concerning world trade.[75] Today's peasants look for forms of organization that collaborate on a supra-regional scale and make full use of all recent communication techniques. Their opponents are global enterprises and organizations. Local and regional strategies no longer suffice. Meetings, forums, tribunals, and demonstrations need to have an international appeal and draw global attention.[76] The struggle is open, rather than hidden and disguised as it used to be, in a repressive local environment. *La Vía Campesina* is active on two fronts. On the one hand, they focus on the international agents of neo-liberal globalization. Protest and negotiations are combined: "negotiations with other agencies would be weak without the real threat that *Vía Campesina* can actually resort to militant forms of actions against them; conversely, purely 'expose and oppose' actions without intermittent negotiations would project the movement as unreasonable." On the other hand, the movement consists of several organizations that are active on local and regional scales. *La Vía Campesina* promotes local struggles for access to and control of productive resources such as land, credit, seeds, knowledge and water. It also helps marginalized people have a greater say in defining community and national agricultural policies. Media coverage is very important for the actions of *La Vía Campesina*. The Internet is a crucial aid that the movement employs and can control.

3. Failure and success of peasant movements

Historical research shows time and again both the power and the weakness of traditional peasant resistance. Peasants were organized in informal networks in which actions and resistance were mainly coordinated locally and formal leadership remained invisible. Authorities often described the resistance as instinctive, uncoordinated and irrational, partly as a consequence of their inability to think out of the box, and partly to avoid the obligation of giving in to their demands. Demands and goals were often specific and local; they aimed at safeguarding the survival of the family and relations within the local community. They were always linked to the material and physical needs of the peasantry. The fight also had a symbolic character; it was about the definition of justice and an interpretation of the past. Peasants struggled for the survival of both their physical existence and their cultural status.

---

[75] DESMARAIS, A. A. "The power of peasants…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 139-140.
[76] EDELMAN, M. "Bringing the Moral Economy back in…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 338-340.

Their targets also were almost exclusively local. Their fight was not part of a big project of change, but was a consequence of their fear of losing the world they knew. The techniques they employed were usually small-scale and hidden, so-called *everyday forms of resistance.* Workers of the land switched to active and open resistance only in times of great crisis. Historians have difficulty grasping the spirit of these forms of resistance. What was hidden behind their silence? What were the intentions of the peasants? How successful could such resistance be? Since the Soviet authorities succeeded in carrying out collectivization, it is not surprising that they described the peasants' resistance as a failure.[77] However, historians are not in agreement. According to McDermott, agriculture remained the Achilles heel of the Soviet state. Viola thinks the state's victory was a Pyrrhic victory. Due to collectivization, peasants became bitter and turned to long-term, passive resistance. Fitzpatrick argues that the state could not subject the Russian peasantry completely; peasants succeeded in limiting their contribution to the Soviet state to a minimum.

Through their *everyday forms of resistance*, peasants were definitely able to disturb the ambitions and plans of supra-local powers. Throughout history, peasants have frequently made unpopular measures impossible through the use of passive resistance. The efficiency of those forms of resistance increased as the peasantry succeeded in cooperating.[78] At the same time, the results of rural resistance must not be overestimated; they did not bring fundamental changes.[79] Most of the time, it was the landlord or the government that won the fight, even though they occasionally had to make some concessions. In general, peasantry victories (resulting from both active and passive resistance) were only marginal and temporary.[80] Despite their enormous *de facto* power, why were peasants not able to obtain more than some modest successes? Explanations refer to the weak or inferior position of the social group, their lack of resources, the nature of their work on the land, their desolation and disintegration.[81] If we return to the local level, the main scale of action of former peasant movements, successes were often

[77] For example, Graziosi states that Stalin's victory over the rebellious peasantry was complete in 1933. GRAZIOSI, A. *The Great Soviet Peasant War, Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917-1933*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 52, 56-57, 68-69.
[78] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. 296, 30-31, 303, xvii, 36, 38, 294, 298, 31.
[79] SCOTT, J. C. *Domination and the Arts…Op.Cit.,* p. 191.
[80] BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 140-142, 152; SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., pp. 212, 229, 183, 248, 250-255, 29-30.
[81] HOBSBAWM, E. "Peasants and Politics…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 26-28; HILL, I. "The End of the Russian Peasantry …" *Op.Cit*., p. 111; BERCE, Y.-M. "Rural unrest…" *Op.Cit*., p.141; WOLF, E. R. *Peasants…Op.Cit.,* p. 108.

significant. However, researchers can seldom detect whether the peasants considered their actions successful or not.[82] Critical minds such as Eric Wolf and Eric Hobsbawm often repeated that peasant resistance was unsuccessful and ultimately dying out in the tumultuous twentieth century. They were caught up in the social changes that they tried to fight, both in the forms of capitalism and communism.

The peasants of the twenty-first century have broken with this past. The symbolic fight is not anymore about the interpretation of the past, but of the future. Their fight is no longer directed against the local lord or the repressive state, but against an unfair world order. The patterns of peasants in resistance, based on historical cases of rebellion, need to be revised. Contrary to many expectations predicting the end of the peasantry, a further marginalization of rural areas and of the peasant population does not mark the final collapse of peasant resistance, but the start of a new type of autonomous peasant organizations. Based on a proud and universal peasant identity and supported by the most recent forms of media, communication and action, this movement combines a connection to the land with self-conscious world citizenship. There is no need for external leadership, but alliances with other alter-globalization movements are necessary.

The capitalist world-system has historically expanded and transformed in coexistence with new frontier-zones or zones of contact.[83] The processes of interaction that emanate from these contacts have been challenged by pressures for incorporation into the modern world-system. Throughout history, peasant societies and rural zones have represented geographically diverse frontier-zones. Rural communities have never been able to escape the pressures of incorporation once they came into contact with the new world-system. In response, they have been developing strategies for survival and resistance, articulated towards expanding state power, expanding market relations, class struggle, and ethno-cultural identity. Over time, the scales upon which these social power relations are expressed have been widening and multiplying, and they have become increasingly interdependent. Vulnerability, the link between risk and the precariousness of people's livelihood, has always been part of the peasant's existence. A diversification of income and coping strategies (individual, in the household and in the village) has always been the primary answer. However, a continuing erosion of the family basis of livelihoods has created new and more massive forms of vulnerability. This has eroded former

[82] SCOTT, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak…Op.Cit*., p. 258.
[83] VANHAUTE, E. "Peasants, peasantries and (de)peasantization in the capitalist world-system" *Op.Cit*.

household and village security mechanisms and has affected their ability to overcome short-term economic stress. Three decades of economic liberalization and institutional restructuring, resulting in multiple and intensified involvement in markets - for commodities, credit, technology, land, and all kinds of services - have created growing and interconnected vulnerabilities and new risks. New forms of organized peasant reactions such as *La Vía Campesina* try to formulate an answer to the predominantly neoliberal mode of food production.[84] Food sovereignty, control over one's own food production and food markets, is put forward as an alternative for food security, a concept agnostic about food production systems. A call for localizing food power implies support for domestic food production and the promotion of a return to smallholder farming.[85] At the same time, peasant's rights are now defined as a set of "transgressive rights", challenging the primacy of the nation-state and calling for international and universal (human rights) spaces.[86] The local has been reinvented and redefined as part of global struggles. This clarifies how the present material and ideological struggles for "peasant spaces" put the peasantry in the center of the twenty-first century's systemic crisis. The peasants of the twenty-first century have taught us an important lesson: they are not a redundant relict, but a force of change directed at the future.

[84] PATEL, R. "International agrarian restructuring and the practical ethics of peasant movement solidarity". *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. vol.41, n.1-2, 2006, pp. 84-85.
[85] HOLT-GIMÉNEZ, E. "The World food crisis. What's behind it and what can we do about it?" *Food First. Institute for Food and Development Policy (Policy Brief nr 16),* 2008, pp.13-14.
[86] PATEL, R. "Transgressing rights. La Via Campesina's call for food sovereignty". *Feminist Economics*. vol. 13, n.1, 2007, pp. 87-93; EDELMAN, M. "Bringing the Moral Economy back in…" *Op.Cit*., pp. 331-345; McMICHAEL, P. "Peasants make their own history, but not just as they please…". *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 8, n.2-3, 2008, pp. 205-228.

Peasants and the revolution of 1781 in the viceroyalty of New Granada (Colombia)

Héctor J. Martínez Covaleda

In late May 1781, 20 thousand armed men gathered in the town of Zipaquirá to invade the capital of New Granada, Santa Fe de Bogotá, located half a day's ride away. They came from Villa del Socorro and other regions throughout the eastern part of New Granada. But behind them and in other war fronts, the ruling Viceroyalty had also taken up arms. The plebian rebels called themselves the *Comuneros* (the Commoners). A couple of weeks later, on June 8, the Governing Board of the Viceroyalty accepted 35 "capitulations" written by the Comuneros' elites and the plebeian forces reluctantly returned home. While further uprisings and an attempted reorganization to reinvade the capital took place, the Revolution had received a mortal wound after this demobilization. The capitulations were quickly nullified by the King, Charles III of Spain, and the most prominent popular leaders such as the peasant José Antonio Galán and the weaver Isidro Molina were executed or forced into exile. Who were the men that gathered in Zipaquirá and what were they looking for?

A historiographical balance

The historiography of the Revolution of 1781, better known as the Revolution of the Comuneros, is vast.[1] However, the book entitled *The*

[1] The following authors claim that it was a pro-independence movement: BRICEÑO, Manuel. *Los Comuneros. Historia de la insurrección de 1781*. Bogotá: Imprenta de Silvestre y Compañía, 1880; RODRÍGUEZ PLATA, Horacio. *Los comuneros*. Bogotá: Editorial ABC, 1950; ACOSTA CARDENAS, Pablo E. *Los Comuneros*. Bogota: Editorial Minerva, 1945; POSADA, Francisco. *El movimiento revolucionario de los comuneros*. Bogotá: Siglo XXI Editores, 1971; FRIEDA, Juan. "El levantamiento comunero como etapa hacia la independencia". In: *Rebelión comunera de 1781*, *Documentos*. 2 Tomos. Bogotá: Instituto colombiano de Cultura, 1981; ISRAEL, Jonathan I. *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights 1750-1790*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. The authors below argue that it was anti-tax movement: BAFIOS, Angel Camacho. *Sublevación de los* comuneros *en el virreinato de Nueva Granada*.

People and the King: The Comunero Revolution in Colombia by the American historian John Leddy Phelan, published in Castilian for the first time in 1980, has become the highest authority on the subject.[2] For Phelan, the Revolution of 1781 was neither a precedent for the war of independence of Colombia from the Spanish crown (1810-1824) nor a social Revolution, as other historians have contended. It was a "protest" of the elites of New Granada who sought to restore the traditional form of government shared between them and the King of Spain, based on an "unwritten constitutional" government. According to the author, after the Revolution, things returned, with some variations, to normal. For Phelan, the Revolution of 1781 did not exist; it was a kind of aristocratic plot that forced the monarchy to go back to the traditional form of government and processing of taxes. It was nothing but a parenthesis in the realm of a long-lasting regularity. By contrast, we argue in this article that the Revolution of 1781 was essentially a peasant and plebeian revolt, and represented important features of a modern Revolution that sought to break with traditional ways of doing politics.

We share the view of Frank Safford and Marco Palacios who argue that Phelan "presents the Comuneros rebellion like a minuet between *Criollos* elites and officials of the Crown".[3] Notably absent in the historiography of the Revolution are the peasants, the bulk of the inhabitants of New Granada, although several studies have revealed their importance during the eighteenth century in all regions of the Viceroyalty.[4] Expressions

---

Seville: Tip. Gimínez y Vacas, 1925); SALMORAL, Manuel Lucena (ed.) *Tres historias testimoniales sobre la revolución comunera*. Bogotá:Banco de la República, 1982; LYNCH, John. Las revoluciones hispanoamericanas 1808-1826. Barcelona: Ariel Historia, 2001. Finally, these authors believe it was a social revolution that was betrayed: LIÉVANO AGUIRRE, Indalecio. *Los grandes conflictos sociales y económicos de nuestra historia*. Vol.1 y 2. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1972; ARCINIEGAS, Germán. *Los comuneros*. Bogotá: Ed. Bedout, 1980 [1938]; ARCINIEGAS, Germán. "20,000 comuneros hacia Santa Fe". Presentación. Complemento a la Historia Extensa de Colombia Vol. XIV. Bogotá: Plaza y Janes, 1988; GARCÍA, Antonio. *Los comuneros. 1781-1981*. Bogotá: Plaza e Janes, 1986.

[2] PHELAN, John Leddy. *El pueblo y el Rey. La revolución comunera en Colombia, 1781*. Bogotá:, ed. Universidad del Rosario, Colombia, 2009.

[3] PALACIOS, Marco y SAFFORD, Frank. *Colombia: País fragmentado, sociedad dividida*. Bogotá: ed. Norma, 2002.

4 FALS BORDA, Orlando. *El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá; bases sociológicas e históricas para una reforma agraria*. Bogotá: Ediciones Documentos Colombianos, 1957; TOVAR PINZÓN, Hermes. *Grandes empresas agrícolas y ganaderas. Su desarrollo en el siglo XVIII*. Bogotá: CIEC, 1980; KALMANOVITZ, Salomón. *Economía y Nación. Una breve historia de Colombia*. BOGOTÁ: Ed. Siglo XXI, 1985; BEJERANO, Jesús Antonio. *Ensayos de historia agraria colombiana*. Bogotá: Fondo Ed. Cerec, 1987; MEISEL ROCA, Adolfo (1998), "Esclavitud, mestizaje y hacienda en la Provincia de Cartagena 1533-1851". In: BELL LEMUS, Gustavo (ed.). *El Caribe colombiano*. Barranquilla: Ediciones

such as "massive displacement of peasants" or "peasant Revolution" are the few references to this social group coined in the historiography.[5] Posada, a Marxist historian, does not mention them when referring to "the people"; he refers only to the "*Común*" that sought national independence.[6] Phelan only views the peasants, such as the Comunero Captain José Antonio Galán, as subordinates of the elites.[7] In his analysis, the peasants and other plebians did not exist as stakeholders in the revolt. The absence of peasants in the historiography of the Comuneros is an incomprehensible omission. Yet it may be explained by two reasons: first, the attitude towards history that privileges only elites as forming the "national" consciousness and, second, by the difficulty of finding the fingerprints of the peasants in the documents. Their absence in the analysis of the Revolution has led to misunderstandings and errors of periodization, highlighting only the political project of the elites and voiding the importance of subaltern groups.

References in the historiography emphasize the urban character of the Revolution of 1781, but they barely explore the social composition of the city and do not inquire about the presence of peasants in it or what their characteristics were. It is often forgotten that the cities and towns, which was the site of the "republic of whites", had a huge rural hinterland where most of the population gradually moved and worked. The lack of attention to peasants in Latin American historiography marks a clean break from the historiography on Revolutions. For example, historians have highlighted the role of indigenous-peasant uprisings in Peru and Upper Peru in 1780 and the independence movement and the 1910 Revolution in Mexico.[8] Yet the role of peasants could be understood better if, following Thompson and Rude,[9] they were observed in the dual capacity of producers and consumers, giving

---

Uninorte, Barranquilla, 1998, pp. 69-137; COLMENARES, Germán."El tránsito a sociedades campesinas de dos sociedades esclavistas en la Nueva Granada: Cartagena y Popayán, 1780-1850". *Revista Huellas*, Universidad del Norte, No. 29, 1990; CLAVIJO OCAMPO, Hernán. *Formación histórica de las elites locales en el Tolima, Tomo I, 1600-1813*. Colombia: Biblioteca Banco Popular, Colombia, 1993.

[5] ARCINIEGAS, Germán. "20,000 comuneros hacia Santa Fe…" *Op.Cit*.

[6] POSADA, Francisco. *El movimiento revolucionario de los comuneros*. *Op.Cit.*

[7] PHELAN, John Leddy. *El pueblo y el Rey.Op.Cit.*

[8] GOLTE, Jürgen. *Repartos y rebeliones. Túpac-Amaru y las contradicciones de la economía colonial*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1980; TUTINO, John. *De la insurrección a la revolución en México: las bases sociales de la violencia agraria, 1750-1940*. México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1990; FLORESCANO, Enrique. *El nuevo pasado mexicano*. México, D. F.: Cal y Arena, 1995; VAN YOUNG, Eric. *La "otra" rebelión. La lucha por la independencia de México, 1810-1821*. México: FCE, 2006.

[9] THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. "´Lucha de clases sin clases?´, Tradición, revuelta y consciencia de clase: estudios sobre la crisis de la sociedad preindustrial. Prólogo de Josep Fontana. Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 1975; RUDÉ, George. *El rostro de la multitud*. Con Introducción de Harvey J. Kaye. Valencia, Espanã: Biblioteca Historia Social, 2000.

them space for "horizontal" action with the other subaltern sectors of the cities.

Phelan's contributions on the involvement of the *Criolla* (Creole) elites in the Revolution are important, but do not account for the contribution of the "people" by itself and do not value the participation of plebeians, except in their response to the charisma of the patricians and as followers of the ideology of the elites. The "people" only exist as a mass of support, sharing the same views and the "traditional" ideology of elites. To the extent that the author ignores the independence of subordinate sectors in any act or thought, he is forced to explain the Revolution as a conspiratorial and manipulative act of Creole elites, despite the deeply popular and inclusive character of the movement. To Phelan, the only social groups relevant are the high segments of society.

This perspective is unilateral since it ignores one of the magnetic poles of culture and politics in the Old Regime where, in the words of E.P. Thompson, a "bipolar force field" existed and where the patricians/plebeians model was "an ideological force in its own right."[10] Phelan's position, to use the expression of Ranahit Guha,[11] is part of an "elitist historiography" which shares with conservative historiography the presumption that the formation of the nation and its consciousness was exclusively a task for the elites, embodied in their personalities or ideas. A separate analysis of the behavior of one of these two segments in the Revolution provides little explanation of the motivations and actions of the totality of those who participated in the mass movement of 1781.

Phelan's work is focused on the protest of the elites against the breaking of the "unwritten constitution" between them and the King. In our opinion, however, this break in relation to the "new" sales tax that initially provoked popular revolt did not exist, among other reasons because it had the acceptance of the councils and the *Real Audiencia,* controlled by resident elites. Reducing the reason for the Revolution to a customs problem ignores the deep socio-economic changes that had occurred during the eighteenth century that transformed the traditional transactions between elites, the monarchy and the plebeians. Based on the works of Liévano, Aguilera, Rausch and Garcia,[12] we argue that by widening the study of the

[10] THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. "Patricios y plebeyos". In: THOMPSON, E.P. *Costumbres en común*. Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 1995.
[11] GUHA, Ranahit. *Las voces de la historia y otros estudios subalternos*. Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 2002.
[12] LIÉVANO AGUIRRE, Indalecio. *Los grandes conflictos sociales y económicos de nuestra historia*. *Op.Cit.*; AGUILERA PEÑA, Mario. Los comuneros: guerra social y lucha

Revolution geographically and socially, we may observe that latent conflicts between elites and commoners were brought out into the open, especially when slaves and Indians were incorporated into the alliance. The participation of peasants in the Revolution of 1781 is still begging for investigation.

Taxation does matter

The historiographical perspective that fixes its attention exclusively on the ideological aspects of the Revolution of 1781 loses focus on the basic aspects of economic relations such as the disposable income of consumers to acquire material goods. In particular, little attention has been given to taxation as a determining factor in consumption and how it influenced the minds of producers and consumers who participated in collective actions. A fact which illustrates the importance of the material aspects of the Revolution in 1781 is the predominance of plebeian demands in the 35 capitulations referring to strictly economic issues, ranging from pricing and the number of lines per folio in the marriage records for the "poor" to the elimination of state monopolies.

The impacts of taxation are assumed as given and are accepted as a reason for dissatisfaction, but they have nevertheless been little explored. The motives for the Spanish state to impose such taxes and the perceptions of the taxpayers are ignored. The analysis is reduced solely to a problem of processing and legitimacy, that is, only about who should impose taxation. As the English historian Anthony McFarlane argues, the 1781 conflict went beyond an "abstract constitutional issue" and covered various local economic and political motivations. [13] Most of the historiography about the Comuneros omits the study of the content and impact of taxation reform, and in particular, what peasants thought and felt since they were precisely those who mobilized during the Revolution and, in practice, imposed the settlement in Zipaquirá. The problem was not so much the *legitimacy* as the *impact* of taxes on consumption and production.

Stanley and Barbara Stein, for example, explain how Charles III looked to the American colonies in search of new resources because it was

---

anticolonial. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1985; RAUSCH, Jane M. "Los comuneros olvidados: la insurrección de 1781 en los llanos del Casanare". *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*. vol. XXXIII, n.41, Banco de la República, Colombia, 1996; GARCÍA, Antonio. *Los comuneros. Antecedentes de la revolución de Independencia*. Bogotá: Ed. Desde Abajo, 2010.

[13] McFARLANE, Anthony. *Colombia antes de la independencia*. Bogotá: Banco de la República-Ancora Editores, 1997.

impossible to increase the tax burden on the population in the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, Spaniards had reacted to attempts to increase taxes in 1766 through an armed popular movement, the Esquilache riots.[14] Indeed, the question of taxation condenses the policy, the purposes of states and the power relations between the various existing social groups. Tax revenues were the life source of the royalty, the bureaucracy, the army and the church. As the purpose of Charles III was to strengthen his state to finance dynastic wars, he was forced to tighten taxation in the colonies. Strong government and high taxes were synonymous in this imperial project.

It was in the context of the inter-imperial conflict between Spain, France and England in the eighteenth century when Charles III ordered a series of fiscal and administrative reforms for Spain's colonies in order to reconquer and establish the so-called "Second Empire".[15] These reforms affected all the Spanish colonies in the Americas and, in the case of New Granada, were synthesized in the provisions of the *New Plant* which included an increase in the tax burden and the replacement of former officials in the agencies of colonial power by "new men ", loyal to the king's project. To enable these reforms, the Minister of the Council of the Indies, José de Gálvez, sent three "visitors" to Spanish America: José Arreche to Peru, Garcia Pizarro to Quito and Gutiérrez de Piñeres to New Granada. Gálvez himself had been the Intendant of New Spain (México) between 1765 and 1772.

The first tax provision applied by the visitor-regent Piñeres in New Granada was a higher sales taxes, known as the Barlovento tax. But he never imagined that this tax would spark one of the deepest and most significant popular revolts in the history of Spanish America in the eighteenth century. In early March 1781, the tax was promulgated. On March 16, in Villa del Socorro, in the region of Guanentá, located in the northeast of New Granada, more than 300 kilometers from the capital, a mutiny against the tax began, headed by poor women and accompanied by peasants, weavers and butchers, which would effectively begin the Revolution of 1781.

The role of this tax as source of the Revolution has been sorely underestimated and those who have understood it that way have been

[14] STEIN, Stanley y Barbara. *El apogeo del imperio. España y la Nueva España en la era de Carlos III, 1759-1789*. Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2005.
[15] DELGADO, Josep María. *Dinámicas imperiales (1650-1796). España, América y Europa en el cambio institucional del sistema colonial español*. Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2007; FONTANA, Josep. *Ponencia Carmona*. España, 2011.

identified as *fiscalistas*.[16] Those responsible for coining this term are the same authors who have highlighted the importance of tax issues in the Revolution, yet they concluded too easily that the objectives of the collective mobilization were merely of a reformist nature. Despite these studies, little or nothing has been researched about the explicit impact that this tax had on farmers and consumers. The old sales tax amounted to 2% and another 2% was added with the Barlovento tax. This undoubtedly generated dissatisfaction but did not cause, by itself, the Revolution. Phelan argues that if there had been the traditional mediation of the Creole oligarchies that tax and others would have gone through some adjustments. An argument that may have strengthened this opinion is that this percentage was the lowest in all the American colonies, which ranged from 6% in Peru and Cuba to 8% in Mexico. But we must consider that the greatest impact was not generated by the level of the tax, which was comparatively modest, but the impact of the instruments and regulations accompanying it on which nothing has been investigated.

In fact, the rate that was published was a fixed monetary amount that would be charged on each product. This feature made the *ad valorem* value actually applied to oscillate depending on market prices. In the case of cotton, the main peasant crop from Guanentá and Socorro, the rate was three quarts per “arroba” of cotton "branch" which theoretically should have increased the tax from 2% to 4%. For cotton derivatives, however, the tax was also applied to all inputs in the value chain. Thus, another 4% was charged on the sewing threads, 4% on fabrics and 4% on the "clothing of the earth." In theory, the final consumers to purchase a shirt, for example, would have to pay the 4% tax and therefore the price would be increased only by that percentage. However, this tax would accumulate on input prices at each stage of production. We estimate that the price of a shirt actually increased by 8.9%[17] and not 4%. This is what is known in economic theory as "pyramiding" or "cumulative translation of taxes." In addition, the sales tax was charged as many times as the product was traded.[18]

A parallel anti-evasion tool, the *tornaguía*, which was in addition to the existing safeguard known as the "guide" was designed that made it impossible to avoid paying the tax. The Council of El Socorro understood this when they told the Viceroy Manuel A. Flórez, brazenly, that one of the

---

[16] See Note 2.
[17] This calculation is made on the value added at each stage of production.
[18] Juan Diaz de Herrera. Consultation on tax collection. Visitor Piñeres. In: FRIEDE, Juan ed., *Rebelión comunera de 1781. Documentos*. 2 Tomos. Bogotá: Colcultura, 1981, p.881. See also AGUILERA PEÑA, Mario. *Los comuneros: guerra social y lucha anticolonial*. *Op.Cit.,* p.84.

biggest problems of the tax reform was "the increase on regulation that left them [the poor] no relief or discretion to escape the contribution".[19] The sales tax was thus quite onerous and threatened the continuity of production chains and consumption of the poor. This was enough for the peasants, artisans and consumers throughout New Granada to protest. But this only happened in El Socorro.

Prior to the escalation of the new tax policy, policies for state monopolies were modified, specifically for tobacco. In addition to passing the lease system monopoly, traditionally monopolized by municipal elites and the "noble" families of Santa Fe, to a system of direct administration, operated by employees of the Crown, they wanted to monopolize not only all marketing areas, but the production of tobacco leaves. From 1776, at the behest of the Santa Fe elites, the tobacco growing area was limited to four areas of New Granada, with their corresponding areas of consumption. This involved a significant reduction in the area and number of farmers. The *cosecheros* (planters) were small peasants who before the reforms had benefited from the freedom to engage in this economic activity. To enforce the measure, a network of "mounted police" (*guardas*), usually Spaniards, fulfilling the task of burning leaves and imposing penalties and fines, was created. These guards did not report to the authorities of the town council, but directly to the state monopoly. The presence of this mounted police was considered an attack on municipal authorities and on peasants and women who suffered the bulk of repression. This was enough for peasants to protest throughout New Granada. However, only peasants from the area of influence of El Socorro did.

The causes of the Revolution

What were the causes of the Revolution? Opinions are divided and often historians confuse the causes, objectives and consequences. Some argue that it was the increase in the tax burden and therefore the objectives of the revolt were reformist; others argue that "the people" gathered with their elites to seek national independence and, therefore, suggest that this movement was a necessary step in the process of building the Colombian Republic or, as in the case of some Marxists, it was an inevitable and necessary stage to national independence and towards a future socialist Revolution; others argue it was a movement of the Creole elites to restore the "co-government" with royal authorities.

[19] Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Santa Fe, 663A, *Cabildo* to Viceroy Flórez, Socorro, May 18, 1781, 9s.

While recognizing the valuable contributions of the historiography on this subject, however, some historians confuse causes with results and therefore omit the intermediate stages of the analysis, i.e., the dynamics of the Revolution. There is a tendency to characterize the Revolution in terms of one specific time, disregarding the whole revolutionary process. To understand this process, it is necessary to analyze the actors, alliances and counter-alliances, the reaction and counter-reaction of the participating forces, changes in the political and military situations, and the geographic and social expansion of the Revolution at different time points. Almost without exception, most authors generally analyze the period from the first riots until the completion of the Revolution (though some suggest that the origins lie in the beginning of elite involvement) yet they privilege a particular time period in the process to back their conclusions.

There are those who emphasize the first riots, which lead them to characterize the Comuneros as a movement that merely sought to overthrow unjust taxation measures. Others have emphasized the pact between elites and the government, and joint participation in the demobilization and repression of popular sectors, which thus represent the seeds of "treason" of the elite to the social Revolution and war. Others, like Phelan, turned their attention to the time of the issuance of the capitulations on June 5, where, supposedly, the royal authorities and the leaders of the Comuneros reached an agreement. This author also makes a particular reading of the capitulations that leads him to see a constitutional arrangement to restore the old semi-autonomous form of government and, thus, concludes that the Revolution was "conservative."

Yet the causes do not necessarily determine the outcome and vice versa. Teleological perspectives, such as Phelan's, explain the origins from the results, going back in time to explain the outcome. While each stage is determined by the preceding one, each also has its own characteristics, scope and independence. The causes, whether they are economic or ideological, for example, do not explain the dynamics of war and the results of it. The result is therefore not a logical consequence of the causes. In the same way that the outcomes of the confrontation were not predictable for its actors, the causes cannot be simply derived from the outcomes. Francesco Benigno, for instance, who studies the European Revolutions of the seventeenth century, suggests that historians often emulate what happens in certain crime novels: the detective is focused only on the information that leads directly to the criminal, discarding indirect information and

causalities.[20] Yet the criminal did not always intend to kill the victim and sometimes he was not the only perpetrator. It is thus necessary to investigate the revolutionary process and dynamics in more depth and not simply derive them from the results.

Given the context of the Bourbon reforms, it is not very difficult to explain why the Revolution of 1781 spread to most of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. The tricky part, paraphrasing Jürgen Golte,[21] is to explain the reasons why the revolt began in a specific region instead of starting in all the places where the reforms were applied. This is an attempt to give some plausible explanations of why the Revolution began in the Guanentá region, specifically in Villa del Socorro and Villa San Gil. Economic activity in El Socorro and northeastern New Granada (Guanentá) was characterized by several interconnected elements: first, the region recorded a high population growth, high population density and profound changes in social composition during the eighteenth century. Second, it was an important and dynamic agricultural region, mainly exploited by peasants (small and medium landowners or lease holders in a precarious sharecropping system). Third, the industrial region of New Granada was also located in Guanentá, operated by artisan-peasants and where a substantial part of the population was engaged in the manufacture of weaving threads and fabrics from cotton and other goods made with other natural fibers, allowing a wide division and specialization of labour not possessed by other regions. Tax reform and policy for state monopolies fractured productive and commercial chains and called into question the precarious balance that ensured colonial institutions.

The population of Villa del Socorro was 95% white and *mestizo* ("free of all colors") which contrasts with the rest of New Granada which registered only 73% in this respect.[22] Unlike Peru and Mexico, there was a relatively small indigenous presence. The prevalence of whites and mestizos involved a substantial change in economic and social relations from other areas: since they did not belong to the segments of "caste" Indians or black slaves, they could not be compelled to perform forced labor or to pay tribute, which means that they had a relatively high degree of personal freedom, especially the landowning peasants. Non-owners entered in agreement with the landowners that involved a frequent process of negotiation between the parties regarding the quantity and type of ground rent to pay. Additionally, the population of the region was also composed of

[20] BENIGNO, Francesco. *Espejos de la revolución: conflicto e identidad política en la Europa moderna*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2000.
[21] GOLTE, Jürgen. *Repartos y rebeliones*. *Op.Cit.*
[22] McFARLANE, Anthony. *Colombia antes de la independencia*. Op.Cit. Appendix A.

workers (day labourers or peons) and artisans who originally came from the class of landless peasants. As Ospina Vásquez argues, the presence of a large group of mestizos in the region, not culturally far from the white population, allowed an early, though not definitive, balance to be obtained between these socio-racial segments (or estates). In fact, the participation of poor whites and mestizos in local politics was more active.[23]

The economic base of El Socorro and Guanentá was agriculture, which recorded an accelerated growth in the eighteenth century demonstrated in the evolution of the collected tithes.[24] The main crops in the region were corn (the staple food of the region), tobacco, cotton and sugar cane, among others; the first three crops were anchored in peasant economies. There was also cattle raising developed in some large farms (*haciendas*), but landed units were neither comparatively large nor continuous and the livestock obtained was not abundant. Neither were there large plantation estates. However, between 1776 and 1778, the cultivation of tobacco was banned in most of the region of Guanentá, including in El Socorro, Mogotes and San Gil, which decreased the level of cultivated leaves, but it continued being planted "illegally" throughout the region. The decline of tobacco was offset by the growth of the cotton crop to meet the growing activity of spinners and weavers; peasants found an alternative means of livelihood through these activities. The economic and social dynamics, and the livelihood of El Socorro, became dependent on textile production with multiple social, production and trade linkages both "forwards and backwards".[25]

According to research by Alvarez, Raymond, Brungardt and Ospina Vásquez, among others, there were two forms of the organization of textile work units in the region of Guanentá that developed in the middle of the eighteenth century: "home work" (the *putting out system*) and independent "domestic work". In the first, the trader was the coordinating center of the process; he provided the raw material (cotton or yarn) and marketed the final items obtained from the workshops through long distance trading.[26] In

---

[23] As OSPINA VÁSQUEZ, Luis has argued in *Industria y protección en Colombia, 1810-1930*. Medellin: FAES, Medellín, 1976, p.45.

[24] BRUNGARDT, Maurice F. "Tithe production and pattern of economic change in central Colombia, 1764-1833". PhD.Thesis. University of Texas at Austin, 1974.

[25] This concept was taken up by the German economist Albert Hirschman who developed a theory of linkages as a sequence of investment decisions. See HIRSCHMAN, Albert. *La estrategia del desarrollo económico*. México: FCE, 1982.

[26] ÁLVAREZ OROZCO, René. "Producción manufacturera colonial en la Provincia del Socorro, Colombia: centros de producción y mercados". Diálogos Revista Electrónica de Historia, vol. 4, núm. 2, noviembre-marzo, 2004, Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica; ÁLVAREZ OROZCO, René. "Artesanos y producción manufacturera en la Nueva

"domestic work", the producer acquired raw materials from the market and traded the result of their work directly.[27] Those units were operated by the "poor people" of the region, who actually owned their tools, but whose income was perceived either as a type of self-paid "salary" (a term used by Chayanov[28]) or as piecework by merchants. Income earned was quite low. Yet it was a new type of rural economic activity that contributed to the emergence of an incipient working class in the second half of the eighteenth century. Not by chance, one of these workers in El Socorro was the weaver Isidro Molina, one of the leaders of the Revolution.

While there were also medium-sized workshops with significant levels of production, accumulation and specialization, it would incorrect to say that there were manufacturing companies or factories in Guanentá. However, it is clear that there was the deployment of an industrialization process that energized production, created new social actors and altered relations between different social groups. The presence of "industry before industrialization" as De Vries conceptualizes for the European case,[29] led to poor rural families intensifying industrial labor to produce for the market. This concept disputes the idea of the long existence of a strong separation between the countryside and the city. There were various routes of industrial progress that did not necessarily involve the development of factories[30] and one of them was evident in Villa del Socorro.

Granada: la industria textil en la Provincia del Socorro, siglos XVIII y XIX". Procesos Históricos. Revista Semestral de Historia, Arte y Ciencias Sociales. Mérida-Venezuela, N. 10, Julio 2006; RAYMOND, Pierre; BAYONA, Beatriz Bayona y TORRES, Humberto. Historia del algodón en Santander. Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1982; RAYMOND, Pierre; BAYONA, Beatriz. Vida y muerte del algodón y los tejidos santandereanos: historia económica y tecnológica de la desaparición del cultivo y de la industria casera del algodón. Bogotá: Ecoe, 1987; BRUNGARDT, Maurice F. Tithe production and pattern of economic change in central Colombia. Op.Cit., BRUNGARDT, Maurice F. "The economy of Colombia in the late colonial and early national periods". In: FISHER, John R., KUETHE, Allan J. and McFARLANE, Antony. eds., *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*. Baton Rouge: Lousiana State University; OSPINA VÁSQUEZ, Luis. *Industria y protección en Colombia, 1810-1930*. Medellin: FAES, Medellín, 1976.

[27] For theoretical reflections and how these systems operated in Peru and Mexico consult MIÑO GRIJALVA, Manuel. *Obrajes y tejedores de Nueva España, 1700-1810*. Madrid: ICI-IEF, 1990; ESCANDELL TUR, Neus. *Producción y comercio de tejidos coloniales: los obrajes y chorrillos del Cusco, 1570-1820*. Cusco-Perú: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos, 1997.

[28] CHAYANOV, Alexander. *The Theory of the Peasant Economy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986[1925].

[29] DE VRIES, J. *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Demand and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[30] For a balance of this discussion and its basic literature, consult FONTANA, Josep. *La historia dels homes*. Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2000; MENDELS, Franklin F. "Agricultura e industria rural en el Flandes del siglo XVIII". In: KRIEDTE, Peter;

The basic objective of this activity was to supplement the income of the peasant family unit, involving work done mainly by women and children. As the development of spinning and weaving was essentially a labor of subsistence and low cost, "poor people" in all conditions, that is, mestizos, poor whites, free mulattoes and others were involved. It was, in fact, an activity of social integration, which explains why it was possible to quickly construct a "horizontal" alliance of the crowd, to use the terminology of E.P. Thompson, in the Revolution of 1781. The peasants, the vast majority of the population in the region, maintained strong links with the cottage industry in terms of production units supported by family labor. This was the case of the father of the future plebian "Captain-Commander," José Antonio Galán, who was white, Spanish by birth, the owner of a small plot of land dedicated to growing snuff tobacco while the women and children of his family were occupied in spinning cotton. During his childhood, J.A. Galan was probably a cotton spinner and an assistant to his father in snuff tobacco production. At the time of the Revolution, however, José Antonio was a peasant (*labrador*).[31]

This constellation of economic and social dynamics was articulated with the economic policy of the Empire. The Guanentá region was one of the most affected by the policy that eradicated the cultivation of tobacco areas. First, sowing was banned in Villa del Socorro and then in San Gil. Between 1778 and 1780, the citizens from Mogotes, Charalá and Simacota, located a few miles from El Socorro, engaged in violent protests against the guards of the state monopoly.[32] These parishes were inhabited by a small number of people, mostly peasants and artisans, who had close family ties with the inhabitants of the neighbouring parishes. Family networks were thus the organizational basis of the revolt of the plebeians. The peasant and plebeian mobilization began in rural Guanentá and gradually moved to the urban centers of the same region (El Socorro and San Gil), then the capital of the Province (Tunja) and finally to the capital of the Viceroyalty, Santa Fe. It was therefore a clear move from the countryside to the city.[33]

MEDICK, Hans; SCHLUMBOHM, Jurgen eds. *Industrialización antes de la industrialización*. Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 1986.

[31] Statement of José A. Galan, Socorro, October 18, 1781. In: FRIEDE, Juan ed., *Rebelión comunera de 1781*. *Op.Cit*., p.579. See also LIÉVANO AGUIRRE, Indalecio. *Los grandes conflictos sociales y económicos de nuestra historia*. *Op.Cit*., p.458 and ÁLVAREZ OROZCO, René. "Producción manufacturera colonial en la Provincia del Socorro, Colombia…" *Op.Cit*., p 14.

[32] ACOSTA CARDENAS, Pablo E. *Los Comuneros*. *Op.Cit*., p.91; AGUILERA PEÑA, Mario. *Los comuneros: guerra social y lucha anticolonial*. *Op.Cit*.

[33] GARCÍA, Antonio. *Los comuneros*. *Op.Cit*.

The trigger for the Revolution was the convergence of imperial policy towards tobacco (crop eradication) and the tax policy on cotton (Barlovento tax) in the same space and time, which affected the livelihoods of the workers, peasants and artisans. As the cotton harvest was for plebeians the "last livelihood and discretion they had to go through life," the imposition of the Barlovento tax meant misery for growers and spinners. However, the complaint was articulated together with the prior prohibition on planting tobacco.[34] While it is plausible to highlight poverty and its deepening as one of the causes of the revolt of the *commoners*, a term frequently mentioned in the documents of the time, this problem is not enough to explain a collective action of large magnitude. It is necessary to consider other factors that explain why the plebians opted for revolt rather than petitioning the authorities or accepting this condition, as they had for centuries.

Theda Skocpol developed the idea that there is a latent or potential subversive in every poor person and that certain organizational conditions and the existence of "political cadres" from the elites can lead to their collective explosion.[35] Yet this argument is difficult to sustain. Moral economists, such as E. P. Thompson and James Scott, have more convincingly argued that peasants and other popular sectors were jealous of their livelihood and security, which became a moral imperative. Those who attempted to curtail it became victims of their anger even if it was perceived that a part of the community did not comply with the implied covenant established with the elites (and the King) to protect them. In New Granada, unlike the hunger riots of the eighteenth century in Europe,[36] popular revolt was not directed towards the control of food prices, but the maintenance of tax rates. The same peasant leader José Antonio Galán, stated in October 1781, during his interrogation that ended with his execution, that they agreed that they had to pay the sales tax, but only "two percent, which was as natural a right as to die".[37] This was an affirmation of the traditional

[34] AGI, Santa Fe, 663A, "Testimony of the first book ...", Villas de Santa Cruz and San Gil, March 24, 1781.
[35] TUTINO, John. *De la insurrección a la revolución en México*. *Op.Cit.*
[36] THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. "La economía «moral» de la multitud en la Inglaterra del siglo XVIII". In: THOMPSON, E.P. *Tradición, revuelta y consciencia de clase…Op.Cit.*, RUDÉ, George. *El rostro de la multitud* Rude, 2000; VILAR, Pierre. *Hidalgos, amotinados y guerrilleros. Pueblo y poderes en la historia de España*. Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, 1982.
[37] Statement Galán, Socorro, October 18, 1781. In: ARCINIEGAS, Germán, ed. *CHEC-Documentos*: Complemento a la Historia Extensa de Colombia Vol. XIV. Bogotá, 1988, p.253. See also BRICEÑO, Manuel. *Los Comuneros. Op.Cit.,* Documentary Appendix, No. XXV.

rebellious culture of plebeians.[38] Indeed, this phrase precedes the expression of American Benjamin Franklin who in 1789 said: "In this world, you cannot be sure of anything, except death and taxes."[39]

The deepening of poverty was not sufficient grounds for a widespread revolt to arise. The right to "subsistence" was a necessary, but not sufficient reason for the uprising. According to Barrington Moore, a "politically effective moral indignation," is required for the emergence of a vast rebellion, that is, that people see that their misery is the result of "human injustice", of "identifiable acts of superiors" and the assessment of need and the perception that they should not have to endure such a situation.[40] When their poverty is product of the action of certain men, not the whim of nature or other causes, it is possible to overcome the "illusion of inevitability" and take the future in their own hands.[41]

Guanentá plebeians repeatedly expressed feeling "aggrieved", that is, abused and systematically deceived. They said that first "they were commanded to make tobacco sowings", as part of the Bourbon policy of encouraging cultivation for tax purposes, but then were told that they should "remove" them when they were in the middle of production, thereby losing their investments and livelihood for their families.[42] The governing powers then encouraged the planting of cotton to supply fibers for the industrialization of Catalonia (Spain) and increase revenue, but then they suppressed the activity by implementing a "new" tax. Due to these "grievances", according to the town hall of San Gil, commoners were convinced that the new Barlovento tax against cotton and yarn would be their "last extermination" and thus proclaimed that they were "unable to walk under the yoke of obedience".[43] The effects of the various imperial measurements had come together in the same geographic space with different economic, employment and social characteristics from the rest of New Granada in a region where the people already felt aggrieved. The result was the loss of obedience to the king.

The loss of fidelity of the plebeians to the king was evident in actions such as the breaking of the Edict of the Barlovento tax, the massive

---

[38] On traditional rebel culture, see THOMPSON, E. P. "Introducción: costumbre e cultura." In: THOMPSON, E.P. *Costumbres en común*. *Op.Cit*., pp.18-24.
[39] Cited in MANKIW, Geoffrey. *Macroeconomics*. New York: Worth, 2012.
[40] MOORE Jr., Barrington. *La injusticia, bases sociales de la obediencia y la rebelión*. México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996.
[41] Moore cited in TUTINO, John. *De la insurrección a la revolución en México*. *Op.Cit*.p.29.
[42] AGI, Santa Fe, 663A, "Testimony of the first book...", San Gil, March 24, 1781.
[43] *Ibid*.

attacks on the offices of liquor and tobacco monopolies, persecution to death of the "guards" and the expulsion of the royal authorities of municipalities, among many other acts. As an artisan screamed as he destroyed the Barlovento edict: “Does anyone defend the arms of the king?” and the crowd shouted “No”. The slogan for the revolt of the plebeians was not in general as widely believed, “Long live the king and death to bad government.” This became more general, but only when the local elites joined the Revolution. The later slogans included “"Long live the king, but do not pay the Barlovento tax”, “Long live the king and death to his evil mandates” and “Long live the king and death to his commands and to the thieves who are here”.[44] It was a direct call to the king, and not his intermediaries, to solve their problems.

The obedience "due" to the king by the plebeians was subsequently deepened by incorporating the Creole elites of the capital into the revolt on April 16. They were incorporated in a document known as the Card of the People (*Cédula del Pueblo*). This document explicitly proclaimed the seizure of state power by the Creoles with the support of the plebeians and the expulsion of the Europeans. Its content was fanatically adopted by the popular classes. “Long live El Socorro and death to bad government,” they said. The king was replaced by the sovereignty of El Socorro to eliminate "bad government". The government of the Viceroyalty would fall on May 12, after the expulsion of the regent and the prosecutor of the *Audiencia*, and the rise of a governing board of the pro-commoner elites in the capital.

Subsequently, with the geographical and social spread of the Revolution, and the incorporation of indigenous people, Túpac Amaru II, the leader of the popular revolt in the Viceroyalty of Peru that occurred in the same year, became an inspiration. People screamed, “Long live the Inca King and death to the King of Spain and everyone who defends him”[45]. A tabloid proclaimed, “Long live the Inca King and death to the *chapetones* [the elites who wore pants], that if the King has pants; I also have them”. The mestizo Captain José A. Galán proclaimed Túpac Amaru II the king of New Granada in Alto Magdalena. On May 19, 1781 neighbors in the plains region of New Granada directed by the Creole Javier Mendoza also deposed the governor and swore fealty to Túpac Amaru II.[46] On May 23, the common people of the sierra village of Cocuy proclaimed there was a new

[44] AGI, Santa Fe, 662, Principal, 6r.
[45] FRIEDE, Juan ed., *Rebelión comunera de 1781. Documentos*... Op.Cit., p.687.
[46] CÁRDENAS, Pablo. ed., *Documentos de Cárdenas Acosta*. Tomo 1. Bogotá: Editorial Kelly, 1960, pp.61-62; AGUILERA PEÑA, Mario. *Los comuneros*. Op.Cit., pp. 118,139, 143, 159; RAUSCH, Jane M. “Los comuneros olvidados...Op.Cit.

king who was “the Inca Túpac Amaru, powerful king”. Both elites and plebeians thus sought to replace the sovereignty of the King of Spain in New Granada.

Unknown to the Comuneros in New Granada, the revolt of Tupac Amaru II had already been defeated in Peru by the concerted action by the elites, yet the popular benchmark was still the uprising in the neighbouring Viceroyalty of Peru. The Peruvian uprising was "peasant" and indigenous,[47] but failed to achieve a sustainable partnership with the mestizo and Creole elites, as in New Granada. But the differences between the revolts in Peru and New Granada were important. In Peru, the indigenous population was the majority and the reaction to the reforms of the Minister of the Indies, José de Gálvez, revolved around different questions, including opposition to the "forced merchandise trade" practiced by the magistrates of Peru. This mechanism was not practiced in New Granada, since unlike in Peru and Mexico, the magistrates in New Granada were not allowed to force the Indians to buy their goods.[48] Therefore, the trade with Indians in Guanentá directly resulted in more "free" forms as simple business transactions. Moreover, in the region of Guanentá, and generally in New Granada, Indians did not exceed more than one thousand inhabitants.[49] Despite the initial sympathy of Peruvian elites to the peasant and indigenous uprising, they quickly supported the king as the revolt radicalized and polarized society.

From opportunities to redress

The historiography of world revolutions has focused excessively on the political "opportunities" opened up in crisis situations for social actors rather than the grievances or perceptions of the poor in regard to injustices, which are ultimately the key factors in mobilizing and mounting insurrectionary armies.[50] International wars and power vacuums fill whole pages as prerequisites for revolts involving elites, for example, but little space is dedicated to analyze the perceptions of the bulk of the population in

---

[47] O’PHELAN GODOY, Scarlett. *Un siglo de rebeliones anticoloniales. Perú y Bolivia 1700-1783*. Cusco, Perú: Centro de Estudios Rurales Andinos Bartolomé de las Casas, 1988; GOLTE, Jürgen. *Repartos y rebeliones. Op.Cit*.

[48] MELO, Jorge Orlando. “Introducción. Francisco Antonio Moreno y Escandón: retrato de un burócrata colonial”. In: *Indios y Mestizos a finales del siglo XVIII*. Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1985, Section V.

[49] In Socorro there were 440 Indians, in San Gil 225 and in Girón 120. This contrasts with Tunja City and its hinterland where there were 29,882 Indians. See McFARLANE, Anthony. *Colombia antes de la independencia. Op.Cit*., Appendix A, Table 6.

[50] TUTINO, John. *De la insurrección a la revolución en México*. *Op.Cit.* p.33.

popular uprisings. Perceptions of political opportunities are important, but are not generated or explained by revolutions themselves. The political opportunities that the Guanentá commoners had to confront, including situations in which they risked their lives, was the division, paralysis or support of elites to their uprising.[51] But the reason for the revolt was not the participation of elites, as a part of the historiography of the Comuneros contends. In fact, for a month (March 16-April 17) plebeians acted almost alone without the participation of elites in Guanentá nor the Santa Fe aristocracy. This is why we have called the Comuneros Revolution, a veritable revolt of the plebeians.

Local elites would begin to participate on April 18, when the revolt of the plebeians had spread throughout Guanentá and progressed within the province of Tunja. However, their entry was determined by the worsening of the clash between the two basic components of communities: the elites and commoners. Plebes attacked the elites when they did not adhere to the revolt or if they remained neutral in relation to the elimination of taxes and monopolies. In fact, the authority of the community was directly questioned. Would it be plebeians or the elites, who traditionally ruled, who would exert this power? Once the elites joined the revolt, plebeians delivered the management of their revolt to local patricians. It was what they expected in the context of their *moral economy*, as the elite had to meet their "duties" to direct and protect the poor. This alliance was made by signing a written, explicit and conscious *social contract*, a breach of which could be paid with death.[52]

Nevertheless, the plebeians did not stop taking initiatives, to advance the Revolution in the course of the war. While General Francisco Berbeo insisted on finding a quick agreement with the government that led to demobilization, despite the defeat inflicted by the commoners in the battle of Vélez on May, 1781, the plebeians and the captains of the more rural communities had set a goal of making it to Bogotá and conquer the capital for the Revolution. The 35 capitulations were actually signed in Zipaquirá against the will of the majority of the plebeians and the Indians who had

[51] On April 16, a document was read in Socorro entitled "Health, Regent Lord", better known by the crowd as the "Real Gaceta" or "Cédula del Pueblo". Written by the *Santafereña* aristocracy it invited the people to invade the capital and gave them a roadmap and a fairly advanced political program for the period. See ARCINIEGAS, Germán. Ed., *CHEC-Documents*. *Op.Cit*., pp.143-152.

[52] This was signed and sealed before the notary and deputy mayor of El Socorro and issued on April 18. The the rights and duties of masters and commoners were stipulated in the document. See CÁRDENAS, Pablo. ed., *Documentos de Cárdenas Acosta*. *Op.Cit*., Tomo 1, pp.137-138.

recently joined *en masse* to the Revolution and even against the wishes of a significant part of the elite of Santa Fe (and other regions) and plebeians of the capital who felt they did not go far enough. The negotiated agreement represented by the capitulations was the result of an act of force carried out by the elites of the most important cities of the East, who managed to divide the revolt, forming an army entirely at their disposal. While the armed threat of plebeians to the commissioners remained, there were minimum requirements and compensation offered to the masses for not invading Santa Fe. The negotiations conducted by elites and government commissioners even removed several of the major popular aspirations, such as the return of land confiscated from indigenous peoples, among others.

The markings of a modern revolution

The Revolution of 1781 showed several characteristic features of modern revolutions. The Comuneros sought a radical change in the way politics was conducted and how the creation of institutions that facilitated economic growth were defined. Steve Pincus typifies modern revolutions as being popular, violent and causing dissension.[53] The peasant and popular participation in 1781 reached magnitudes that would never be achieved in the future, even during the Colombian War of Independence. It covered most of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, including some of the jurisdictions of the Captaincy of Venezuela and the Audience of Quito. The royal authorities even feared that the Revolution in New Granada, connected with the revolt of high and low Peru, would receive support from northern European powers.

As we mentioned, the first stage of the Revolution (16 March-17 April) was almost exclusively the work of the plebeians who imposed their designs in practice. In the second stage (March 18-June 8th), the El Socorro elites assumed the political direction of the commoners by setting up a hierarchical military structure reserved for the so-called "good and honest men" of each municipality. They were or had been members of the municipal authorities, collectors of taxes and managers of the monopolies of tobacco and liquor. The vast majority were landowners and/or merchants.[54] In the first stage, they were threatened with death and sometimes attacked by the crowd. They had much to gain if they joined to the revolt of the plebeians. After al, they were also affected adversely by the reforms. In

[53] PINCUS, Steven C. A. *1688: la primera revolución moderna*. Barcelona: Acantillado, 2013.
[54] AGUILERA PEÑA, Mario. *Los comuneros*. *Op.Cit*..

addition, they benefitted from the regulation of revolt and from eliminating the danger of the call by the anti-revolt elites of the capital to its "vassals", as the Captain General explicitly called his "soldiers". The elites who joined the revolt were thus well placed to serve as the direct intermediaries between the people and the king.

Nevertheless, the plebeians kept their own leaders, remained active and made their own decisions. In the Alto Magdalena, Galan freed slaves, deposed local authorities, physically punished members of the Creole elite, and appointed captains from people of humble origin. On several occasions, the crowd confronted the captains of the elites, including General Berbeo, when their decisions did not match popular aspirations. For example, when Berbeo was in the process of consultation with the members of the governing board, which included Archbishop Caballero y Gongora, and had been given the popular mandate of 11 May to invade Santa Fe, one of the most known plebeian leaders, Juan Agustín Serrano, said: "Everything is resolved with two bullets, one to the Archbishop and the other to General". While Serrano was taken to jail by the order of General Berbeo, the crowd released him after few hours. It is no surprise that the royalist authorities told King Charles III that this was a "fact that permits to Your Majesty to know what the subordination of these people to their bosses was".[55]

The aspirations of the plebeians were imposed by force without waiting for an agreement with the royalist authority or the acceptance of the captains general from the elite. Despite the actions of Generalisimo Berbeo and his lieutenants, the initiative of the armed crowd was tolerated since there was little that could be done to stop it. The plebian sectors in the first stage of the Revolution organized the elimination of taxes (such as Barlovento and Alcabala), refused to pay the ecclesiastical tithe in some places, declared freedom to plant whatever crops they desired and conduct commerce, and reduced prices for tobacco consumption and liquor, among other actions. Subsequently, transaction costs (reduced rates for using bridges, notaries, etc.) were reduced. The plebeians demanded a free market in all its aspects. This latter feature characterized the Revolution as entirely modern.

There was a notable difference with the "hunger riots" of the Western Europe in the eighteenth century. The commoners of Guanentá did not claim the abolition of the policy of "free trade" as the poor of Europe demanded. On the contrary, the peasants and artisans from Guanentá demanded a real free market for production and consumption. This attitude

[55] CÁRDENAS, Pablo. ed., *Documentos de Cárdenas Acosta*. *Op.Cit*. Tomo I, p.277.

was not guided by any theory of economic liberalism or Enlightenment ideas. This occurred because the economic policy of Charles III for the colonial market was essentially an interventionist and radical action, promoting the extraction of economic surplus by way of capturing monopoly rents and taxes. However, a strong "underground economy"[56] had developed where goods were traded for less than the price set by monopolies. Fair pricing, free markets and economic development were key aspirations of the popular revolt in the Revolution of 1781. Peasants and artisans from Guanentá were, unknowingly, closer to Turgot, Quesnay and Smith than the European popular sectors.

The political practice of plebeians did not necessarily coincide with the aspirations of the Creoles. The desire of the elites of New Granada, before the Revolution, was to maintain state monopolies of tobacco and liquor, among others, but under the conditions and direction of their family networks. Before the arrival of the Visitor Piñeres, they aimed to assemble an infrastructure financed by the private sector, which would perpetually manage the monopolies for monetary compensation. This proposal was vetoed by the Visitor, thus accumulating an additional reason for the hatred of the monarchy among some elites. As it was not possible to implement this management scheme, the elites were reduced to maintaining monopolies under the traditional renting scheme. In addition, it was the elites, not Piñeres, who asked to reduce the growing area of tobacco and agreed to implement the Barlovento tax.

The peasants and plebeians of New Granada expressed opposing ideas. They demanded the complete abolition of the monopoly of tobacco and freedom of trade and prices. Consequently, this demand was referred to in several of the 35 capitulations of Zipaquirá. By contrast, the monopoly of liquor was not a major concern for the peasants, except for the increase in consumer prices, because raw material for processing (the cane molasses) was provided by the great owners, who typically relied on black slaves. The liquor monopoly continued in the form of renting, as adopted in the capitulations. Dissent and lack of consensus between patricians and plebeians was a defining feature of the Revolution of 1781. Moreover, there was no unity of purpose between local elites and Santa Fe elites about the

[56] On the various concepts of underground economy, see MARTINEZ COVALEDA, Héctor. La economía subterránea e ilegal en Colombia. Elementos para el estado del arte sobre conflicto y economía. Colombia: CDPAZ-Proyecto Planeta Paz, 2010. www.planetapaz.org/.../186-la-economia-subterranea-e-ileg.

type of government that was desired and the purpose of the invasion of the capital Santa Fe. Indeed, there was the real prospect of a civil war.

Finally, one of the highlights of the Revolution was the participation of new political actors, in particular the plebeians, who explicitly expressed their wishes verbally or in practice, which is a key feature of modernity. This historical rupture reflects the shift that the plebeian revolt represented. It went from a simple anti-riot tax to demands for the creation of a new space for political participation and a *locus* of sovereignty. The plebeians allied with local elites and those in the capital to participate in the Revolution, although the price was that they lost the leadership of the movement. They created a space to participate in the design of economic policy and conceive the capitulations. The Revolution was able to fill the power vacuum created when the authorities faithful to the king were expelled or fled from the municipalities. They created new bodies of political leadership, including the appointment of local governing captains, decisions in which plebeians were involved, even interceding to prevent patronage appointments and warlordism. It is particularly noteworthy that humble and brave warriors such as the peasant José Antonio Galán and the weaver Isidro Molina continue to be idolized in the Columbian collective imagination while General Berbeo is largely forgotten.

The Revolution propelled by peasants and other plebeians in New Granada resulted in the constitutional charter of the capitulations of June 5. Although the delegates of the provincial elites and the aristocracy of Santa Fe officially wrote the capitulations through a type of Constituent Assembly, they collected and filtered general popular aspirations that would become law. But not only that, for a new state organization resulted from the Revolution, including the creation of a standing Creole army, the monopoly of all political and administrative offices of the colonial state for the native-born, an alternative taxation system and a new relationship with the King. Limits were imposed on the powers of the monarch such as the requirement to justify new taxes to the new political organization that emerged from Zipaquirá. The Revolution of 1781 was radical, violent and displayed modern signs due to the wide participation of popular sectors. It was not the *Fronda* or, as Phelan imagines, a feudal reaction.

The capitulations were soon abolished by elites who failed to defend them and demobilized the *Comunero* army and the communities who supported the Revolution. Yet the desires expressed by the popular movement predicted a substantial change in the relationship between society and the state, and the establishment of an institutional framework to promote economic development. To paraphrase John Womack, but giving

another meaning to his statement, peasants and other plebeians of El Socorro wanted to keep things as they were, but this nevertheless sparked a Revolution.[57]

Conclusion

The Revolution of 1781 in *New Granada* was eminently popular and peasant. It formulated a break with the traditional form of relationship between society and the state. One simple anti-tax riot became, through the dynamics of the revolutionary process, a Revolution with important modern overtones. In the process, a rupture with the king of Spain was explicitly raised, an independent state entity with a centralized and more inclusive framework was established, and a taxation system and an institutional framework more favourable to employment creation and economic growth was achieved. Our conclusion was reached by an approach that focused on the dynamics of the Revolution and the interaction of subaltern groups with other social classes. In particular, we investigated how the traditional perceptions of plebians regarding the economic and social dynamics of the eighteenth century in New Granada were altered. This is quite distinct from the dominant paradigm represented by John Phelan on the "conservative" nature of the Revolution of 1781.

[57] WOMACK, John. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. New York: Knopf, 1969.

The Spanish Communist Party and the Andalusian countryside: Rural mobilisation and social empowerment (1956-1979)

María Candelaria Fuentes Navarro

The effectiveness of the political project of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) in rural Andalusia (characterised by large properties and casual labour particularly in Córdoba and Seville) can be acknowledged by both the results of the 1979 local elections and, to a certain extent, by the percentages of affiliation to the Spanish trade union *Comisiones Obreras del Campo* (Rural Workers' Commissions) in 1978.[1] The matching of interests between an individual (as a bearer of certain aspirations) and a political party (embodying those aspirations and promising to stand up for them if the necessary social support is provided) was established by the democratic decision to vote for a given political group.

What caused such successful electorate support to the Communist project in Andalusia? In the following article, we shall present a general panorama of the PCE's work in the Andalusian countryside from the late 1950s (when the party began its underground organisation after the severe repression during the Civil War and early Francoism) to 1979 (following the dictator's death and the celebration of the first democratic local elections). A theoretical approach facilitating a complex and multidimensional analysis of social mobilisation in these rural contexts during late-Francoism and the period of the transition to democracy will be used.

---

[1] These results were communicated by the trade union itself at its first congress in 1978. See Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix. The *PCE* achieved an important 20.38% of the votes from Seville's countryside –against 29.02% by UCD and 24.17 by PSOE – and 35.80% from Cordoba's countryside – compared to 25.12% by UCD and 26.63% by PSOE. Similarly, a large number of mayoral seats was achieved in these regions, along with a considerable number of councillors. See *Realidad. Boletín informativo de las Comisiones Obreras de Sevilla*. Año III, nº 19, 6 de abril de 1979, pp. 8-9. www.datoselecciones.com/elecciones-municipales-1979/andalucia

Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical approaches underlying this article focus on *constructivist* theories, which allow for the interpretation of social action, the development of social identities and common frameworks of reference, as well as discourse analysis.[2] This approach leads us to regard social mobilizations against Francoism in rural Andalusia as social interaction and interrelated processes established during everyday life, rather than as a result of the structural characteristics of the social context they stem from.

Tools provided by recent theories applied to democratization processes and the development of pro-democratic, social values in rural areas are also considered in this study. Following the lines of previous research[3] into democratization processes in rural Andalusia, the study of late-Francoism and the period of the transition to democracy are also taken into account with special focus on the frameworks of political mobilization which help us understand the construction of citizenship and democracy in

---

[2] On the creation of collective social identities and common frameworks of reference, see, for instance: SNOW, D. and BENFORD, R.: "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization". In: KLANDERMANS, B. *et al.* eds., *International Social Movement Research. From structure to action: comparing social movement research across cultures*. Vol. I. London: JAI Press, 1988, pp. 197-217; "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest". In: MORRIS, A. and MUELLER, C. eds., *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 133-155; BENFORD, R.: "Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement". *Social Forces*. n.71, 1993; HUNT, S., BENFORD, R. AND SNOW, D. "Marcos de acción colectiva y campos de identidad en la construcción social de los movimentos". In: LARAÑA, E. AND GUSFIELD, J. eds., *Los nuevos movimientos sociales*: *de la ideología a la identidade*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2001, pp. 221-249, p. 228; RIVAS, A. "El análisis de marcos: una metodología para el estudio de los movimientos sociales". In: IBARRA, P. and TEJERINA, B. eds., *Los movimientos sociales. Transformaciones políticas y cambio cultural*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998, pp. 181-215, pp. 190-193. The discursive construction of reality has been studied in Spain by Miguel Ángel Cabrera and others. CABRERA ACOSTA, M. A. "Historia y Teoría de la Sociedad. Del giro culturalista al giro linguístico". In: FORCADELL, C. and PEIRÓ, I. eds., *Lecturas de la Historia. Nueve reflexiones sobre Historia de la Historiografía*. Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2002, pp. 255-272; "On Language, Culture, and Social Action". *History and Theory*. vol. 40, n.4, 2001, pp. 82-100; *Historia, lenguaje y teoría de la sociedade*. Madrid: Cátedra-Universitat de València, 2001.

[3] MARKOFF, J., GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M. and VILLA, I.. "Los procesos de democratización en la Andalucía rural contemporánea. Propuesta de análisis para una reinterpretación de la historia andaluza del siglo XX". *Actas del XIII Congreso Internacional de la Sociedad Española de Historia Agraria*. Lleida, 2011; HERRERA, A. *et al.* "Los procesos de democratización en el campo. Democracia y mundo rural en la Andalucía del siglo XX". In: *Nuevos horizontes del pasado. Culturas políticas, identidades y formas de representación*. Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea, Santander, 16 y 17 de septiembre de 2010 - Facultad de Filosofía y Letras - Universidad de Cantabria; HERRERA, A. y MARKOFF, J. "Rural movements and the transition to democracy in Spain". *Mobilization: the International Quarterly Review of Social Movement Research*. Volume 16, n.4, diciembre de 2011, pp. 455-475.

this region. It is necessary to redefine and flexibilize the concepts of citizenship and democracy in this period of Spanish history in favour of an alternative narrative that considers the essential role played by rural areas in the construction of democracy in Andalusia and Spain as whole. This will lead us to a better understanding and judgment of all the social agents involved in practices of political engagement, considered by researchers today as democratic, despite these practices being unconsciously performed in many cases.[4] The process of political learning and socialization, and therefore, of social empowerment, developed during the 1960s and 1970s in Andalusia may be best understood this way.[5]

The PCE's reorganization and the revival of organized protest. First steps (1956-1960)

The PCE's agrarian programme[6] stemmed from the confirmation that traditional rural society was in crisis as the result of the capitalization of agriculture, with mechanised farming and rural depopulation as the main catalytic factors.[7] The general feeling of discontent, alienation and frustration among rural workers, due to the lack of real opportunities to gain access to a decent life, was used by the PCE as the catalyst for social

[4] The present study focuses on the work of the PCE in this process without detriment to other movements promoting mobilisation and democratic awareness of the rural population, such as Christian-oriented movements. See SABIO ALCUTÉN, A. "Cultivadores de democracia. Politización campesina y sindicalismo agrario progresista en España 1970-1980". *Historia Agraria*. N.38, 2006, pp. 75-102; GONZÁLEZ MADRID, D. and MARTÍN, O. J. "Cristianos conscientes en el mundo rural. Los movimientos de curas rurales en la diócesis de Albacete (1965-1977)". In: ORTIZ HERAS, M. and GONZÁLEZ MADRID, D. eds., *De la cruzada al desenganche. La Iglesia española entre el Franquismo y la Transición*. Madrid: Sílex, pp. 265-289.

[5] As pointed out by Gil Andrés, power defines and redefines democracy by means of laws and constitutional texts, but street and countryside inhabitants have a leading role too, by means of an open, persistent and collective defiance shown by social mobilizations. "'Esas luchas pueblerinas'. Movilización política y conflicto social en el mundo rural republicano (La Rioja 1930-1936)". *Ayer*. n. 89, 2013, pp. 93-119, p. 103.

[6] Documentation available at the PCE Archive on the "agrarian issue" is profuse. However, the most complete piece of work on this issue during the late 1950s is GARCÍA, T. (Juan Gómez) *La evolución de la cuestión agraria bajo el franquismo*. Madrid: Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, 1993 based on the intervention of Juan Gómez himself at the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the PCE in 1957. See also GÓMEZ, T. *La evolución de la cuestión agraria bajo el franquismo*. Archivo Histórico del PCE, Sección Documentos del PCE, Documentos por años, Actas del Pleno del Comité Central del PCE, 1957.

[7] For further information on this matter, see ABAD, C. and NAREDO, J. M. "Sobre la "modernización" de la agricultura española (1940-1995): de la agricultura tradicional hacia la capitalización agraria y dependencia assistencial". In: GÓMEZ BENITO, C. and GONZÁLEZ RODRÍGUEZ, J. J.: *Agricultura y sociedad en la España contemporânea*. Madrid: CIS, 1997, pp. 249-317 and NAREDO, J. M.: *La evolución de la agricultura en España (1940-2000)*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2004.

mobilization and protest and as an opportunity to raise pro-democratic attitudes able to identify Francoism with a predatory economic system and the cause of their poor living conditions. By means of a positional readjustment regarding the "agrarian issue", the myth of agrarian reform was provided with a renewed symbolic impetus, turning day labourers and small tenants into the main protagonists of the construction of democracy in rural Andalusia.[8]

Since the late 1950s, the PCE initiated a slow, but constant, process of reorganization as renewed protests spread throughout the Andalusian countryside. It was the first time that Spanish Communists managed to link the pre-civil war traditions of working-class *associationism*, mainly developed by Socialists, Anarchists, Republicans and Catholics, with the general, rather diffident, sentiment of discontent fuelled by the application of capitalism in agriculture after the autarchy period. Communists succeeded in making discontented peasants and casual workers recover their collective memories of previous associative experiences, present until the end of the Second Spanish Republic, in the defence of their economic interests, thus creating new associative networks.[9]

The celebration of both the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the party's Central Committee in 1957 and the *Huelga Nacional Pacífica* (National

---

[8] For further information on the origins of Communist discourse connected with the "agrarian issue" and the agrarian reform, consult COBO ROMERO, F. *Por la Reforma Agraria hacia la revolución. El sindicalismo agrario socialista durante la II República y la Guerra Civil* (1930-1939). Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2007; ACOSTA RAMIREZ, F. CRUZ ARTACHO, S. GONZALEZ DE MOLINA, M. *Socialismo agrario, conflicto rural y democracia en el campo español (1880-1930). Los orígenes de la federación de trabajadores de la tierra*. Madrid: Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino, 2009; HERRERA GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, A. *La construcción de la democracia en el campo, (1975-1988). El sindicalismo agrario socialista en la transición española*. Madrid: Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, Medio Rural y Marino, 2007. For further information on the PCE's ideas in the 1950s, see COBO ROMERO, F. and ORTEGA LÓPEZ, T. "El Partido Comunista de España y la cuestión agraria en Andalucía durante el Tardofranquismo y la Transición política a la Democracia, 1956-1983". *Historia Actual Online*. n. 7, primavera 2005, pp. 27-42. ÁLVAREZ, S. *El Partido Comunista y el campo. La evolución del problema agrario y la posición de los comunistas*. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1977.

[9] In this regard, the theoretical approaches herein adopted are those of Pamela Radcliff, considering the PCE as the main catalyst for these protest movements. We believe this party managed to provide this incipient discontent and embryonic rural protests not only with human resources, but also with linguistic and discursive instruments, ideas, values and social networks which helped build the foundations of a common democratic and civic way of thinking and behaving. RADCLIFF, P. B. *Making democratic citizens in Spain. Civil society and the popular origins of the transition, 1960-78*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011.

Peaceful Strike) in 1959[10] were two important milestones in this process. The first signs of discontent and rebellion across Andalusian rural areas had appeared prior to the celebration of the meeting.[11] In many cases, this attitude and commitment to struggle was evident before the presence of the PCE was established in many rural municipalities. At this precise moment, the Communist party started to coordinate these sentiments of disaffection with Franco's rural policies into an organized structure. The party became progressively more strategically involved in the everyday life of rural workers dissatisfied with Franco's regime. There was an attempt to integrate the demands from all sectors of rural society – young people, women, casual labourers, small peasants and tenants and other opposition forces – whose rights were violated by Franco's agrarian policies in common struggle against the Francoist regime, as a prior step to the implementation of socialist and communist policies.[12]

The PCE's definite position in favour of the necessity of an agrarian policy focused on mass mobilization in the Andalusian countryside first appeared after the resolutions adopted at the 3rd Plenary Meeting. Social

[10] The impact and scope of both the *Jornada de Reconciliación Nacional* and the *Huelga Nacional Política* upon the Spanish Communist structure are clearly explained in SÁNCHEZ RODRÍGUEZ, J. *Teoría y práctica democrática en el PCE (1956-1982)*. Madrid: Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas, 2004.

[11] For further information on protest revival in Andalusia, see HEINE, H. *La oposición política al franquismo, 1939-1952*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1983; HEINE, H. y AZUAGA, J. M. *La oposición al franquismo en Andalucía Oriental*. Madrid: FSS Ediciones, 2005; FOWERAKER, J. *La democracia española. Los verdaderos artífices de la democracia en España*. Madrid: Arias Montano, 1990, pp. 135-143. BERNAL, A. M. "Resignación de los campesinos andaluces: la resistencia pasiva durante el franquismo". In: ORTIZ HERAS et al. *España franquista: causa general y actitudes sociales ante la ditadura*. Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1993, pp. 145-159; BAENA LUQUE, E. y ORTEGA LÓPEZ, T. Mª. "1962, "el mayo andaluz": Andalucía ante las huelgas mineras de Asturias". In: VEGA, R. ed., *El camino que marcaba Asturias. Las huelgas de 1962 en España y su repercusión internacional*. Oviedo: Trea, 2002, pp. 143-160; COBO ROMERO, F. and ORTEGA LÓPEZ, T. "La protesta de sólo unos pocos: el débil y tardío surgimiento de la protesta laboral y la oposición democrática al régimen franquista en Andalucía Oriental, 1951-1976". *Historia Contemporánea*. n. 26, 2003, pp. 113-160; ORTEGA LÓPEZ, T. "Algunas causas de la conflictividad laboral bajo la dictadura franquista en la provincia de Granada (1939-1975)". *Ayer*. n. 50, 2003, pp. 235-254; *Del silencio a la protesta: explotación, pobreza y conflictividad en una provincia andaluza, Granada 1936-1977*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2003; MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ, D. y CRUZ ARTACHO, S. *Protesta obrera y sindicalismo en una región "idílica": historia de Comisiones Obreras en la provincia de Jaén*. Universidad de Jaén, 2003.

[12] The PCE's initial proposals regarding the need for reorganization and being present in the everyday life of Andalusian rural workers are clearly stated in the microfiches contained in the section "Nacionalidades y Regiones: Andalucía" from the PCE Archive. The first examples in particular, with references to the late 1950s are also found in this collection. AHPCE, Nacionalidades y regiones, Andalucía y Extremadura, Microfichas.

mobilization was seen as a *sine qua non* to gain democracy in Spain.[13] In addition, the PCE's *Política de Reconciliación Nacional* (National Reconciliation Policy) marked a watershed in the Communist struggle against Francoism and in favour of democracy. In addition to the numbers who participated during this particular celebration on May 5, 1958, it also proved successful in terms of a experiential and referential learning process that helped further the goals of the party and its supporters.[14] In fact, from the Communist point of view, the *Jornada de Reconciliación Nacional* (National Reconciliation Day) brought back a renewed impulse for the fight for labour rights, particularly lost after the traumatic government repression of the post-Civil War years. This PCE initiative was regarded as successful since it helped Andalusian rural workers to get politically involved again, recovering their previous fighting spirit. The Communists defined this as a strategy "to move beyond friendly discussions to being more closely tied to the place of work and linked to the masses" [15]. This attitude of confrontation led to a certain *assimilation* of behaviour or "pull effect" among rural areas, all towards a common cause, a definite change of attitude among rural workers regarding Franco's regime, which the PCE deemed necessary to coordinate. As the party summarized the feelings of rural workers: "we want to work the olive groves, but [only] earning *cincuenta pesetas* and our day meal, landlords themselves can work the land" [16].

According to Communist documents, the subsequent celebration of another day of protest in Spain – the *Huelga Nacional Pacífica* (National Peaceful Strike) – celebrated on June 18, 1959 was largely supported by rural workers all over Andalusia,[17] and meant both a step forward towards

---

[13] For a complete analysis of the Communist's position regarding the consequences of capitalized agriculture, the process of land concentration and proletarianization of rural workers, see GÓMEZ, T. *La evolución de la cuestión agraria bajo el franquismo* Op. Cit.

[14] AHPCE, Nacionalidades y regiones, Andalucía y Extremadura, Microfichas. Microficha 37, 1957; microficha 40, 1958; microficha 42, 1958.

[15] AHPCE, Nacionalidades y regiones, Andalucía y Extremadura, Microfichas. Microficha 43, 1958.

[16] AHPCE, Nacionalidades y regiones, Andalucía y Extremadura, Microfichas. Microficha 71, 1958.

[17] *'El hecho más resonante fue el paro en masa de los trabajadores del campo en Andalucía y Extremadura, y muy particularmente en Córdoba, Sevilla, Jaén y Badajoz. Era la primera vez que los obreros agrícolas participaban tan ampliamente en una huelga política; que ella se produjese, además, bajo la dictadura fascista del general Franco revelaba el alto nivel de conciencia adquirido por las masas del campo'* (The most resounding was mass unemployment among Andalusian rural workers, particularly among those from Córdoba, Sevilla, Jaén and Badajoz. It was the first time such a large number of rural workers had supported a political strike; and the fact that it had happened under Franco's regime showed the high level of awareness which the rural masses had acquired).

[17] *Historia del Partido Comunista de España*. París: Éditions Sociales, 1960, p.269. This official history was written by a special commission of the PCE's Central Committee

the reorganization of the party in rural areas and the confirmation of the general sentiment of change developed by the previous celebration of the National Reconciliation Day.

The 1960s: rural assemblies, the dynamism of protest and the democratic awareness of rural society

To analyse the activities of the PCE in the 1960s (the increased dynamism of protests and the democratic empowerment of rural Andalusia) we should also explore its framework of discourse constructed around the "agrarian issue" particularly how it was addressed to rural areas after the resolutions adopted at party's 6th congress.[18] Communist Party discourse regarding the "agrarian issue" with its two principal emphases – agrarian reform and the slogan "Land for the Tiller" – was largely successful, not only persisting, but evolving over the decade.[19] The PCE succeeded in spreading such a discourse among Andalusian rural workers and across different rural sectors, as rural people became personally involved and familiar with pro-democratic civil practices. In this sense, rural *asamblearismo*[20] (democratic assemblies for the adoption of decisions and agreements) and the slogan "Land for the Tiller" were catalysts for social action and protest, and together with the creation of rural commissions, played an essential role as platforms from which Communist agrarian discourse could be extended.

The work displayed by the party at the time across Andalusian rural areas and the strong impact of its discourse on both social mobilization and the spread of common democratic values was self-evident. In our research, the above-mentioned rural *asamblearismo* leads us to highlight the

formed by Dolores Ibárruri, Manuel Azcárate, Luis Balaguer, Antonio Cordón, Irene Falcón and José Sandoval.

[18] AHPCE, Sección Documentos del PCE, Congresos, VI Congreso del PCE, 1960.

[19] GALLEGO, I. "Consideraciones acerca de la consigna «la tierra para quien la trabaja". In: *Nuestra Bandera. Revista teórica y política del Partido Comunista de España*. n. 33, 1962, pp. 3-23; AHPCE, *La tierra para el que la trabaja*. Documentos del PCE, Congresos, VII Congreso, Resolución política, 1965.

[20] A term in connection with the Spanish countryside already used, among others, by: A. M Bernal in BERNAL, A. M., LÓPEZ VILLAVERDE, A. L. and ORTIZ HERAS, M. *Entre surcos y arados. El asociacionismo agrario en la España del siglo XX*. Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, 2001. pp. 17-47. We develop these questions in COBO ROMERO, F. and FUENTES NAVARRO, M. C. "Los comunistas, la democracia y el campo. El "asamblearismo campesino" y la difusión de valores democráticos entre la sociedad rural, 1962-1975". In: ORTEGA LÓPEZ, T. and COBO ROMERO, F. eds., *La España rural. Siglos XIX y XX*. Granada: Comares, 2011, pp. 319-357.

importance of the contexts of micro-mobilization,[21] along with networks of sociability and interpersonal relationships constructed through participation in social movements. Spanish Communists managed to spread their discourse related to agrarian reform and the slogan "Land for the Tiller" among different rural sectors, all workers affected and injured by Franco's agrarian policies. This discourse also touched the hearts of the incipient pro-democratic trade unions and rural commissions created at the time. In sum, this strategy seemed to contribute to the creation of a collective and clearly delimitated "us" and the necessity to struggle against "them" as a prior step necessary for the later construction of a global democratic identity against Francoism, strong enough to bring together the demands of a wide range of different social sectors.[22]

This increased dynamism of protest and the democratic awareness of rural Andalusia during the 1960s persisted and increased in the next decade, when the PCE was able to reap the results of its efforts made since the late 1950s, in the form of both massive mobilisations and electoral support, once the period of the transition to democracy had commenced.

Harvest time. The PCE and the Rural Workers' Commissions during the 1970s: social mobilizations and the construction of citizenship in rural areas

The PCE's policy and discourse during the 1970s focused almost entirely on the preparation of Communists for the process of the transition to democracy with emphasis on support in rural areas as necessary for the attainment of democracy. The Spanish Communists entered the revolting 1970s with a strong and powerful discourse supporting once again agrarian reform and the slogan "Land for Tiller" as a *sine qua non* to gain democracy in Spain. While such a discourse started to gradually slip back into the shadows both for the PCE and the Rural Workers' Commissions as the

[21] Thought as a mechanism of personal interrelation based on primary cohabitation experiences is able to generate operative collective identities capable of defining common objectives. On this regard, see McADAM, D. "Micromobilization contexts and Recruitment to Activism". In: KLANDERMANS, B., KRIESI, H. and TARROW, S. eds., *From Structure to Action. Comparing Movements Across Cultures.* International Social Movements Research, vol. 1. Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1988, pp. 125-154. These micro-mobilization contexts are herein considered as primary sociability nucleuses or "social alveoli" framed within a general observation field revolving around the axis delimited by the study of identity formation and collective action frameworks.

[22] We deal in depth with all these questions in the article FUENTES NAVARRO, Mª C. "El Partido Comunista de España y la sensibilización democrática de la población rural andaluza durante los años sessenta". *Historia y Política*. In press.

decade progressed, its strength remained alive when it came to mobilizing rural workers, beginning to bear fruit and produce positive results for the process of democratization and the Communist movement.

Unemployment rates and lack of land were the major concerns for Spanish Communists in rural areas at the time, two problems that had been already been developing since the late 1960s. Most actions, carried out not only by those workers affiliated to the Rural Workers' Commissions but also by groups of independent workers, were based upon these two objectives and were connected to both the implementation of a profound agrarian reform able to democratize the structures of land property in Andalusia and to the slogan "Land for the Tiller". In addition, the centralization of assemblies was essential in order to raise social protests and make decisions. The PCE was capable of integrating the demands from rural society within the general context of its pre-democratic transition discourse. In this way, the entire policy of pacts and alliances, already advocated and established by the party since the late 1970s – the *Alianza de las Fuerzas de la Cultura y el Trabajo* (the Alliance of Cultural and Labour Forces) and the *Pacto para la Libertad* (Pact for Freedom) – which also included members of the so-called "rural intelligentsia" were developed to resolve the critical problems of unemployment and lack of land. Apart from these alliances and pacts, certain other arrangements were claimed as necessary for the construction of democracy in rural areas, such as the reform of local power structures through local democratic commissions, the organization of panel discussions and other assorted forms of democratic protests and mobilizations.[23]

The work initiated by the party since the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s was reflected in continuous protests and mobilizations, always led by the party's demands and manifestos. While the demand for profound agrarian reform able to democratize the agricultural structures of the Spanish countryside was always at the foreground of the party's discourse, this project also involved the demand for uncultivated or poorly cultivated

[23] "Declaración del Comité Ejecutivo del Partido Comunista de España, ¡Marchamos hacia el Pacto para la libertad! ¡Lucha de masas para acabar con la dictadura!". *Mundo Obrero*, año XL, n º 2, Madrid, 23 de enero de 1970; ÁLVAREZ, S. "Campo español y pacto para la libertad". Speech at the Central Committee's Plenary Meeting of the Spanish Communist Party, July 1973, in AHPCE, Documentos, Documentos sueltos por años, Carpeta 54, 1973; "El Partido Comunista de España y los campesinos. Intervención de Santiago Álvarez en la conferencia de los PPCC de la Europa capitalista sobre el problema agrario y la crisis", AHPCE, Sección, Dirigentes, Santiago Álvarez, Caja 1, Carpeta 3, 1975, pp. 22 y ss; "Manifiesto-Programa del Partido Comunista de España. La contradicción entre las exigencias de un desarrollo moderno para España y el régimen fascista. La lucha por las libertades", in AHPCE, Documentos, Documentos sueltos por años, Carpeta 56, 1975.

land to be distributed among unemployed workers as well as the creation of jobs and an unemployment insurance fund.

In addition, Spanish Communists continued their campaigns in favour of democratic awareness among the rural population throughout this decade. Beyond labour conflicts, the PCE tried to incite Andalusian rural workers to engage in social actions to claim their rights, thereby assisting rural workers to participate in the construction of democracy and citizenship.[24] It can be acknowledged then that its pro-democratic project in rural areas did not simply deal with the mobilization of rural workers for the achievement of labour rights connected with the implementation of agrarian reform and the slogan the "Land for the Tiller". The discourse and actions of the PCE showed that its commitment to rural areas had been designed at a global scale. Without the adhesion of the rural social sectors, the transition to democracy in Spain was not possible. Thus, rural people had to be educated about democratic-civic principles and values and provided with the appropriate tools for the upcoming transition process. In close connection to this, the PCE incorporated a policy of alliances, promoted by the party at the time, to fight for the construction of rural democracy, succeeding in engaging wide sectors of the Andalusian rural population.[25] The party continued to engage in protests beyond labour questions, teaching democratic values to the rural population.

Finally, between 1975 and 1983, the PCE and the Rural Workers' Commissions –the latter known as the Federation of Rural Workers' Commissions once it was legalized in 1976– started to reap the benefits of what they had sown especially during the 1960s and 1970s in the provinces of Córdoba and Seville. Their campaigns for social mobilization, democratic-civic awareness and the empowerment of ample rural sectors were successful during the period of transition to democracy. The positive effect of their discourse among rural workers was confirmed by the high level of participation and involvement in mobilizations in the 1970s, by the increasing number of people affiliated to the rural workers' trade union, and by the support obtained in the 1979 local elections (See tables in Appendix).

---

[24] *La Voz del Campo Andaluz*. mayo de 1972; "Dos Hermanas". *La Voz del Campo Andaluz*. julio-agosto de 1974; Senda, Órgano del Comité Provincial de Sevilla del Partido Comunista de España, Agosto-septiembre, 1975: "Morón, por el agua y el pan"; El clamor de los pueblos de Sevilla". *La Voz del Campo Andaluz*. septiembre de 1975; "La enseñanza rural: reforma agraria y reforma educativa". *La Voz del Campo Andaluz*. junio de 1975.

[25] "Libertad y socialismo". Text delivered by comrade Santiago Carrillo on behalf of the Executive Committee at the Central Committee's Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the PCE (September 1970). AHPCE Documentos, Documentos sueltos por años, Carpeta 51, 1970.

Appendix

Table 1. Members affiliated to the Rural Workers' Commission in Andalusia according to branch of economic activity (May 1978)

Branch of activity	Census of workers	% of the total census (A)	Members affiliated	% of the total members affiliated (B)	Representative Index (*)
	Over-represented branches of activity				
Agriculture	373,417	33,39	89,586	38,9	+ 12,988
Metal and Mining	127,311	11,38	30,509	13,3	+ 1,513
Construction, Glass and Ceramics	130,304	11,65	29,731	12,9	+ 1,502
Varied activities	59,359	5,31	15,497	6,7	+ 0,355
Transport	55,299	4,94	13,086	5,7	+ 0,281
Clothing	38,580	3,45	8,483	3,7	+ 0,127
Chemical industries	24,852	2,22	5,717	2,5	+ 0,055
	Under-represented branches of activity				
Alimentación	91,867	8,21	12,425	5,4	– 0,443
Hostelería	37,462	3,35	5,924	2,6	– 0,087
Sanidad	34,857	3,12	4,921	2,1	– 0,065
Banca y Seguros	26,920	2,41	2,560	1,1	– 0,026
Madera y Corcho	17,260	1,54	3,459	1,5	– 0,023
Enseñanza	20,069	1,79	2,056	0,9	– 0,016
Federación del Mar	30,930	2,76	1,474	0,6	– 0,016
Información, Papel, Artes Gráficas	14,606	1,31	1,884	0,8	– 0,010
Agua, Gas y Electricidad	11,159	0,99	914	0,4	– 0,003
Combustible	7,335	0,65	1,032	0,4	– 0,002
Espectáculos	10,386	0,93	497	0,2	– 0,001
Piel y Calzado	6,312	0,56	300	0,1	– 0,0005
TOTAL	**1,118,313**	**100,00**	**230,053**	**100,00**	**100,00**

SOURCE: Comisiones Obreras de Andalucía's First Congress (May 20 and 21, 1978); Archivo Histórico de las Comisiones Obreras de Sevilla (Seville's Historical Archive of Comisiones Obreras). (*) A × B : 100. Compilation by the author.

Table 2. Communist vote in rural Andalusia. Local Elections, 1979-1983*.

Commune	RURAL AREAS WITH A PREDOMINANCE OF PEASANTS AND/OR SMALL FAMILY-RUN FARMS											
	1979						1983					
	CD	UCD	PSOE	PCE	PSA	Indep. &others	AP	CDS	PSOE	PCE-PCA	PA	Indep. &others
Sierra Sur (Jaén)	2,31	47,74	35,52	8,93	–	5,50	36,18	1,36	50,79	6,59	–	5,08
Sierra de Segura (Jaén)	–	53,41	35,00	4,73	–	6,86	41,00	–	56,64	2,11	0,25	–
La Costa (Granada)	0,12	55,56	28,10	6,46	0,27	9,49	31,75	2,26	50,88	2,68	–	12,43
Alto Andarax (Almería)	0,77	55,45	26,74	3,44	–	13,60	23,25	1,07	47,13	0,63	–	27,92
Commune	**RURAL AREAS WITH A PREDOMINANCE OF DAY LABOURERS AND/OR LARGE LAND PROPERTIES**											
	1979						1983					
	CD	UCD	PSOE	PCE	PSA	Indep. y otros	AP	CDS	PSOE	PCE-PCA	PA	Indep. y otros
La Campiña (Sevilla)	1,54	29,02	24,17	20,38	9,96	14,93	16,57	1,13	48,85	20,42	7,3	5,73
Campiña Baja (Córdoba)	1,52	25,12	26,63	35,80	–	10,93	18,65	–	34,95	28,77	3,68	13,95

SOURCE: Anuarios Estadísticos de Andalucía (Annual Statistical Documents in Andalusia), Anuario "El País" and Instituto de Estadística de Andalucía (Andalusia's Statistical Institute): *Elecciones Locales en Andalucía*. (*) Percentages over the total of valid ballots. *Acronyms used*: CD. Coalición Democrática; AP. Alianza Popular; UCD. Unión de Centro Democrático; CDS. Centro Democrático y Social; PSOE. Partido Socialista Obrero Español; PCE-PCA. Partido Comunista de España/Partido Comunista de Andalucía; PSA-PA. Partido Socialista Andaluz/Partido Andalucista; Indep. Independents. Compilation by the author.

.

Between "resistance" to the war and social conflict. Revolts and "peasant republics" in Southern Italy, 1943-1945

Massimo Asta

Introduction

The phenomenon of the so-called "peasant republics" that emerged in southern Italy during and after the violent agitations of 1943-45 – consisting of improvised and precarious forms of self-government, municipally-based and constructed – has rarely found a place in the historiography of the Second World War period. An incomplete and summary reconstruction of these social conflicts that animated the transition between the fall of fascism and the advent of the Italian Republic was often relegated to local history, which sought to highlight the exceptional, extraordinary aspects of these events, often by assimilating them and circumscribing them as folklore.

More generally, for a long time these developments have suffered the same fate as the whole history of Italy under the Gothic Line. They have remained in the shadows because of the centrality and significance of the rupture represented by the Resistance movements in the North. It is not superfluous to recall that the first major conference that started to redress decades of neglect about the transition in the South of Italy since the Allied landings in Sicily (July 10, 1943) was only held, under the direction of Nicola Gallerano,[1] in 1984.

Nevertheless, an additional factor contributing to the distortion of some interpretive conclusions has been the prevalence of political and institutional history over social history. On this basis, the revolts were read as contradictions, disconnected from each other, due to the exclusive reference to the "republics" of mainland Italy or, alternatively, to those of Insular Italy. In particular the revolts that were triggered in Sicily were improperly called "*Moti non si parte!"* (anti-war revolts) and were solely related to the protests against the military mobilization of the Bonomi government and the consequent mass desertion. In the first case, they would

---

[1] GALLERANO, N. (ed.), *L'altro dopoguerra. Roma e il Sud, 1943-1945*. Milano: Angeli, 1985.

be consistent with the democratic awakening of the post-Second World War period and precursors of peasant struggles led by the left from 1945 onwards. By contrast, in the second case, the revolts would be mainly operated by separatist and neo-fascist formations, and so would be characterized as a populist and reactionary trend. In light of the study of new archival sources, this contribution aims to overcome this duality and to propose a comprehensive reading that reflects the involvement and the centrality of socio-economic logic as well as ideological in the phenomenon.

2. Delimitation of the field of research

The 26 cases examined, though not exhaustive, are broadly representative of revolts that broke out between 1943 and 1945, from the Campania to Sicily. Although differing in some respects, they have many elements of homogeneity, which allow us to make generalizations, even in the very short period analyzed. [2]

The theater of the revolts in all cases is that of agro-towns[3]: rural villages typical of the South of Italy - and of several parts of the

[2] The analysed revolts took place in: Sanza, Calitri, Maschito, Ferrandina, Caulonia, Piana degli Albanesi, Palazzo Adriano, Alcamo, Mazzarino, Delia, Scordia, Licata, Palma di Montechiaro, Naro, Ravanusa, Capizzi, Caronia, Ragusa, Comiso, Modica, Acate, Chiaromonte Gulfi, Scicli, Giarratana, Vittoria, Santa Croce di Camerina, Palazzolo Acreide. The research is based on the analysis of acts of military tribunals held in the Archive of the Military Tribunal of Naples (AMTN), the Archive of the state of Palermo (ASP), in copy form, in the Archive of the Campania Institute for the History of the Resistance (ACISR). Another important source of documentation is kept at the Central archive of the State (CAS). General considerations on the revolts triggered in Sicily, and more specifically on that of Catania may be found in MARINO, G. C., *Storia del separatismo siciliano, 1943-1947*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1993. For a synthetic description of the Italian revolts see CHIANESE, G., *Quando uscimmo dai rifugi. Il Mezzogiorno tra guerra e dopoguerra, 1943-1946*. Roma: Carocci, 2005, pp. 126-141. For a well-documented account of the revolt in Caulonia see MISIANI, S., *La repubblica di Caulonia*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1994. For memoirs, see OCCHIPINTI, M., *Una donna di Ragusa*. Firenze: Landi, 1957; CICCONE, S., *La Repubblica di Maschito. La prima repubblica libera nata dalla Resistenza*. Bari: Edizioni dal Sud, 1989 and LANZA, A. (ed.), *Testimonianze da una repubblica contadina. Francesco Petrotta e i giovani di Piana degli albanesi*. Palermo: Centofiori, 1979.

[3] On the model of settlement of the agro-towns, see BLOK, A., *The mafia of a Sicilian Village (1860-1960). Study of violent peasant entrepreneurs*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974; DRIESSEN, H., "Mediterranean agro-towns as a form of cultural dominance. With special reference to Sicily and Andalusia". *Ethnologia Europaea*, n. 14, 1984, pP. 111–24 ; BARONE, G., "Egemonie e potere locale (1882-1913)". In: AYMARD, M. and GIARIZZO, G. (eds.) *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Sicilia*. Torino: Einaudi, 1987, p. 192; SCHNEIDER, P, and J., *Culture and political economy in western Sicily*, New York, 1974 ; CURTIS, D., "Is there an 'agro-town' model for Southern Italy? Exploring the diverse roots and development of the agro-town structure through a comparative case study in Apulia". *Continuity and Change*, n. 28, 2013, pp. 377-419.

Mediterranean - with a large population and a predominantly agricultural economy. This kind of settlement was characterized by *latifundia* with a high degree of concentration of land ownership and the diffusion of forms of pre-capitalist labor relations and ownership (*gabella*, *colonia parziaria,* sharecropping, emphyteusis).[4]

Among the many forms of popular protests, sometimes violent, which occurred continuously during this period, we included in the analysis only collective actions in which the purpose of *political takeover* develops or, at least, was emerging more or less clearly, and in some cases was carried out for a few weeks. This takeover was interpreted and represented by the leaders of the revolt and its participants in very general and ambiguous terms, but it always coincided with the violent conquest of the control of the local government. In many cases, the revolt led to the creation of a new institution, whose new authorities temporarily embodied *de facto* the local power, which was variously called: "Committee of public safety" (in Calitri) [5], "Provisional People's Committee" (in Comiso)[6], "Executive Board", "Commissioners" (in Piana degli Albanesi)[7], "Council of the Revolution" and "People's Court" (in Caulonia)[8] and "Executive party" (in Acate). [9] In the case of Vittoria[10] and Ferrandina[11] they were both called Committees of National Liberation, where Communists and Socialists had a hegemonic position, and where the previous state legality was replaced with a "revolutionary" legality.

3. Popular "rationality" in the dynamics of revolt

The dynamics of these revolts were largely uniform. Popular reaction always involved attempts to shut down the state through looting,

[4] On the forms of agrarian contracts widespread in the South of Italy, see PLACANICA, A., "Il mondo agricolo meridionale. Usure, caparre, contratti". In BEVILACQUA, P., (ed.), *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea*, vol. II, *Uomini e Classi*. Venice: Marsilio, 1990, pp. 261-324.
[5] AICSR, Mario Palermo, b. 63, fasc. 309, Acts of the criminal proceeding against Gabriele Acocella + 56.
[6] ASP, Military tribunal of the war, section of Catania, b. 7, fasc. 504, Acts of the criminal proceeding against Giacopelli Adriano + 119.
[7] Report of the warrant officer of *carabinieri,* commander of the station of Piana degli Abanesi, f.to L. Portera, 17 march 1945, cit. in Lanza, A. (ed.), *Testimonianze da una repubblica contadina...Op. Cit.*, pp. 173-181.
[8] MISIANI, S., *La repubblica di Caulonia*. *Op. Cit.*
[9] ASP, Military tribunal of the war, section of Catania, b. 7, fasc. 508, Acts of the criminal proceeding against Vincenzo Petino + 37.
[10] ASP, Military tribunal of the war, section of Catania, b. 8, fasc. 509, Acts of the criminal proceeding against Giovan Battista Alecci + 133.
[11] CAS, MI, PS, 1947-1948, b. 4, fasc. facts of Ferrandina.

destruction and burning of public buildings, that is to say, the town hall, the tax and customs offices, the supplies office, the police barracks, the court and the prison. This was the common scenario in all the cases studied, making them more similar to the typical forms of urban and peasant riots of the Middle Ages and Early Modern epochs.

Here, probably, lies one of the reasons that has favored a reading that has neglected the political nature of these events. In this context, the approach of political parties, especially the left, adds another element of explanation. The revolts grew outside of and against the political line and the control of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSIUP) who were engaged in the governments of national unity and, for the most part, they surged in 1943-44 when the left was still quite separated from the reality of the peasant South. Socialist and communist agrarian policy and trade union mobilization would only be consolidated in 1945. As a result, the revolts ended up being interpreted simply through the category of "spontaneity".[12]

However, the presence of a general difficulty in penetrating the dynamics of these mainly peasant forms of conflict must be stated. Two intellectuals, who were themselves engaged in resistance, Giorgio Bocca and Roberto Battaglia, have written about resistance activities that took place in southern Italy: one, in 1966, emphasizing a "telluric energy, which we cannot foresee the consequences of: a hot fury that is located in the popular subconscious" [13], and the other, in 1953, in particular regarding the "Four days" of Naples, described as "grandiose features and an indefinable phenomenon of nature"[14]. James C. Scott, for his part, in *Weapons of the Weak,* asserted that the "emphasis on peasant rebellion" was "misplaced" and that it "seems like visceral reactions of blind fury"[15]. According to Scott, this is an interpretative position coherent with his analysis of the everyday resistance of subordinates. However, he placed this in a theoretical framework that leads to an underestimation of the mobilizing factor of the spread, from the outside, of revolutionary ideologies. Scott's neglect of this aspect is common and shared by many authors.

---

[12] See, for example, on the interpretation of the fights in Calabria for the common lands CINANNI, P., *Lotte per la terra e comunisti in Calabria (1943-1953). Terre pubbliche e Mezzogiorno.* Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977.

[13] BOCCA G., *Storia dell'Italia partigiana. Settembre 1943-maggio 1945*. Torino: Einaudi, 1966, p. 83.

[14] BATTAGLIA, R., *Storia della resistenza italiana*. Torino: Einaudi, 1970, p. 122.

[15] SCOTT, J. C., *Weapons of the weak. Everyday forms of peasant resistance*, Yale: Yale university Press, 1985, pp. 29 and 37. On the undervaluation of the ideological element, see his criticism of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, ivi, p. 304-350.

An understanding of the supposed easy excitability of the lower classes, especially the peasantry, the mechanicalness, even the "spasmodic" aspect,[16] of its direct action methods was also, from another point of view, and in its more radical interpretive version, one of the elements of a vision focused on the irreducible anthropological singularity of the peasant and on its impenetrability or, at least, its reluctance, to undergo modern forms of politicization or simply any sort of politicization. The terminology, sometimes, is comparable to that used in the reports of prefects. In medieval times, we may add, in France and Flanders, the word sedition was associated with that of *commociones* (commotions), as Samuel Chon noted.[17] It ultimately also has to do with the persistence of *presentism* in historiography so much so that in a recent book on the history of the Resistance in Italy, Santo Peli complained about the existence of a kind of "historiographical ostracism, more or less conscious" [18].

The analysis of "peasant republics" allows us to investigate these interpretive debates. In this context, it is important to note that the outbreak of the revolts analyzed was almost always constituted by an event, an act perceived as an unexpected and intolerable injustice, which triggered public indignation and was capable of mobilizing informal social networks and forms of class solidarity. Often, the collective action was in response to acts of the repressive state apparatus, whose legitimacy, at that time, the population refused to recognize.

The spark in Capizzi was fueled by the arrest of a deserter. In Palazzo Adriano, by a member of the local Communist section accused of illegally utilizing a collective usage right. In Piana degli Albanesi, it was the theft of flour in a public storage unit and the subsequent discovery of a quantity possessed illegally in the house of a police officer. In Ferrandina, it was the arrest of the peasant Domenico Aspromonte, a communist and secretary of the Chamber of Labor, which enjoyed broad popular support, and the non-distribution of food ration cards for soldiers dispersed after the escape of the king and the signing of the armistice. In Ragusa, during one of the most important revolts that took place in Sicily during the winter of 1944-1945, popular anger was sparked after a woman, Maria Occhipinti - to

[16] See THOMPSON, E. P., "The moral economy of the English crowds in the eighteenth century", in *Past&Present*, n. 50, 1971, pp. 76-136.
[17] See COHN, S. K., *Lust for Liberty. The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1425*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 4.
[18] PELI, S., *La resistenza in Italia. Storia e critica*. Torino: Einaudi, 2004, p. 232.

whom we owe one of the few existing memoirs of these events – lay down on a road to block a military truck conducting sweeps for deserters.[19]

In Licata, however, it was the reopening of the employment office, considered threatening to the prerogatives of the Labor Chamber, which provoked disorder. In Sanza, in October 1943, it was probably the first echoes of resistance taking place in the North, rather than the war for liberation being seen as the beginning of a social revolution, that convinced Tommaso Ciorciari, an old communist peasant, to put himself at the head of the revolt: a red flag was hoisted at the city hall and crucifixes and portraits depicting Savoy were removed from public offices.

However, a reading that would stop at these facts, by placing them in a relationship of cause and effect, is likely to ignore the real underlying causes of these phenomena.

The mass opposition against the military mobilization was not negligible. This factor helped to activate the rebellions, but does not in itself explain the sequence of the revolts, even in Sicily, where the separatist movement, focusing its propaganda on this subject, attempted a showdown (or perhaps an unlikely uprising on the island). [20] However, protests against conscription held simultaneously by young students, mostly separatists, always left people indifferent.

In relation to the Sicilian case, the reason why popular indignation accelerated and evolved was probably the decision of the High Sicilian Commissioner to obligate each producer, without distinction of any kind, to supply 25 kg of flour to the public stockpile. In the revolt of Capizzi, for example, there was also the unpopularity of the implementation of a new tax on pigs, whose breeding was widespread in this village of the province of Messina.[21] In the center of almost all the revolts was the question of food rationing: in Ravanusa, Palma di Montechiaro and Alcamo, it was clearly the immediate origin of the shift to action by the masses, but in all other cases it was an important factor. Thus, it would be wrong not to fully assess

---

[19] On the revolts of Capizzi, Palazzo Adriano, Ravanusa, Palma di Montechiaro and Ragusa, see CAS, MI, PS, AA.GG. RR., 1944-1946, b. 8, fasc. Sicily, popular uprisings. On the case of the revolt of Licata, see AMTN, Military Tribunal of Palermo, b. 33, Acts of the criminal proceedings against Giuseppe Muscia + 74. On the revolt of Alcamo, AMTN, Military Tribunal of Palermo, Acts of the criminal proceedings against Ignazio Cassarà + 75. On the revolt of Sanza, see ACISR, Passaro, b. 52bis, Acts of the criminal proceedings against Tommaso Ciorciari + 28.

[20] See, MARINO, G. C., *Storia del separatism*. *Op. Cit*.; MANGIAMELI, R., "La regione in guerra (1943-1950)". *Op.Cit.;* PATTI, M., *La Sicilia e gli alleati. Tra occupazione e Liberazione*. Roma: Donzelli, 2013.

[21] See, ACS, MI, PS, AA.GG. RR., 1944-1946, b. 8, fasc. Sicily, popular uprisings.

how these revolts appeared to be linked, almost seamlessly, with countless protests for bread, often with women protagonists, that grew from the beginning of the full fascist war effort from 1941 onwards.[22]

4. An attempt at a unitary interpretation

Overall, the phenomenon can partly be interpreted as a set of violent forms of "resistance" of the population to the process of war regimentation, in the double sense of military conscription and food rationing. These changes tended to modify and, in some cases, temporarily upset the balance of social relations and urban hegemony within communities.[23] The "peasant republics," in this sense, can also be interpreted as elementary attempts at self-government through which the popular classes clung to local communities to find a way to escape from the poverty and constraints imposed by the war by cutting off relations with the state. In Maschito, in the summer of 1943, a "republic" was formed even to oust German soldiers being evacuated from southern Italy and housed by the local fascist leaders.[24] The interpretive category developed by Jacques Sémelin of "civil resistance," even if it focused on forms of peaceful action in response to the Nazi domination in Europe during the Second World War, can be useful for reflecting on this issue. The malaise of the population of Southern Italy and its opposition to the war, nevertheless, resulted in "collective action" as "dynamic forms" that "gradually are put in place" and are intended to "maintain the integrity" of the community and the "social cohesion of the groups that it is composed of" [25].

---

[22] See, ACS, South Government, MI, PS, AA.GG. RR., 1943-194, b. 1, and b. 2.

[23] The importance of the phenomenon of the revolts analyzed is to be linked with the survival of the centrality of the local power to totalitarian fascist challeng. See LUPO, S. "L'utopia totalitaria del fascismo". In *La Sicilia*. *Op.Cit*. pp. 428-457. More generally, on the role of local elites in southern Italy, and within a very extensive bibliography, see LUPO, S., "Tra centro e periferia. Sui modi dell'aggregazione politica nel Mezzogiorno contemporaneo". *Meridiana*, n.2, 1988, pp. 13-50; PEZZINO, P., *Il paradiso abitato dai diavoli. Società, élites, istituzioni nel Mezzogiorno contemporaneo*. Milano: Angeli, 1993; MUSELLA, L., *Individui, amici, clienti: relazioni personali e circuiti politici in Italia meridionale tra Otto et Novecento*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994; ASTA, M., "Sicilianismo come populismo e ideologia della transizione". In: SALMERI, S. (ed.). *Democrazia, educazione e populismo*. Enna: Euno Edizioni, 2012; MARINO, G. C., *Il maligno orizzonte e l'utopia. La profonda Sicilia dai Fasci al fascismo*. Caltanisetta: Sciascia, 1998.

[24] See CICCONE, S., *La Repubblica di Maschito*. *Op.Cit*. More generally, on the cases of resistance in the south of Italy see, CHIANESE, G., "Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia". In: COLLOTTI, E., SANDRI, R., SESSI, F., *Dizionario della Resistenza*, vol. I, *Storia e geografia della Liberazione*. Torino: Einaudi, 2000, pp. 23-32.

[25] SÉMELIN, J., *Sans armes face à Hitler. La résistance civile en Europe, 1939-1945*. Paris : Payot, 1989.

On the other hand, the logic of community survival is not the only factor necessary to explain the revolts. Another central aspect to be integrated in the interpretation was the long-standing endemic class conflict in the South which was temporarily erased, or at least reduced, by fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War, only resurfacing during the days of "insurrections". Class conflict, even though it was messy and episodic, developed and led to the targeting of property owners. In Licata, three wealthy owners were kidnapped, while the secretary of the Socialist Party, one of the leaders of the revolt, announced the intention of the distribution of land for grazing. In Ferrandina, thefts against landowners multiplied and in Sanza a group of peasants armed with axes and other tools, led by Tommaso Ciorciari, prevented the expulsion of a sharecropper and demanded respect for the collective usage right of "*sforestamento*", an old practice renewed each year on land that once belonged to the ecclesiastical estates. In Alcamo, Naro and Palazzo Adriano, the population destroyed not only public buildings, but also the social "clubs" of the propertied classes and local notables. In Mazzarino, the private homes of wealthy landowners were also looted and burned.[26]

There were thousands, mostly peasants, who participated more or less actively in all cases (in villages and small towns that had, at most, a population between 3,000 and 20,000 inhabitants). A more precise sociological composition of the rebels and the leadership of the revolt may be inferred from the defendants in the trials that took place in the Military courts of war. It should be noted the presence of peasants and artisans (including classical figures of radicalism: blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters), a high prevalence of the former over the latter and the low presence of *braccianti* (farm workers) - except for the case of the revolt of Ravanusa, where they accounted for almost all of the defendants.[27]

The main role of the poor landless peasant (a category that encompasses a wide range of contractual relationships) was due to the fact that compared to the farm labourers they had more relationships with municipal offices (especially tax offices and those related to agriculture) and helps to explain the fury with which the rebels attacked the public buildings. Furthermore, the rationing system and illegal land grabbing accentuated social conflicts between the popular classes, artisans and peasants, and the

[26] The available documentation has allowed us to reconstruct the sociological composition of the most active groups of the rebels in Alcamo, Camastra, Ferrandina, Licata, Maschito, Palazzo Adriano, Piana de gli Albanesi, Ravanusa, Sanza, Scicli, Vittoria, S. Croce di Camerina and Giarratana.

[27] See ACS, MI, PS, AA.GG. RR., 1944-1946, b. 8, fasc. Sicily, popular uprisings.

great landowners, even in a context already structurally characterized by profound inequality and strong social cleavages.

The rebels of the "peasant republics" were primarily concerned, in fact, with adopting, in different forms, a system of redistribution of basic foodstuffs in a radically more egalitarian sense. Thus in Ferrandina where Giuseppe Aspromonte required longtime landowners to sell quantities of grain that were then sold to members of the communist section with controlled prices. Or Vittoria, where the socialists and communists constituted the "Workers teams" for the requisition of grain and established the "Commissions" which even landowners were obliged to participate in, forcing them to provide wheat to supply the insurgents and the population.

The concept of legitimacy, in the sense used by Thompson for the category of "moral economy" about English revolts in the eighteenth century, that is to say the "conviction - from rebels - to have the wider community approval" and act in defense of "a clear idea of the common good" by exercising traditional rights adapts perfectly to the cases analyzed here.[28] At the center of the revolts between 1943 and 1945 in southern Italy, there was always the demand for basic, primary needs, such as the right to grind flour and the right to bread. Another instrument of egalitarian redistribution, that of the collection, was present in some revolts, such as in the cases of Vittoria and Piana degli Albanesi.

5. Three emblematic cases: the revolts of Piana degli Albanesi, Maschito and Caulonia

Piana degli Albanesi is a village in the mountains of the province of Palermo, whose population is of Albanian origin. In this case, the leader of the revolt was Giacomo Petrotta, who had already joined the Communist party and had previous experience of political activism in Turin. His mentality is well represented in the lines of his will written shortly before the constitution of the "People's republic": "The undersigned Petrotta Giacomo, of Giuseppe and Schirò Elena, 27 years old, international revolutionary, convinced of the difficulty of hard work, I lead against the capitalist landowners in Sicily, for the common cause of the triumph of the proletariat, I will with God in my thoughts always keep my commitment. And if I should fall under the reactionary lead, because of the death of my mother I want to share my property, half goes to my brothers and sisters, and the other half to the poorest of the Communist party section of Piana dei

[28] THOMPSON, E. P., "The Moral Economy…" *Op. Cit.*

Greci [Piana degli abanesi]". In religious terms, Petrotta also ends his diary with the hope of establishing in Piana degli Albanesi "only one sheepfold and only one shepherd".

The rebels gathered food for the population, organized control of several farms to requisition wheat or other products held unlawfully and held under strict control the activity of the millers to ensure that they did "not take advantage of the flour of customers". Everything happened with the blessing of the Church (Petrotta nominated the local bishop as one of the "commissioners"), the independent republic of Piana degli Albanesi, and its three directing principles: "brotherhood", "unity" and "stabs to the insubordinates" [29].

The strong community ties and the same egalitarian aspirations that seek to recover a legitimacy that was perceived to be lost were also present in the "republic" of Maschito, at the head of which was Domenico Bochicchio, a communist, farmer and woodcutter, born in 1900. He kidnapped the *podestà*, one of the few large landowners of the village, by locking him up in his own house, removed the rationing system and distributed oil and wheat raised in the agricultural consortium. At the same time, the rebels forced the landowners and local leaders to provide wheat and money to the people: "There were four people in the commission" - Bochicchio would remember thirty years later - "I ordered them and made them take the money", it was "a true Republic and I was the president. [...] I put the papers on the square here... to warn the population. [...] As a mayor". The distribution of wheat at the time of the "Republic", he said in response to questions from the reporter, was done "according to justice, to the needs, depending on the number of mouths" [30].

The case of the "republic" of Caulonia, is at the limit and at the same time at the crossroads of the typical ideological horizon of social banditry, blood revenge and more modern forms of social conflict. The leader of the revolt, Pasquale Cavallaro, an elementary school teacher, *andranghetista*, with a period of emigration to the United States, was also, in the 1920s, the organizer of a local anti-fascist movement of *amendoliano* orientation. After a period of political confinement, he joined the Communist Party and was appointed mayor of the municipality by the Allies in January 1944. As mayor, he proceeded to distribute public lands to the population.

During the disorders of the days of the "republic", one of Cavallaro's sons, Libero, would force his victims to shout: "Libero Cavallaro is the

[29] See Lanza, A., (ed.), *Testimonianze da una repubblica contadina...Op. Cit.*,
[30] See Ciccone, S., *La Repubblica di Maschito*. *Op.Cit*.

terror of the Ionian coast!". However, the violence of the rebels tended to be controlled and disciplined through the establishment of a "Tribunal of the People". The trials were open to the community, which had the right to attend with each person having a right of veto over the decisions of the "judges". Nevertheless, the sanctions assumed the function and even the shape of a real *charivari* with a high rate of violence: the "charged", almost all landowners and ex-fascists, were beaten, flogged, exposed to public ridicule, stripped or forced to stand barefoot in the mud and walk long distances.[31]

6. Conclusions

The peasant revolts and the "republics" of 1943-45, if they can be interpreted in some respects as an urban mob or a classical peasant *jacquerie*, were actually quite different. First, except for the cases of Comiso, Palazzolo Acreide, Alcamo and Chiaromonte Gulfi, and in spite of some archaic forms of conflict, they did not have a conservative character. Protagonists did not fight for justice or equality while cheering the king, whose portraits were, instead, publicly burned. Moreover, they were not simply looking to be heard or to be taken into account by the authorities. The peasants and artisans behind these revolts rather aimed to remove the local ruling elites to exclude propertied classes and notables from the political leadership of the community. The community logic coexisted with the conflict between social classes and the balance between these contradictory dynamics was continuously challenged during the revolt and changed as it developed.

A remarkable resemblance existed between these revolts and the anarchist revolts of Andalusia in the second half of the nineteenth century.[32] In the dynamics of the revolts in these two place, the target of class violence was limited exclusively – except for one case only - to the economic and symbolic goods of the landowners, demonstrated an absence of any federative project and was characterized by a particular rebel language (which seemed to be influenced by the typical language of the secret societies, masonic, republican and anarchist). Even the ideology did not

[31] See, Misiani, S., *La repubblica di Caulonia. Op. Cit.*.
[32] On the anarchist Andalusian revolts, see, LIDA, C., *La mano negra. Anarchisme rural, societés clandestines et répression en Andalousie (1870-1888)*. Montreuil: L'échappée, 2011; CASTRO ALFIN, D., *Hambre en Andalucia: Antecedentes y circunstancias de la Mano Negra*. Cordoba : Ayuntamiento de Cordoba, 1986; MAURICE, J., *El anarquismo andaluz: campesinos y sindicalistas, 1868-1936*. Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1990; HOBSBAWM, E., *I ribelli. Forme primitive di rivolta sociale*. Torino: Einaudi, 1966.

differ much. In spite of the affiliation of several leaders of the revolts of 1943-45 to the Communist Party, their ideology was rather close to that of a libertarian communism, influenced by the dissemination of anarchism in southern Italy during the nineteenth century.

It should also be noted that the South of Italy and Andalusia shared in addition to similar forms of peasant politicization also the same type of settlement of the agro-towns. This suggests the presence of a certain relationship between these two factors. Marc Bloch claimed, "peasant revolts were as natural to traditional Europe as strikes are today" [33]. For the cases of the southern Italy and Andalusia we may thus add geographical and socio-economic factors to Bloch's diachronic interpretation of these two forms of social conflict.

The degree of diffusion of revolutionary ideologies seemed to be a necessary resource of the collective mobilizations leading to the formation of "republics." Biographies of the leaders of these revolts clearly demonstrate this. Nevertheless, even if we can define these revolts as anti-systemic, they did not call into question the direct ownership of the land. The community logic did not disappear and farmers did not manage to go beyond all the norms and values of agrarian hegemony. As has already been observed for revolts in Andalusia, they were movements that required a significant exogenous contribution to transform their ideology.[34]

This is what happened, actually, almost seamlessly, thanks to the role of the left after 1945, and the union mobilization and development of the movement for the occupation of land and for the implementation of decrees taking the name of the Communist Minister Fausto Gullo (concerning the allocation of uncultivated or inefficiently utilized lands, distribution of the products in sharecropping contracts, and the question of collective usage rights). The same may be said for the movement for the conquest and application of agrarian reforms after the war. In contrast to the typical mob of large cities, or traditional peasant uprisings, this kind of popular revolt did not delay the expansion of the labor movement in these peasant centers. Instead, as the results of the elections in April 1948 confirmed, in two thirds of the municipalities where the revolts analyzed appeared, communists and socialists exceeded the percentage of votes obtained at the national level. In half the cases, they became the real "red"

---

[33] BLOCH, M., *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française*. Paris : Antwerp, 1931.
[34] See, Hosbawm, E., *I ribelli. Op. Cit.*

fiefs. And in Piana Albanesi and Mazzarino, the Communist Party had long received the absolute majority of votes.

Peasant cooperatives and land occupations in the Sicilian *latifundium* (1944-1950)

Niccolò Mignemi

Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, Italy was still largely a rural country: with the vast majority of the population employed in agriculture, social crisis was typically construed as a "peasant question." Ever since political unification in 1861, the Italian countryside had been characterised by economic and social problems, marked by deep and persisting land inequalities as well as archaic contractual arrangements. Although fascism had adopted ruralism as a central theme in its official propaganda and had encouraged the modernization and rationalization of capitalistic farming strategies, the mechanisms of peasant dependence and poverty remained unchanged. Thus, in the specific conditions of the mid-1940s, rural social conflicts dramatically remerged.

Starting from the Southern regions, the mass mobilization spread out across the countryside, becoming one the most impressive and urgent mass movements in twentieth century Italy.[1] It was a heterogeneous social movement that encompassed a wide range of different social groups working in agriculture: the wage labourers of the Po Valley; the sharecroppers of Northern and Central Italy, as well as their homologues of the South; small tenant farmers from all over the country; and the broad

[1] See the two volumes of *Campagne e movimento contadino nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi*. Bari: De Donato, 1979-1980. On the history of the peasant movements in Italy and particularly in the Southern regions, see also: *Mezzogiorno e contadini: Trent'anni di studi*. Quaderni dell'Istituto romano per la storia d'Italia dal fascismo alla Resistenza, n. 4, 1981; CRAINZ Guido; NENCI Giacomina, "Il movimento contadino". In: BEVILACQUA, PIERO ed. *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea. III: Mercati e istituzioni*. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1991, pp. 597-668; MASELLA, Luigi, "Braccianti del Sud: una ricognizione storiografica". In: D'ATTORRE, Pier Paolo; DE BERNARDI, ALBERTO eds., *Studi sull'agricoltura italiana: Società rurale e modernizzazione,* Annali della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a. XXIX, 1993. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1994, pp. 195-222; NENCI, Giacomina. *Le campagne italiane in età contemporanea: Un bilancio storiografico*. Bologna: il Mulino, 1997.

category of poor peasants from the Southern regions.[2] Although they are seen as different elements within a common movement, in fact the aims and the strategies of these groups were essentially diverse, with the postwar conjuncture inducing only a temporary convergence within them.

Driving the social conflicts, and as evident in the debates on agrarian structures and agrarian reform, there are three different but coexisting questions: 1) the *land question* concerns the distribution of the large estates and the attribution of non-cultivated land; 2) the *contractual question* concerns the conditions fixed in tenancy and sharecropping arrangements; 3) the *labour question* focuses on work costs, wages and unemployment. Although in theory referring to different social groups (small and landless peasants, tenants and sharecroppers, hired labourers), the three questions are in fact deeply interrelated. In the Southern regions, not only do they coexist within the same geographical contexts, but they are often combined in the same person – who owns a tiny piece of land, while renting land from others and supplementing his income through seasonal wage work in order to survive.

Here we focus our attention on the first question – concerning land – to analyse the ways in which peasant collective agency used the *cooperative* as an instrument in the battle for access to land.[3] We analyse these developments in the context of the *latifundia*-dominated and grain-producing regions of the interior of Sicily, where the peasantry is traditionally identified as archaic and deeply individualist. We will focus attention on the province of Caltanissetta, in the central part of the island, chosen as an exemplar of the economic and social structures that typically dominated in rural Western Sicily.[4]

As several inquiries during the first half of the twentieth century attested, wheat dominated the countryside of Caltanissetta, with a notable contribution by tree crops in the southern part. A large part of the rural

---

[2] ROSSI-DORIA Manlio, "La situation des campagnes italiennes". *Les Temps modernes*. a. II, n. 23-24, pp. 448-453, 1947.

[3] For a detailed analysis of the struggles of the Sicilian wage labourers, see DI BARTOLO, Francesco. *Lavoro, salario, diritti. Vent'anni di lotte bracciantili in Sicilia (1948-1968)*. Rome: Ediesse, 2011. For a general synthesis of social conflicts in postwar Sicily, see BRUNO, Roberto. "*Ci chiamano barbari": Lotte sociali e movimento sindacale in Sicilia nel secondo dopoguerra (1943-1950)*. Naples, Rome: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2011.

[4] See *Inchiesta parlamentare sulle condizioni dei contadini nelle provincie meridionali e nella Sicilia. Volume VI: Sicilia. Relazione del delegato tecnico Prof. Giovanni Lorenzoni*. 2 volumes. Rome: Tipografia nazionale di Giovanni Bertero e C., 1910, and the English extract in LORENZONI, Giovanni, "Latifundia in Sicily and Their Possible Transformation". *International Review of Agricultural Economics*. n.s., n. 1, 1923, pp. 316-349.

population was concentrated in agrotowns, facilitating social control of manpower, and the *latifundium* system occupied an important place in the organization of local agriculture. Land concentration was a significant phenomenon, with the 1927 special inquiry registering 122 large estates over 200 hectares, occupying more than one third of the total provincial surface. But the distributive inequalities did not prevent land fragmentation or the existence of a large class of smallholders: at the close of the 1940s, 80% of the landowners had no more than 2 hectares (ha), with an average plot size of 0.6 ha.[5]

In general, latifundia are extensively cultivated, according to a rotation cycle combining wheat, beans, pasturage and fallow. However, the property unit rarely corresponded to the farming unit, and the "fragmentation of land and labour was the rule."[6] Landholders often lived in the urban centres and governed their business through local representatives. They typically rented their entire estates to middlemen, the so-called *gabelloti*, who divided the portions to be cultivated into small plots (1-4 ha) to sublet to poor peasant workers through short-term contracts (2-6 years) with a share tenure of fixed rent (paid in cash or kind).[7]

In the post-Second World War period, the province of Caltanissetta was at the heart of the social and political conflicts that took place in Sicily. The important role played by the Communist Party in the local peasant movement was the counterpart to the power accumulated by the most significant figures of the Christian Democrats, who had transformed the province into their electoral domain. At that time, the local mafia had considerable economic interests in the agriculture of the area, which it sought to preserve in the face of ongoing social dynamics, as the violence of certain episodes attest. Here, we evoke this schematically without going into details. Adopting the "point of view" of the cooperatives within postwar rural social conflicts, our attention will be mainly focused on the economic

---

[5] See the regional volume of the national inquiry *La distribuzione della proprietà fondiaria in Italia*. Rome: INEA, 1947-1948 and the monograph on the INEA inquiry on the small peasant property PRESTIANNI, Nunzio, *Inchiesta sulla piccola proprietà coltivatrice formatasi nel dopoguerra. IV: Sicilia*. Palermo, Rome: INEA, F.lli Treves Dell'Ali, 1931. For the 1927 data, see MOLÈ, Giovanni, *Studio-inchiesta sui latifondi siciliani*. Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1929.

[6] SCHNEIDER Jane, SCHNEIDER Peter, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*. New York, San Francisco, London: Academic Press, 1976, p. 61. See also ROCHEFORT, Renée. *Le travail en Sicile: Étude de géographie sociale*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961, p. 163.

[7] Together with contractual arrangements, peasant economic dependence and social subordination was finally reinforced through usurious interest rates on anticipated inputs. Consult AYMARD, Maurice. "From Feudalism to Capitalism in Italy: The Case That Doesn't Fit". *Review: a journal of the Fernand Braudel Center*. vol. VI, n. 2, 1982, p. 162.

and social mechanisms that explain how, in a given context, peasant agency can be analysed in connection with the characteristics of the existing agrarian pattern.

Legal tools and peasant agency

In a famous article, Hobsbawm emphasizes the importance of the legal dimension to peasant land occupations, where this refers to both "the prevailing official legal system and the legal norms actually accepted by the peasantry."[8] Looking at Italian case from the mid-1940s onwards, we argue here that the law can also play a crucial role as a tool adopted by the peasant movement to claim land.

The first land occupations began in the Southern regions at the end of 1943, as a sort of instinctive reaction to the "exceptional conjuncture" of the postwar period, which temporarily destabilized traditional power relations and left large estates untended. But the invasion and occupation of land was not a new phenomenon in these regions, and especially not in Sicily, where it reappears cyclically as a central tool within a "long history" of peasant struggles and revolts. The social struggles of 1919-20 and even earlier seem to have been revived in the ritual and the geographical distribution of the cortèges occupying the latifundia in the mid-1940s. However, the historical context and the power relations that emerged here also have their own specific features.

In July 1943, the Allies invaded Sicily; Italy signed the armistice at the beginning of September, and the Anglo-American army made progressive gains in the Southern Italian regions, while in the North the resistance movement battled against fascist and Nazi forces. April 1944 saw the beginning of a period of coalition government comprising all the political forces of the antifascist front, with an important role for parties of the left. From the installation of the first government, and for the next two years, the Minister of Agriculture was the communist lawyer Fausto Gullo, who promulgated certain measures that are fundamental to the explanation of the further development of the peasant movement in Italian countryside.

Communists, socialists and an important segment of the Catholic party – to mention only the most important national political forces – directly supported the postwar peasant movement, but in 1944-45 their initial concern was to manage social conflicts to create more organized

[8] HOBSBAWM, Eric J., "Peasant Land Occupations". *Past and Present*. n. 62, February, 1974, p. 120.

forms of collective action. Confronted by the ongoing mobilizations and driven by the political project of the general agrarian reform distributing the land and radically transforming rural social relations, Gullo promoted several legislative measures. Inspired by similar measures in the past, he provided small peasants and rural workers with legal tools that reinforced their political power in social conflicts. This strategy aimed to federate the large category of the poor peasants within a common political front – although ultimately the risk of internal conflict would prove to have been underestimated. In the present analysis, we focus in particular on the decree of October 19, 1944, which indirectly "legalized" land occupations, giving peasant cooperatives the opportunity to ask for temporary (up to four years) concessions of abandoned and uncultivated land. The measure can be perceived as a sort of exception to individual property rights, but can also be seen as an act which was in effect compelled by the end-of-war context, aiming to reduce rural unemployment and ease the demographic pressure on the land, as well as to expand the total cultivated area and so increase cereal production and grain prices.

The decree on uncultivated land is well known and has been widely popularized. Its consequences were immediately apparent, "authorizing" land invasions and occupations. However, this particular measure has to be situated within a wider perspective on the agricultural policy pursued by Gullo during the postwar transition. Other measures including prolonging tenancy contracts, freezing rents, and adjusting sharecropping terms (giving 40% to the landholder and 60% to the farmers).[9] In this context, the cooperatives claiming land become a sort of aggregator of all the social struggles taking place within the heterogeneous world of poor Southern peasants. Well beyond the conventional figure of the landless rural proletarian, the mobilization concerned the larger class of smallholders who were typically obliged to supplement their income by renting other landowners' land or by renting out their labour power as wage or day labourers.

This movement was not revolutionary in the strict sense. Confirming "the entrenched legalism of peasant land invasion,"[10] it pursued its cause through legal means and demanded the application of relevant legislative measures. From this point of view, we can argue that the rule of law was

---

[9] These measures were influenced by the extension of the special war legislation on tenancy that was pursued until the end of agricultural year 1946-47. For a general analysis of the measures promoted by Gullo, see ROSSI-DORIA, Anna. *Il ministro e i contadini: Decreti Gullo e lotte nel Mezzogiorno 1944-1949*. Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1983.

[10] HOBSBAWM Eric J., "Peasant Land Occupations". *Op. Cit.*. p. 124, see also ROCHEFORT, Renée, *Le travail en Sicile… Op. Cit.*, p. 167.

being invoked, and was finally transformed into "a central arena of conflict"[11] where peasant collective agency tried to influence power relations and gain better economic and social conditions for rural workers. From this point of view, cooperatives became a key element in the political organization of the countryside; but at the same time they functioned as a sort of mediator, officially recognized and given legitimacy in engaging in dialogue with public authorities.

However, the fortunes of the cooperatives were strictly linked to the measures concerning uncultivated land, and thus we need to follow the evolution on the legislative front. Over the years, various modifications were introduced to the original measure on land concessions to peasant cooperatives. The decree of October 1944 would be substantially altered by the decree of September 6, 1946, issued under the initiative of the new minister of Agriculture, the Christian-Democrat Antonio Segni. This measure redefined the notion of "uncultivated land", modified the institutional mechanisms through which cooperatives could ask for land, and raised the terms of the concession from four to nine years and even more, if special plans for agricultural improvement could be presented. Accused of serving the economic interests of the landlords against the rural workers, Segni defended himself by saying that he was reinforcing the technical and economic dimensions of the cooperative initiative as against the political influence and the "euphoria" of the initial period.

Beyond the debates and the criticisms, the decree of September 1946 was in effect the last measure to substantially affect the place of cooperatives in rural conflicts, even though the legislation on uncultivated land would continue to have effects into the 1950s. Launched under the initiative of Gullo, the measures of 1944-46 contributed to reinforcing the position of the small farmers. At the same time, they were a specific consequence of the conditions of the end of the war, encouraging the extension of cultivated land for food production and managing social conflict in the countryside. But their provisional nature and the absence of permanent legislation made the limits of the decrees evident, once the excitement of the "emergence" period had been overcome.

On their side, the landholders accepted this short-term compromise in order to protect their long-term profits and to mitigate the risk of radicalizing the social conflict. But the coalition government would be progressively undermined. In 1947, the Socialist and Communist Parties

[11] THOMPSON, Edward P., *Whigs and hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*. London: Allen Lane, 1975, p. 264.

were excluded from government at the national level, as well as in Sicily where a left-wing front was the primary political force, having gained 30% of the vote in regional elections.[12] The victory of the Christian Democrats in the national election of April 18, 1948 symbolically clinched this shift in the balance of political forces.

In a context dominated by political conflict, the cooperatives could not find suitable conditions to develop and reinforce their scope for autonomous action, and the agrarian reform of 1950 would not recognize their potential role in the process of land distribution and agricultural improvement.[13] The peasant movement tried to defend the land concessions obtained through the cooperatives, but was not able to make a substantial change to these dynamics, conceiving the "battle over uncultivated land" as a sort of transition phase towards the final aim of general agrarian reform. Over the years, the question of uncultivated land merged into the larger debate on property rights and farming, which in political terms meant the debate on land reform and the reform of agrarian contracts. As Hobsbawm observed, "land occupation in modern politically organized peasant movements is an incident in a long-term campaign."[14]

At the same time, the long-term dynamics of the peasant farmers purchasing the land through "traditional" market mechanisms started up again at the end of the 1940s. The postwar dynamics of the land market were slow and non-linear, but they were able to "absorb" a part of the "peasant desire" for land. Even though the speculative operations drained a part of their resources, some contextual evolutions (i.e. risk of agrarian reform, growth in the cost of labour, decline in agricultural prices, more profitable investments) encouraged several big landholders to break up their large estates, supplying the market with a great number of small and medium plots. Thus while the market for large and medium farms stagnated during the postwar period, the market for small plots was characterized by an intensity of transactions, further encouraged by the effects of the decree

---

[12] On the Sicilian case, see SANTINO, Umberto. *La democrazia bloccata: La strage di Portella della Ginestra e l'emarginazione delle sinistre*. Soveria Mannelli (CZ): Rubbettino Editore, 1997.

[13] Different recent works on the Italian agrarian reform can be cited: BERNARDI. Emanuele. *La riforma agraria in Italia e gli Stati Uniti: Guerra fredda, piano Marshall e interventi per il Mezzogiorno negli anni del centrismo degasperiano*. Bologna: il Mulino, SVIMEZ, 2006. By the same author "Estados Unidos y la reforma agraria italiana (1947-1953)". *Historia agraria*. n. 54, August 2011, pp. 141-174; MISIANI, Simone. "Colonización interior y democracia: la reforma agraria italiana de 1950". *Historia agraria*. n. 54, 2011, pp. 105-140; *Riforma fondiaria e paesaggio. A sessant'anni dalle leggi di riforma: dibattito politico-sociale e linee di sviluppo*. Soveria Mannelli (CZ): Istituto Alcide Cervi, Rubbettino Editore, 2012.

[14] HOBSBAWM Eric J., *Op. Cit.*. "Peasant Land Occupations". p. 129.

of February 24, 1948, introducing tax breaks and subsidies in favour of small peasant property.

Rhythms and evolutions of the rural struggles

Thus, although the peasant movement launched a massive campaign of land occupations, the outcomes obtained by the cooperatives in terms of enduring concessions were limited, and in the end rather incidental to the overall evolution of agrarian policies in Italy. Of course, we might then ask whether the "cooperative phase" was no more than an exceptional and isolated episode in the postwar history of the Italian countryside. However, even though they were provisional, the measures adopted by ministers Gullo and Segni had a real influence on class relations in the local agrarian contexts. The mechanisms they introduced temporarily suspended the traditional conditions of precariousness and subordination. The cooperatives become a key element with this, as the rapid and prominent development of the phenomenon in the traditionally non-cooperative Southern regions confirmed.[15]

According to official statistics, between 1944 and 1956, peasant cooperatives countrywide submitted 27,885 requests to the local section of the civil court, which was responsible for the question.[16] In Italy overall, 2.3 million hectares of uncultivated land were demanded, and 9,060 concessions were authorized on nearly 300,000 ha. The final outcome was limited – concessions were temporary and soil quality often poor – but not irrelevant as compared to the 767,000 ha distributed over three decades by the 1950 land reform. At the same time, it is interesting to observe that more than half of both the requests (13,973, totalling 1,023,722 ha) and the authorised concessions (4,798, totalling 190,229 ha) preceded December 31, 1947.

The postwar peasant movement was a national movement, but the phenomenon of land occupations was geographically polarized in favour of Southern Italy, with Sicily being the most prominent region in numerical terms.[17] Here, 4,832 requests were submitted, for a total of 906,743 ha, and

[15] On the cooperative tradition in Sicilian agriculture, see CANCILA Orazio ed., *Storia della cooperazioni siciliana*. Palermo: IRCAC, 1993.
[16] See the yearbook *Annuario statistico dell'agricoltura italiana* of the Istituto Centrale di Statistica for the data on the first half of the 1950s.
[17] On the Sicilian case and the role of the peasant cooperatives, see RENDA, Francesco. "Il movimento contadino in Sicilia". In: *Campagne e movimento contadino* Cit.. *Volume primo: Monografie regionali*, 1979, pp. 557-717 and the chapter in *Storia della cooperazioni siciliana*. *Op.Cit*. There is also the collective volume MARINO, Giuseppe

987 concessions were authorized on 86,420 ha, 80% of in 1944-47 (855 concessions on 73,024 ha). Data collected by the National Agricultural Statistics and Economics Office (UNSEA) provides further information about the origins and the characteristics of the 65,030.91 ha conceded to cooperatives up to 1949. This land represented more than 40% of the total of 157,468.22 ha belonging to 403 private landowners and 45 public or private collective owners (state, provincial or municipal properties, church, charities and others).[18]

A static analysis of the cooperatives' action as regards uncultivated lands needs to be integrated by a dynamic one. Using the records produced by the local commission in the provincial civil court, we are able to go into the details of the yearly and monthly dynamics of the authorized land concessions in the Sicilian province of Caltanissetta.

The two provinces of Agrigento and Caltanissetta lie at the heart of the social movement asking for the distribution of uncultivated land via cooperatives, both located in the latifundia-dominated grain-producing regions of the central Sicily. Largely dominated by small tenant farmers and sharecroppers, the struggles here focused initially on the contractual question, seeking to negotiate better contractual arrangements with the landholders. But, very quickly, cooperatives developed to seek access to the uncultivated land: in the territory of Caltanissetta the cooperatives managed 1,686 ha in 1944-45, 7,205 ha in 1945-46, and 10,977 ha in 1946-47 – that is, about 60% of the total geographical area obtained after the Second World War.

Analyzes have long identified two phases in the Italian peasant movement of that period: the first phase, from 1944 to 1946, was characterized by traditional forms of primitive rebellion or simple *jacquerie*; the second phase, more organized and culminating in the mass mobilisations of autumn 1949, was dominated by the debate on agrarian reform.[19] This framework has already been subject to criticism, and here we will

---

Carlo, ed., *A cinquant'anni dalla Riforma agraria in Sicilia*, Quaderni del CEPES. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003.

[18] See *Indagini particolari nel settore agricolo: Concessione di terre incolte o insufficientemente coltivate, in applicazione ai decreti Gullo e Segni*. UNSEA. Estratti dal Bollettino Mensile di Informazioni dei mesi di agosto e settembre 1949, Rome, November 1949, tab. 7-8.

[19] See, for example, TARROW, Sidney G., *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1967, pp. 245-248. For a critical analysis of this perspective, see *Nord e Sud nella crisi italiana 1943-1945: Atti della tavola rotonda, Catania 14-15 marzo 1975*. Istituto siciliano per la storia dell'Italia contemporanea (ISSICO). Cosenza: Pellegrini Editore, 1977.

reconsider it further, exploring how the land concessions in favour of the peasant cooperatives evolved in the province of Caltanissetta.

The first concessions in Caltanissetta, eight in number, were decided by the local commission between May and October 1945. Preceded by a phase of interruption, authorised concessions returned in force at the end of August, peaking in the "explosion" that began in October and continued until December 1946: by the end, 72 concessions would have been authorized on 7,736 ha. Another pause (only 8 concessions on 567 ha) occurred at the beginning of 1947, following the regional pact signed between the peasant movement and the organizations of the landholders to respect the agricultural calendar and protect yearly production. The concessions grew again in the second half of 1947, perhaps "encouraged" by the strategies of the left-wing forces that at the time were trying to capitalize upon their positive results in the 1946 regional election and relaunch their political initiatives in anticipation of the 1948 national election. Thus, in the province of Caltanissetta, from August until the end of 1947, the local commission authorised 64 requests from the cooperatives, pertaining to 5,531 ha. However, it is plausible to argue that the 1947 peak is only a "final flare," and that in fact it concludes the "cooperative season" on the uncultivated land of the latifundia. In 1948, only six more concessions would be authorized, on 2,131 ha.

If we use the information concerning the requests presented and the land assigned to cooperatives as a proxy for how power relations were evolving in rural social conflicts, the dynamic observed belies an analysis which sets the primitive rebellions of the first phase in opposition to the politically organiZed struggles of the second. In fact, the cooperatives' action appears more effective and the peasant movement more powerful before 1947, which is then confirmed as a sort of turning point within the rural social conflicts in general. However, we have also to consider that the results obtained by the peasant movement on uncultivated land in some ways followed a sort of natural cycle: at the beginning of the peasant mobilization, large surfaces were available and land occupation through the cooperatives was relatively easy; but over the years, as more concessions were authorised, the competition increased and the amount of unoccupied uncultivated lands declined. Against this "natural frontier," the sole alternative seemed to be the redefinition and the constant renegotiation of the superficially technical notion of "uncultivated land."

Therefore, in the requests from the peasant cooperatives to local commissions, as well as in the counterattacks mounted by landholders, the frontier separating the cultivated from the uncultivated land was no longer

fixed on the basis of strictly economic and agricultural criteria. Mediated by the law, different social groups often exploited the same technical arguments and resorted to apparently neutral, apolitical notions to serve their own strategies. In the end, in all the local contexts, the cultivated–uncultivated frontier became subject to permanent renegotiation in accord with existing power relations.

Thus far we have observed these evolutions by adopting a yearly perspective, but the analysis of the monthly patterns in the land concessions to cooperatives can provide additional elements to better understand how peasant collective agency operated on uncultivated lands. Reviewing, on a monthly basis, all the concessions attributed in the province of Caltanissetta between 1945 and 1950, we can identify a sort of annual cycle wherein the vast majority of the land concessions tended to be concentrated between the end of August and the end of November. Naturally, peasant mobilizations and social struggles intensify after harvest, and the end of the summer corresponded to a period of intensified lobbying of local commissions. At the same time, the seasonality of the concessions seemed to follow the agricultural calendar and the traditional expiry date of the agrarian contracts, which, in the grain-producing regions of Sicily ended on August 31. What we seem to observe, then, is an ongoing attempt to mediate social conflicts, providing cooperatives with a solution to their needs by the beginning of the new agricultural year, in order to ensure future production, ploughing and seeding on a surface as large as possible.

Looking at the data for the province of Caltanissetta, the yearly cycle of the land concessions to cooperatives was characterised by two peaks: the first, during the spring (April to June), concerned a limited number of vast areas; the second, during the autumn (October to December), concerned a high number of small areas.

The two peaks seem to be explicable by different factors, and we will try to analyze these seasonal patterns and propose a possible interpretation. On the one hand, the spring peak in general concerned large estates that would have been cultivated since the beginning of the new agricultural year: the decisions of the commission were motivated here by productive concerns. On the other hand, the autumn peak was often influenced by ongoing social mobilizations and land occupations: for political purposes, these concessions aimed to stabilise situations of unrest and prevent the development of existing conflicts. Thus, they needed to satisfy a higher number of requests, even if this strategy would induce land fragmentation and finally prejudice the value of the concessions attributed to cooperatives. Reality, of course, is always much more complex than our models, and we would need additional evidence from other contexts to fill

out this picture: nevertheless, we can reasonably suppose that our considerations are probably pertinent for the larger part of the grain-producing areas of Sicily and for other similar regions as well.

Cooperative paths and peasant agency

Encouraged by the specific conditions that prevailed in the postwar period, the peasant movement adopted cooperatives as a central instrument in rural social conflict. On the formal side, the law identified the cooperatives as the only legitimate body able to request uncultivated land. On the practical side, the cooperative became a fundamental component in socializing peasants and organising collective agency in the countryside. We might, then, ask which dynamic prevailed, and so try to determine whether the cooperatives emerged autonomously, or as a response induced by institutional initiatives. But in fact neither of the two processes appears predominant, and at the local level the top-down dynamics interacted with the bottom-up dynamics, rather than the two being opposed to each other.

As we have seen, in seeking to obtain uncultivated land the cooperatives acted in the name of the peasant movement and negotiated directly with the local commissions and landowners. Provincial federations supported and advised the affiliated cooperatives, which, through their delegates, followed the development of formal procedures, participated in the technical inspections of the estates requested, and defended the cooperatives' interests when controversies emerged. When concessions were authorized, the cooperatives became the official holders, providing guarantees for rent, dictating contractual obligations to members, and monitoring the respect of the farming guidelines fixed by the local agricultural department. At the local level, cooperatives emerged as a crucial actor in mediating relations both with public and also with private institutions. Thus, for example, they would take out collective loans, or ask for subsidies to provide working capital. Operating on the input and the output markets, they reinforced the bargaining power of their members and thus improved their economic opportunities. They also developed social initiatives and different forms of mutual aid.

Placed in charge of the formal concession, the cooperative also became the arena in which the different actors involved – namely, the members – decided how to govern and how to exploit the land they had obtained. In fact, the unity of large estates was rarely maintained and the land was in general fragmented into small plots of 3-5 ha, and distributed to the members for individual cultivation. This mechanism encouraged land

fragmentation and potentially transposed local conflicts and social hierarchies into the membership of the cooperative. In the end, the risk was that the cooperatives would reproduce the characteristics and the dynamics of the latifundia system. Collective farming could have been an alternative, but this solution was rarely adopted and was always half-hearted, except for cases where a collective effort was needed, such as for land transformation and agricultural improvement.

In the end, the impact of the peasant cooperatives can fairly be judged to have been limited; but their rapid and important development after the Second World War is evident, even in the most remote regions of Southern Italy. This was not the case, for Sicily, however, where a significant and mainly rural cooperative movement had existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Presented as a possible solution to transforming economic processes and social relations in the latifundia, farming cooperatives were at that time one of the most important and innovative regional manifestation of the phenomenon of modernization, well known even beyond national borders.[20] The context of the 1940s, however, was totally different, and reference to a sort of "regional tradition" is not enough to explain the substantial development of the cooperative movement in the countryside.

In 1949, the UNSEA inquiry registered 1,187 cooperatives with 246,576 members in Italy, and 290 cooperatives with 100,511 members in Sicily alone, cultivating about 65 thousand hectares.[21] Here, the plots assigned to members had an average surface of 1.45 ha, but only 44,730 members (86.5% farmers and 13.5% other professional figures) had effectively obtained land. At the national level, the proportion of members having obtained land was higher (60.6%), but of the total surface area of 166 thousand hectares, the average plot was only 1.11 ha. This gap revealed the limits of cooperative action on uncultivated land in Sicily, but can also be interpreted as a proof of the key role attributed to cooperatives within the social conflict over access to land.

We can observe these dynamics at the local level using the data collected for the province of Caltanissetta. Here, 64 cooperatives asked for land concessions between 1944 and 1954. They are drawn from almost all the municipalities of the area and in the adjacent provinces of Agrigento and

---

[20] On the farming cooperatives in Sicily at the beginning of the twentieth century, see *Storia della cooperazioni siciliana*. *Op. Cit*. and RENDA, Francesco. *Socialisti e cattolici in Sicilia, 1900-1904: il giovane Sturzo, le lotte agrarie, la mafia*. Caltanissetta-Roma: Salvatore Sciascia editore, 1972.

[21] See *Indagini particolari nel settore agricolo*. *Op.Cit*., tab. 1.

Catania. They were created in the period 1944-47, with only four exceptions: two cooperatives were created in 1938-39, one in 1925 and the last – the only one that dates to the pre-fascist period – in 1919. Between 1944 and 1950, these cooperatives presented 1,021 requests to the local commission concerning 259,260 ha. By the end, 161 concessions – ranging from 25 ha to more than 1,000 ha – were authorized on 87 estates and for a total of 18,234 ha. Together with Agrigento (with 320 concessions on 19,367 ha in 1952), Caltanissetta was the province where the peasant cooperatives obtained the greatest results on uncultivated land.

The most important national political forces were – directly or indirectly – engaged in the rural social mobilizations through their local federations. Other studies have explored these aspects via precise and detailed studies realized at the micro level,[22] and it is not possible here to go into the details of the complex and peculiar local–national relations that emerged in every specific context. Schematically, however, we may say that Catholic and socialist-communist initiatives often coexisted in the same local contexts, where they would eventually compete to gain leadership over the rural population. Nevertheless, the political forces manifested similar attitudes and strategies, endorsing the "allied cooperatives" that could finally serve as unions or local sections of the national parties. As Tarrow observed, for the Communist Party (PCI) this connection seemed fundamental, because "the cooperatives gave the PCI the opportunity to appear in the South not as an electoral party seeking votes or as a working class party seeking alliances, but as the authentic embodiment of peasants' aspirations for the land."[23]

The cooperatives became a key actor within the postwar conflicts over land, and even landholders, middlemen and big rural entrepreneurs sometimes adopted the strategy of creating pseudo-cooperatives to defend their own land against the risk of the forced concessions.[24] But the peasant movement, too, developed some innovative arrangements to serve its own strategies, as proved, for example, by what we could call the "estate cooperative": in these cooperatives, the tenant farmers and sharecroppers of a given estate associates themselves with the explicit aim of collectively renting land which they already exploited individually. From this point of

[22] For the province of Caltanissetta see, for example, VITALE, Francesca Paola. *La memoria dei comunisti nisseni*. Palermo: Istituto Gramsci Siciliano, 1988.
[23] TARROW, Sidney G., *Peasant Communism…Op. Cit.*, p. 282.
[24] Although it focuses on the 1920s, an interesting analysis of cooperatives as an arena for local social conflicts over land is provided in DI BARTOLO, Francesco. "Imbrigliare il conflitto sociale. Mafiosi, contadini, latifondisti". *Meridiana*. n. 63, 2008, pp. 33-52.

view, it is interesting to observe how the cooperatives tried to "absorb" and stabilize the actors and economic relationships.

However, the cooperative movement on the uncultivated land could not guarantee peasants a definitive redistribution of property rights. At the same time, several intrinsic limits undermined the long-term prospects of the postwar "cooperative phase": the land identified as uncultivated was in general poor and marginal; the period of the concessions was very short, discouraging land improvements and agricultural transformations; and no financial resources or subsidies were given to sustain productive investments.

Through collective agency, however, peasants could negotiate better contractual and working conditions, even if only for a limited period. This crucial fact induced the emergence of certain contradictory dynamics, which transposed into the cooperative the local and internal social conflicts of the peasant movement. While an inclusive spirit prevailed during the initial mass mobilisation, the economic and professional disparities progressively segmented the strategies pursued by every social grouping involved in the rural conflict over land. The class composition of the rural population and the social hierarchies were finally reproduced within the cooperatives, with the latter eventually even becoming "the tools of local clientele groups."[25]

Whether adopted, manipulated or perverted, in the postwar transition the cooperatives served as an attack on uncultivated land and finally gained a deserved place in the long-term history of the peasant struggles for land.[26] From this point of view, it is interesting to observe that collective action through the cooperative did not exclude recourse to alternative and individual strategies, such as the land market or, after 1950, the distributive mechanisms introduced by agrarian reform. In the province of Caltanissetta, for example, between the end of the war and 1952, about 22,000 ha were sold or attributed with an emphyteutic lease, in favour of approximately 4,000 farmers. Certain specific measures encouraged this dynamic and, between 1948 and 1950, the law on small peasant property allowed 1,074 smallholders in the area to increase their estates, buying 4,915.22 ha, and creating 1,192 new smallholders on 2,364.68 ha.[27]

Two further processes would contribute to the decline of the peasant cooperatives of the postwar period: the mass migrations out of the Southern countryside towards the urban centres and the Northern regions; and the

---

[25] TARROW, Sidney G., *Peasant Communism…Op. Cit.*, p. 282.
[26] ROSSI-DORIA, Manlio. "La situation des campagnes italiennes". *Op. Cit.*
[27] The 2,266 smallholders on 7,279.90 ha in the province of Caltanissetta correspond to about one third of the 6,523 smallholders on 22,772.29 ha globally subsidized in Sicily.

"great transformation" of Italian agriculture wherein sector-based and corporatist strategies were progressively imposed. However, even where individual strategies prevailed, the recourse to collective agency was not entirely abandoned. It can still be seen, readapted to serve individual purposes, in, for example, negotiating the effective application of reform measures or seeking a compromise when the debt burden risked undermining the acquired assets. Many cooperatives disappeared during the 1950s; others attempt a sort of reconversion as service, supply or marketing cooperatives. But scarce resources limited their ability to act autonomously, and they were often obliged to turn to political forces or public institutions to survive.[28]

Conclusions

Our analysis confirms the complex nature of the Italian postwar peasant movement. The political dimension of the phenomenon needs to be explored at the national and local levels, as other works have done and others are already doing, adopting a "view from below" to interrogate the interconnections between the two levels.[29] The present article has proposed an economic and social history of the peasants' claims for land, situated within the larger history of Italian rural social conflicts in the late 1940s. It is thus a history of both individual strategies and collective mobilisations. The cooperatives were a crucial part of that history, and by focusing on them we are able to occupy a "privileged observatory" on the agrarian dynamics of the interwar period. In conclusion, we will try to examine their contribution to the ongoing transformations: did the action of the cooperatives on the uncultivated land really have any concrete effects; or were they only a parenthesis, their significance restricted to a specific conjuncture of circumstances?

It must be noted that the cooperatives did not achieve permanent redistribution of assets nor did they develop an entrepreneurial alternative model like the farming cooperatives of the first decades of the twentieth

[28] See SCHNEIDER, Jane; SCHNEIDER, Peter, "Economic Dependency and the Failure of Cooperatives in Western Sicily". In: NASH, June; DANDLER, Jorge; HOPKINS, Nicholas S. eds., *Popular participation in Social Change: Cooperatives, Collectives, and Nationalized Industry*. The Hague, Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1976, p. 291.

[29] From this point of view, an interesting debate has been developed over a number of years by the journal *Annali dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi*, in which see in particular n. 3 (1981) on the topic: *Le campagne italiane e la politica agraria dei governi di unità antifascista (1943-1947)*. For recent works, see for example DI BARTOLO, Francesco. "Una complessa relazione tra gruppi". *Snodi. Pubblici e privati nella storia contemporanea*. n. 5, 2010, pp. 44-63.

century. Peasant access to land would definitively remain governed by other – more traditional – mechanisms. Nevertheless, we may also make a strong case that their role was not negligible in the postwar transition. Invoking "the right by labour"[30] to legitimize land occupations and by embodying the "danger of land reform" for big landowners, the cooperatives temporarily influenced power relations at the local level. They reinforced the position of the small farmers, offered an additional source to augment household incomes, and provided crucial inputs for yearly agricultural production.

We can interpret the cooperative as a provisional but not irrelevant instrument in peasant everyday life, one which eventually had significance for their individual and family strategies. These results are based on analysis of the specific case of the province of Caltanissetta. Although further research will certainly be necessary, we can reasonably hypothesize that our considerations could be generalized to other Southern Italian regions characterized extensively by grain-producing agriculture.

Hobsbawm distinguishes three types of land occupation, "depending on the legal situation of the land to be occupied."[31] In the Sicilian case, the concessions to the cooperatives were invoked, but the property title was accepted and the rule of law reaffirmed: the peasant movement finally came to contest the economic rather than the legal basis of the latifundium. Rather than pursuing radical subversive strategies, or manifesting a "primitive desire" to gain land, the small and landless farmers attempted to reinforce their bargaining power and intervene over contractual arrangements, seen as the crucial mechanism governing power relations and the distribution of economic value between workers and landowners.[32] Thus, the postwar transition can eventually be located within the silent and more hidden long-term history of the rural social conflicts that pre-existed the "explosion" of the mid-1940s and which would be perpetuated throughout the radical transformations of the Italian countryside.

.

---

[30] HOBSBAWM Eric J., *Peasant Land Occupations*. *Op. Cit.*, p. 122.
[31] *Ibid.*. p. 120.
[32] See *Exploiter la terre. Les contrats agraires de l'Antiquité à nos jours. Actes du colloque de Caen, 10-13 septembre 1997*. BÉAUR, Gérard; ARNOUX, Mathieu; VARET-VITU, Anne. eds., Rennes: Association d'histoire des sociétés rurales, 2003, and GIORGETTI, Giorgio. *Contadini e proprietari nell'Italia moderna: Rapporti di produzione e contratti agrari dal secolo XVI a oggi*. Turin: Einaudi 1974.

Land conflicts in Formosa, Argentina (1884-1958)

Noemí M. Girbal-Blacha

Historical setting

Marginality in modern Argentina (1880-1930) stemmed from the agro-export model, which was structured from the port of Buenos Aires. The cattle raising and cereal region of La Pampa, which received massive immigration from Southern Europe, and witnessed growing urbanization and the concentration of external investments, was the core region of agricultural investment, resulting in regional inequalities. This region represented 27.7 % of the Argentinean territory yet concentrated, on average, three quarters of its population (72.7%), 90.5% of its agriculture, 70.1% of cattle raising and 73% of railways.

The Argentinean Gran Chaco (Chaco, Formosa, Santiago del Estero, North of Santa Fe and the East of Tucumán and Salta) in the northeast of the country represented 18% of national territory. It was crossed by 3 railways and rivers that connected it with the metropolis. Marginality thus did not always mean isolation. The causes that led to the long-lasting underdevelopment of agriculture of this region were complex.[1] A high percentage of state lands was occupied through precarious tenure arrangements, representing one of the causes of conflicts and sustained marginality in the region.

Institutions regulate socio-economic development that motivates the social investments of the active sectors in a given region.[2] This means that economic regulations, roles and behaviors were socially shaped by institutions beyond strictly legal issues. The institutions that supported "*collective values*"[3] were determined through a "*common sense of*

---

[1] GIRBAL-BLACHA, Noemí M. y CERDA, Juan Manuel. "Lecturas y relecturas sobre el territorio. Una interpretación histórica". *Estudios Rurales. Publicación del CEAR (Centro de Estudios de la Argentina Rural)*. Bernal: CEAR, núm. 1, 2011, pp. 55-78.

[2] CORONA TREVIÑO, Leonel. *Teorías económicas de la innovación tecnológica*. México: Instituto Politécnico Nacional CIECAS, 2002.

[3] GARRABOU, Ramón. *Sombras del Progreso. Las huellas de la historia agraria*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2010.

appropriation"[4] that may generate conflicts over economic resources. In the historical case of Formosa, economic development was shaped by the modalities of the appropriation, tenure and usage of state lands.

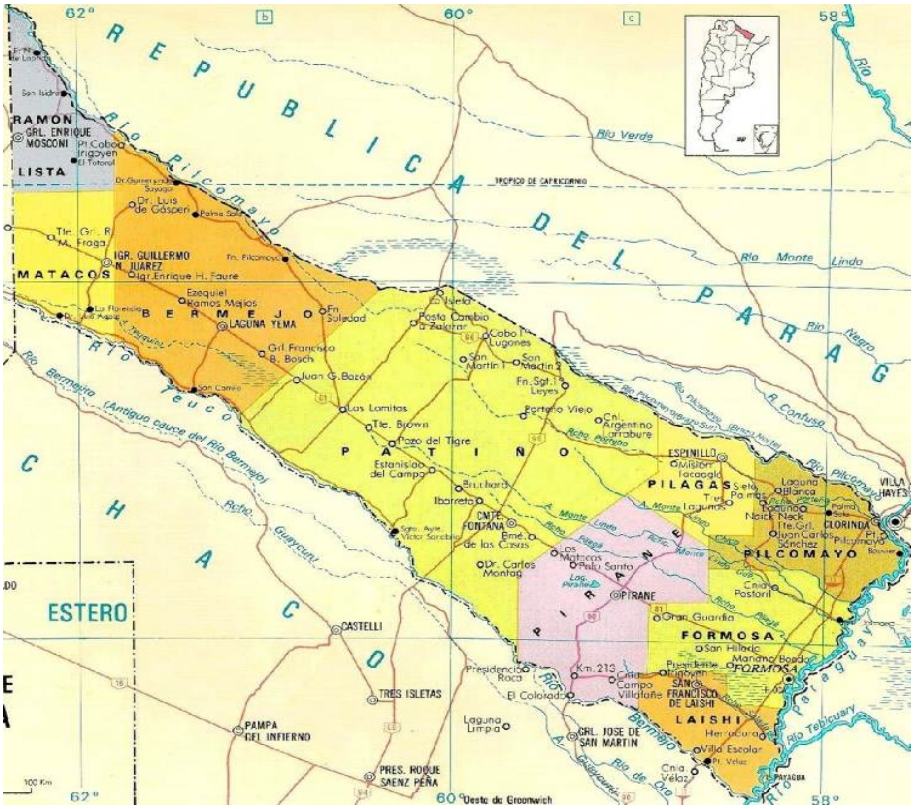
The poor unequally benefitted from the natural resources in the region and those that society generated. The Argentine northeast (NEA, according to its acronym in Spanish) was mainly formed by National Territories that were created in 1884. They were dependent on the Federal Government and their residents had limited citizenship rights. They occupied 40% of Argentinean Territory and 10% of its total population.

They resulted from struggles by indigenous peoples and generally lacked a local bourgeoisie. The NEA joined the agro-export model late in the game with non-competitive products in relation to the dominant national

[4]MARCH, James G. and OLSEN, Johan P. "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life". *American Political Science Review*. n.78, 1984, pp. 734-749.

producers involved in cattle raising, export and import activities, and agro-industrial producers. In the last quarter of nineteenth century, the NEA witnessed the industrialization of sugar production; around 1900, the exploitation of its forest resources and since 1920 the growing of cotton and creole cattle raising.

Formosa – neighbouring Paraguay – was incorporated into the Argentinean Gran Chaco. The land tenure system supported the desertification of soils, frustrating the expectations of native, Paraguayans, and neighbouring inhabitants who lived temporarily on state lands. This generated conflicts over land uses. The preservation of the natural resources of the region, with its heterogeneous productive models and scarce technology, was complex. Cattle raising and forest extraction activities were what attracted settlers to this "Promised Land" to colonize a devastated land lacking any state control. Its inhabitants believed in the short term and intensive usage of the land, which contributed to the erosion of the soil. Formosa was also more linked to the foreign market than to the domestic one.



The centre of Formosa had a network of canals built to avoid flooding, which had an impact on its ecosystem, leading to low profit activities with little capital investment. The indigenous population,

disciplined by the state and the church, consisted of untrained producers working limited areas that eroded the land and caused a population exodus.[5]

There is little in the historiographical literature on the social actions and public policies in this National Territory that gained its own government in 1884 and initiated a low-level colonization scheme following the North American model.[6] As Leoni de Rosciani argues with regard to the Territories: "the lack of connection between different areas that formed each territory, blocked the establishment of supporting structures at the level of territory" and the formation of a political identity.[7] The population also had to deal with oscillating and negative state decisions in regard to land tenure and economic development.[8]

This article deals with the occupation and construction of space in the National Territory of Formosa. It explores national government policies and territorial logic in relation to the resources of common property, in which social conflicts related to the usage and appropriation of state lands emerged in the context of the lack of a strong local ruling class.[9]

2. National Government, territorial logic and conflicts

Spatial occupation and land distribution under state intervention determined the early history of Formosa through legislation such as the Immigration and Settlement Law of 1876 and the National Land Law of 1903 which unsuccessfully tried to implant an immigrant population of tenant farmers. Since 1879, Formosa had been integrated into agro-export business through the extraction of forest-tannin and reed beds, and since 1920, cotton cultivation. In 1930 – after the Wall Street Crash- until 1960, cotton cultivation dominated until synthetic fibres replaced this natural product. As a United Nations report stated: " The division of state lands and

---

[5]ROMERO SOSA, Carlos G. "Historia de la Provincia de Formosa y sus pueblos (1862-1930)". *Academia Nacional de la Historia: Historia Argentina Contemporánea (1862-1930)*. vol. IV, sección segunda. Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1967; ALUCIN, Gabriela. *La provincialización de Formosa y la participación popular. Una hipótesis acerca de la modalidad de su concreción (1930-1955)*. Formosa: Original, 2004.

[6] BORRINI, Héctor R. "Ocupación y organización del espacio en el Territorio de Formosa (1880-1980)". *Cuadernos de Geohistoria Regional.* Resistencia-Chaco: IIGHI, núm. 24, 1991; RUFFINI, Martha. *La pervivencia de la República posible en los territorios nacionales. Poder y ciudadanía en Río Negro*. Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2007.

[7] LEONI de ROSCIANIi, María Silvia. "Los Territorios Nacionales". Academia Nacional de la Historia: *Nueva Historia de la Nación Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2011, p.47.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] NORTH, Douglass C. *Instituciones, cambio institucional y desempeño económico*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993; DI TELLA, Torcuato y otros. *Diccionario de Ciencias Sociales y Políticas*. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2006, pp. 508-512.

the establishment of new colonies meant the introduction of about 5,000 new producers and the introduction of about two millions of hectares into agriculture and livestock production, between 1920 and 1947".[10] Yet this occurred without the resolution of the conflicts stemming from the poor land tenure system. The organizational processes of territorial agriculture went together with these cycles of agricultural production while "state capacities" were utilized to submit the indigenous populations.[11] The territorial occupation of Formosa was carried out from the eastern part to the western.

The natural region of Chaco that formed the Formosa Territory (bordered between the Pilcomayo, Rapaguay, Teuco and Bermejo rivers), was "an extensive area where native cultures, the spontaneous advance from the west of shepherds from Salta and Bolivia" and the Paraguayan immigrant attracted by labour sources converged.[12] It had regions suitable for the exploitation of *quebracho* tannin, and some fertile soil in the national state property in the Eastern part which the state aimed to use to attract foreign and national investment.[13]

The state attributed its own lands in a legally inefficient way. Private colonization was encouraged that ended up putting state lands into the hands of powerful owners from the Argentine coast and from Paraguay. The Office of Land and Colonies under the Ministry of Home Affairs encouraged - with little success- agricultural colonization. Since the late nineteenth century, a large percentage of Formosa's lands were transferred to authorized private producers. In the mid-1920s, the Land Office recorded: 10 grants of 80,000 hectares (ha) each, 1 of 79,457 ha, 1 of 32,500 ha, 1 of 20,000 ha and another of 4,773 ha. A million hectares thus went into private hands with state support. Besides, 200,000 ha were also donated as prizes by the executive branch of the government.[14] The unproductive territorial concentration of Formosa increased conflicts among those who were not the beneficiaries of such unjust state largesse.

---

[10] United Nations Development Programme - UNSO, 2000.
[11] LATTUADA, Mario; MÁRQUEZ, Susana y NEME, Jorge. *Desarrollo rural y política. Reflexiones sobre la experiencia argentina desde una perspectiva de gestión*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ciccus, 2012; IAZZETTA, Osvaldo. "Capacidades estatales, gobernabilidad democrática y crisis global". Working paper series: *Los rostros de la crisis económica internacional y sus impactos políticos en América Latina*. Buenos Aires: PNUD, 2009.
[12] BORRINI, Héctor R. "Ocupación y organización del espacio en el Territorio de Formosa. *Op.Cit*.
[13] Territorio Nacional de Formosa. *Memorias, 1885-1899*. Resistencia-Chaco: IIGHI-UNNE, 1979, pp. 24-28.
[14] SLUTZKY, Daniel. *Estructura social agraria y agroindustrial del Nordeste de la Argentina: desde la incorporación a la economía nacional al actual subdesarrollo concentrador y excluyente*. Buenos Aires: IADE, 2011, pp.115-116.

The reconsideration of titles granted by other provinces or before the limits of the National Territories of Chaco and Formosa were defined, added to this troubled territorial organization. The alienation of lands at the beginning of the twentieth century favored authorized private immigrants with capital. By 1890, Formosa had sold 162,650 hectares at an official price of $ 0.76 per hectare. In Chaco, only 15,000 hectares were sold at $ 0.93 for each hectare. It is worthwhile noting that the coastlines of the Paraguay and Paraná rivers had an added interest because of their geopolitical importance. [15]

The 4167 Law Land in 1903 (valid until 1950) limited the land extension granted to a person or private society in the entire country. The minimum price per hectare was $2.50 for small farms and smallholdings, to be paid in 6 annual fees; there were also other lands obtained by auction for $1 per ha. This was the cheapest land in the entire country. The western part of Formosa particularly benefited because of its geopolitical border situation. Yet the reinvestment of the profits incurred was not always made locally. This was another fact that increased the marginality and poverty of Formosa's inhabitants. The official state power remained quite strong and maintained social control. The National Census in 1895 registered 4,829 inhabitants (36.6% of which were Paraguayan) in Formosa, which went hand in hand with the colonization of poverty.[16]

However, to put land into agricultural production it cost $150 per hectare. As Borrini confirms, "this amount was almost impossible for an independent farmer, neither without their own resources nor state loans".[17] The population of the official Formosa colony (1,537 inhabitants) and Bouvier (776 inhabitants) was only utilized as labour for sugar production. The state brought into its domain a large portion of the land yet there were few colonists living there. Land, resources and a cheap labour force paved the way for the concentrated enrichment of large landowners. The investors from La Pampa tried to broaden their profitability in Formosa while the native inhabitants could not occupy the land legally.

Since 1883, modernization of sugar production along the Paraná river in Formosa began as part of the expansion of sugar production whose centre was Tucumán. Between 1893 and 1894, the "Formosa" sugar production plant, managed by a Hungarian businessman, Maurico Mayer,

---

[15] *El Eco de Formosa*. 18 de enero de 1890, p. 2.
[16] República Argentina. Departamento General de Inmigración (1891 y 1897): *Memoria 1890 y 1896*, Buenos Aires, s.d.t.
[17] BORRINI, Héctor R. "Ocupación y organización del espacio en el Territorio de Formosa. *Op.Cit.*

started to introduce technological innovations, leading to the 1896 crisis of sugar overproduction. A second sugar production plant was Bouvier, managed by Nougués Hermanos from Tucumán. They were both valued at $1,292,071 (45% in lands) by 1914. It was the area that produced the cheapest sugar in the country.[18] The power of the sugar oligarchs was exercised throughout the Territory and while they obtained high earnings, they did not reinvest in Formosa.

The arid, little-populated western area of Formosa between the Pilcomayo and Bermejo rivers "was a remarkable area of rural colonization settled by "tenant farmers" who called themselves northerners"[19] which also contained horticultural activities. Rural colonization and the reduction of the indigenous peoples were two points that provoked conflicts between the large landowners and tenant farmers.[20]

In April 1900, in the southeast of Formosa colony, the Franciscan Order organized a mission, San Francisco de Asis, de Laishi, occupying 74,000 hectares, that gathered together 6,000 indigenous peoples.[21] "La Formosa", a quebracho tannin extract factory, was founded at that time. It main activities were to import and export the quebracho tannin, exploiting native manual labour under slave conditions. Four years later, 15,000 hectares were also allocated to create two Indian reservations under the private management of Domingo Astrada.[22] The extensive attempt to establish the borders of Salta and Formosa would delay the initiatives that aimed to reduce the customs and way of living of creoles, immigrants and indigenous peoples. The proposal was delayed because of the lack of railways and navigability on the rivers. The state set aside the possibility of

[18] TORNQUIST, Ernesto. *El desarrollo económico de la República Argentina en los últimos cincuenta años*. Buenos Aires: E. Tornquist y Cía. Ltda., 1920, pp.51, 55.
[19] BORRINI, Héctor R. "Ocupación y organización del espacio en el Territorio de Formosa. *Op.Cit.* p. 29.
[20] CHAPEAUROUGE, C. *Plano catastral de la República Argentina*, s.d.t., 1925, folio 18; IRIBAME, Pablo D. "Un estado de desconfianza. Notas sobre la burocracia estatal y los Territorios Nacionales". In: QUIROGA, Hugo y RUFFINI, Martha. eds., *Estado y Territorios Nacionales. Política y ciudadanía en Río Negro 1912-1930*. Buenos Aires: EDUCO, 2011, pp.79-91.
[21] DALLA CORTE-CABALLERO, Gabriela. "La Misión Franciscana de Laishi: el proyecto del ingeniero José Elias Niklison (1910-1920)". *Historia Unisinos*, vol. 3, núm. 17, Setembro/Decembro 2013, pp. 203-215.
[22] ASTRADA, Domingo. *Expedición al Pilcomayo*. Buenos Aires: Robles y Cía., 1906; COLAZO, S. "Domingo Astrada y la colonización del Alto Pilcomayo". *Cuarto Encuentro de Geohistoria Regional*. Resistencia: IIGHI, 1984, pp.142-144.

a suitable land distribution scheme and simply moved the native inhabitants, favouring the large predatory forest companies.[23]

The centre of Formosa, far from rivers and railways, proved to be a challenge for settlement. In October 1905, the National Executive forbade the transfer of state lands even those donated, rented or sold which were obtained before the Land Law in 1903. The result was the creation of large estates and low productivity. After a decade, the weekly newspaper, *Nueva Época,* was established which locally promoted "the protection of interests of land, progress and development". From 1917 onwards, it also shared readers with the twice-weekly newspaper, *La Voz Del Pueblo*. Another local newspaper, *La Semana* (formed in January 1923) expressed Formosa's interests with a strong nationalist bent.[24] Lawsuits over land increased without effective results for those plaintiffs less favored by fortune and power.[25]

In 1916, Hipólito Yrigoyen from the Radical Party assumed control of the national government. The colonization of state lands by medium-sized producers was encouraged to increase extensive cattle raising. Almost 50 % of the colonies created in Formosa until 1930 were dedicated to this productive activity.[26] The state acknowledged its legal duty to distribute the land equally. In 1914, plots of land distributed between 0-25 hectares (27% of the total amount) and between 1,000 – 5,000 hectares (29% of the total amount) prevailed. 38.1% of the Formosa population was Paraguayan.[27]

In 1918, a committee was sent to the National Territories of Chaco, Misiones, and Formosa in responses to conflicts over the land. It proposed to establish small- and medium-sized cattle raising and agricultural production through an organized distribution of space, which had to be provisional, howver, since there was no definite or efficient means to measure the lands. The centre of Formosa would be settled only when immigrants from Southern Chaco migrated there.

---

[23]ROMERO SOSA, Carlos G. "Historia de la Provincia de Formosa y sus pueblos (1862-1930)". *Op.Cit*., pp. 218-221.

[24] *La Semana*. Formosa, December 26 1924, p. 1.

[25] Archivo Históricos de Formosa. Sección Exptes. Judiciales, años 1945-1953. Caja 174, exptes. 271 y 522; caja 194 bis, expte. 243; caja 227, exptes. 114 y 165; caja 245, expte. 609; caja 314, expte. 19; caja 441, expte. 658. GIRBAL-BLACHA, Noemí M. "Reclamos de una población rural postergada. Política y justicia a la carta. Visibilidad en Formosa. Argentina (1884-1955)". *Revista de Historia del Derecho* 45, Buenos Aires, agosto 2013, pp. 73-110.

[26] SLUTZKY, Daniel. *Estructura social agraria y agroindustrial del Nordeste de la Argentina…Op.Cit.,* p. 116.

[27]BOLSI, Alfredo y MEICHTRY, Norma. "Realidad y política migratoria en el Nordeste Argentino". *Cuadernos de Geohistoria Regional*. Resistencia: IIGHI-CONICET, núm. 7,1982, p.23.

Unemployment in Formosa became a problem especially after the 1930 crisis.[28] There were two tannin factories, the Compañía de Quebracho *"Formosa"* and the Quebrachales *"Dubosc"*, in the capital and along the Paraguay River, which suspended their employees three times a year. "Unemployment in this Territory was reduced to a few day labourers, but there were unemployed people in the city area because of lack of employment for young people". This was a partial view of the complex socioeconomic situation of Formosa with the railway from East to West only transporting forest products for tannin instead of settling inhabitants to work in urban centres. A proposal was thus made to counteract the indifference of Paraguayan workers, fostering with little success the arrival of Europeans (Serbian, German and Polish workers).

Cotton oil, tannin, sugar and corn oil companies were hardly encouraged by the state. The cotton lands represented 15% of the total cultivated area in the Territory in the 1920s and 60% by 1937. A population movement took place when "Tobas and Matacos [indigenous peoples] were taken to the sugar plants in Salta, between three hundred and five hundred each year".[29] They were taken there and returned when the sugar harvest ended by contractors. The effects of uprooting peoples in this way were not considered.

The inner semiarid area of Formosa contained the Formosa-Embarcación railway and had 54,786 inhabitants by the mid-1930s. The central areas grew more. The rural territorial population added 73.4% in 1920 and 77.2% in 1934.[30] Northern social actors reported to the political power that it was possible to restrict the annual average population growth rate to five hundred. The population rise in Chaco in 1920-1925 was 12.72% and 1.14% in 1955-1960; in Formosa there was a rise of 11.68% in the first period and 4.33% in the second period.[31] The local power could not establish thriving urban centres since they were only aware of social discipline to reduce conflicts without enacting changes to the inefficient and unjust land settlement system.

The organization of the land market was always in dire straits because of the lack of formal property titles. Local newspapers reported in 1934 "Immigrant families were mostly from Paraguay and had poor

[28] Junta Nacional para Combatir la Desocupación (JUNALD). *Memoria 1937*. Buenos Aires: JUNALD, 1938, pp. 133-135.
[29] *Ibid*., pp.134-135.
[30] President's Office. Ministry of Technical Affairs, 1952.
[31] CHACOMA, Jorge D. "Distribución de la población en Formosa: Ambiente, ferrocarril y algodón (1920-1947)". *X Encuentro de Geohistoria Regional*. Formosa: Junta de Estudios Históricos y Geográficos de Formosa, 1990. .

conditions, better to say without any resources" which is confirmed by the few official statistics.[32] Real-estate transfers were usually informal. The limits between properties also caused conflicts. Large producers and companies remained the principal actors in the land market, which contrasted to the poor economic situation of the majority of the population.

State lands for the colonists and the growth of demand for cotton since the 1930s widened the agricultural border, but did not bring stability. The Cotton Census in 1936 recorded that 0.2% of the population were cotton owners in Formosa and 86.6% of these were occupants with financial status. The exploitation of the forest paved the way – in the context of international crisis – for tannin production. At the end of the 1930s, foreign investors controlled more than 20% of the cattle raising areas of this National Territory with either state indifference or complicity in regard to this fact.[33]

The government of 1930 supported the provincialization of the National Territories to redefine the representation system in the National Executive.[34] However, the differences between the territories were accentuated. Since 1934, the National Territories Directorate established territorial councils of administration, but it did not establish legislatures. Between 1938 and 1941, several projects fostered provincialization, but they excluded Formosa. The population of the Territories considered that the ones who decided these policies did not know the jurisdictional needs of the population. Yet the federal government insisted on "Argentinizing" the territories. As a consequence of the increase of social control in state policies to confront banditry, the National Gendarmerie was created in 1938.[35] Political reform was postponed and the legitimacy of state violence was acclaimed. Each National Territory had its own special features as well as sharing common features yet Formosa was still set aside.

The life of indigenous peoples was characterized by extreme poverty and ignorance of state powers to this plight. "More than 50,000 Indians settled in the areas of Formosa and Chaco – according to the official record of the last Census – and many died from starvation, having a miserable life…". "…groups of Indians [were] concentrated in official

---

[32] *La Voz del Pueblo*. Formosa, 25 de mayo de 1934, p.1.

[33] BACQUE, Santiago y BEGUÉ, Pablo. *La industria del extracto de quebracho ante los poderes públicos. Informe presentado a la Comisión Nacional del Extracto de quebracho por los miembros de la misma, representantes de la S. Quebrachales Fusionados*. Buenos Aires: Rossi, 1933.

[34] PEREIRA, Daniel A. *La construcción de la ciudadanía en el Territorio Nacional de Formosa (1879-1955)*.Tesina de Licenciatura. Formosa: Universidad Nacional de Formosa, Facultad de Humanidades, 2004.

[35] MARI, Oscar E. "Milicias, delito y control estatal en el Chaco (1884-1940)". *Mundo Agrario. Revista de Estudios Rurales*. La Plata: CEHR-UNLP, 2006, pp. 1-25.

reserves, religious missions and even personal ones, such that we were unable to speak of social progress".[36] This government inertia was a long-lasting situation. Esteban Maradona, a medical doctor who lived in the area for more than fifty years, was a privileged observer and stated that: "when an inhabitant was settled there, whatever their social condition was: gender, nationality, age, religion, their aspirations was already written: it appeared with the well-known project of exploitation of Indians at a low price…".[37] They were paid with vouchers, tobacco or alcohol by sugar production plants. In the tannin and other factories, they toiled as private workers without compensation.

The coup that took place on June 4, 1943 reinforced the state presence in the National Territories. The government wanted to widen the economic and political organization of the Territories. With Peronism in power, the media were politically and socially biased. This was the case of the *Tribuna Peronista* in February 1947, which was an "informative, doctrinaire, trade unionist newspaper and also a newspaper of problems, aspects, Argentinism and culture". It was the only spokesperson for revolutionaries and of the general Peronist doctrine in the National Territory of Formosa".[38] It protected the interests of "workers, lumberjacks and workers in general" in order to face the "despoilers of indigenous people" and "land-owing oligarchy". These issues revealed the latent conflicts over the land situation in the region with the local press.

The economy accompanied the gradualness of the political field in the Territories. The big estates near the Paraguay River increased their sale of livestock so that the livestock index went from 13.64 in 1930 to 18.39 in 1947, which also caused conflicts.[39] In relation to the granting of lands, documents demonstrate the quick authorization of state land management to limited companies, but at the same time individuals were not allowed to fence in their lands.[40]

Between 1930 and 1960, small cotton plots grew. The given lands reached up to 100 hectares, mainly occupied by poor inhabitants. In 1947, more than 60% of the population settled in dispersed areas without land ownership. The National Census in 1947 recorded that 85.24% of

[36] MARADONA, Eduardo L. *A través de la selva*. Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de la Penitenciaría Nacional, 1937.
[37] *Ibid.,* p. 61.
[38] *Tribuna Peronista*. Formosa, 12 de febrero de 1947, p. 1.
[39] BECK, Hugo. "La etapa peronista en Formosa. Población, economía y política en la transición del territorio a la provincia". *XI Congreso Nacional y Regional de Historia Argentina*. Córdoba: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 2001, pp.4-6.
[40] Archivo Histórico de Formosa (AHF): *Libro de Resoluciones Gubernamentales*, 1945-1946, t. 177, expte. 6231, f. 91.

inhabitants had no poperty titles while the indigenous population was excluded from social benefits[41] as they were relegated to the responsibility of religious organs in Formosa.[42] In December 1948, the official newspaper, *Justicia Social,* paid attention to the indigenous peoples noting that they did not ask for public lands, they asked for working tools. At the same time, *Unidad,* from the local Communist Party, and *Voz Radical,* the monthly newspaper of Radical Party (UCR by its acronym in Spanish), widely reported the authoritarianism of the government.

The land areas granted for agricultural production were progressively reduced. In East Formosa, it was 10 to 15 hectares per each producer. The Census in 1947 and 1960 showed an increase in small-scale land exploitation. The smaller ones up to 25 hectares grew from 42.13% to 59.17% and were used for agricultural production. The bigger extensions were mainly for cattle raising and forest extraction activities. The small areas prevailed, but they only totaled 1.21% of the total surface area of Formosa. This situation also affected the soil and life quality. The inhabitants of state lands and small properties were marginal in relation to overall territorial economic development.[43]

Cattle raising and forest extraction activities in state lands represented 65% of the surface area in 1947 and they were given as concessions, sold and rented in the first case and through gauging payments for forest areas.[44] Real-estate concentration took place in the east of Formosa, where the lands were first privatized. The cooperative movement was not successful in Formosa due to the instability of producers.[45] The discourse of the National Government regularly promised state land to cultivate for farmers from Formosa, Chaco and Corrientes.[46] Yet these were promises which did not correspond to the reality of living in the margins.[47]

---

[41] Matanza de Rincón Bomba, ver: Aranda, 2012; Zamudio, 2008. AHF: *Libros copiadores de notas oficiales*, 1948, libro 115, fs. 175 y 207; 1949, libro117, fs. 298-300, libro 118, f. 107; 1950, libro 123, f. 17.

[42] SBARDELLA, Cirilo R. *Los diarios de la Misión Laishi*. Resistencia-Chaco: Centro de Estudios "Brigadier Pedro Ferré", 1991.

[43] Programa de Naciones Unidas de Desarrollo-UNSO/PNUD. Oficina de lucha contra la desertificación. Secretaría de Desarrollo sustentable y política ambiental e instituto de colonización y tierras fiscales. Tenencia de tierra en la provincia de Formosa. República Argentina. Informe final de Enrico Formica. Buenos Aires: UNSO/PNUD, 2000.

[44]SLUTZKY, Daniel. *Estructura social agraria y agroindustrial del Nordeste de la Argentina…Op.Cit.,* p.25.

[45] *La Cooperación.Organo de la Asociación de Cooperativas Argentinas*. Buenos Aires, 7 de mayo de 1948, núm. 1017, p. 3.

[46] *La Gaceta Algodonera*. Buenos Aires, octubre 31 de 1953, año 30, núm. 357, pp. 1-2.

[47] *Tiempo de cambio regional*. Formosa, 23 de febrero de 1996, p. 7.

Farm Plots (%)

	1947		1960	
Legal Regimen	**Number of Farm Plots**	**Surface Area Used**	**Number of Farm Plots**	**Surface Area Used**
Owners	2.31	18.61	4.65	14.13
Tenants	4.28	2.00	4.23	1.91
Sharecroppers	0.6	0.08	0.71	0.08
Occupants	85.24	71.06	66.23	68.94
Other schemes	7.57	8.25	24.18	14.94
Total	100	100	100	100

Sources: *National Census* 1947, 1960. Compiled by the author.

In 1958, Formosa became a province because of a national political decision. Land administration would be organized by local organs in Formosa. (Article 35 Subsection 2 of the Constitution). The reduced dimensions of properties predominated in the National Census in 1960. The allocation of state lands (Law 113 of 19/07/1960) regulated colonization. It was organized as a process of settlement for those who "peacefully settled" and regularly cultivated "within the surface [area] that [was] settled" (Article 28), thereby obtaining an ownership title.[48] It had thus taken a long time for regularization of property titles.

The legislation allowed for forthright buying and renting. The beneficiaries of the Colonization and State Lands Regime would be the large and medium occupants with less than 10,000 hectares, with inhibitions for limited companies or for limited partnerships. 29% of land titles were given mainly to Argentinean occupants in economic units, agrarian cooperatives', and to people living in the region, and numerous families who were able to work were provided with tools and some resources.[49] The tenderers would pay the agreed price, fees and taxes, producing improvements, cultivations and area measurements and could not transfer the concession without authorization. This limited the number of candidates who were able to meet these conditions.

Between 1947 and 1960, "4,500 new plots were created, most of them dedicated to cotton production and placed in state lands which occupied 67% of the covered surface, one of the biggest proportions of the country".[50] The Census in 1960 showed the extent of "non definite" land tenure in state lands when it was registered that only 1.5% of the cultivated surface was without productive activity. The rest of the Formosa area was occupied by cattle raising and forest extraction activities.

[48] CÁRCANO, Miguel Angel. *Evolución histórica del régimen de la tierra pública pública 1810-1916*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1972, p.434.
[49] UNSO. Tenencia de tierra en la provincia de Formosa. *Op.Cit*.
[50] SLUTZKY, Daniel. *Estructura social agraria y agroindustrial del Nordeste de la Argentina…Op.Cit.,* p. 132.

77.5 % of foreigners were farmers, 86% of the producers were "intruders", 13% were tenants and only 0.2% owners. By 1960, 51.5% of the farms were less than 5 hectares and 35.5% had between 5 hectares and 15 hectares. The lands suitable for the agriculture were limited by the producers' economy.[51] In this context, social conflict and land tenure were the same: marginality was part of the agro-export model.

4. Final thoughts

This article dealt with Formosa and its territory, production, legislation, institutions and the social and economic condition of its inhabitants who engaged in silent conflicts. They were recorded in the documents. They were expressed in the inhabitants' requests and reports. If reality is "a heterogeneous continuum" that can be rationalized, it becomes history when it is studied from particular cases.[52] Public and private requests against the abuses of state and economic powers make clear the discretional nature that led to conflict and also the effects of interregional unbalance which were fostered by the economic model led by the port city of Buenos Aires.

The National Territories were created by the conservative state in 1884. The Radical Party management (1916-1930) aimed to provincialize them, creating legislatures and choosing representatives. The rupture of institutional order in 1930 and the return of neo-conservatism widened citizenship in those Territories, in an attempt to build an electoral base. Peronism (1946-1955) carried out a sustained, but gradual action towards the effective provincialization of territories like Formosa; however, the process was slow. The bureaucracy functioned as an end and means of power relations[53] and the junction between them was seen in the conflicts as in this case related to the usage and tenure of the land.

The economic underdevelopment of the NEA and especially of Formosa came from the lack of state attention and lack of an established local bourgeoisie that invested and was aware of regional interests. It was a space that would be occupied by the bourgeoisie of La Pampa and Paraguay. 8.3% of the surface area was cultivated in Chaco and only 1% in Formosa in 1947. These figures increased to 14% and 1% in the 1960s, respectively.[54] Desertification increased in the western part of Formosa. In

---

[51] BECK, Hugo. "La etapa peronista en Formosa…" *Op.Cit*., p.7.
[52] Weber, Max *Por qué no se deben hacer juicios de valor en la sociología y en la economía*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial-Sociología, 2010, pp. 24-25.
[53] MIGDAL, Joel S. *Estados débiles. Estados fuertes.* México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011.
[54] SLUTZKY, Daniel. *Estructura social agraria y agroindustrial del Nordeste de la Argentina…Op.Cit.,* p.121.

the eastern area, the best quality cattle raising attracted investors from La Pampa who obtained significant earnings that were not reinvested in Formosa.

Life along the coastlines of the rivers in Formosa was part of the regional inequalities of a nation like Argentina, built on a native past, but oriented to Europe through the port of Buenos Aires. History provides us examples of the effects of public policies on the economy, the growing bureaucratization of the state as well as the calls for "social justice" that were finally raised in the middle of the twentieth century.

Political opportunity and collective mobilization in post-revolutionary Portugal – the case of a socio-environmental conflict in the Portuguese inland (1974-1980)

Pedro Gabriel Silva

Introduction

Seven months had passed since the April 25, 1974 Revolution, when the *Jornal do Fundão*, a weekly regional newspaper announced in broad headlines the dramatic situation of a village on the brink of death. The village was Gaia, a rural community in the municipality of Belmonte with 300 inhabitants. The menace came from the mining company that, against the "will of the people"[1], was planning to dredge the plots sitting near the hamlet.[2] The Revolution could not have come at a better time for the local smallholding peasants. In April 1974, the dredge was just a few meters away from the gardens and orchards that fed a large number of households. As the machine approached the houses and surrounding plots, a chorus of protests rose in an outcry strong enough to resonate beyond the boundaries of the municipality, reaching a wide array of political agents and forces on a national scale. Wary of the possibility of losing their valuable property, a group of landowners stood out to campaign against the mining company in a quarrel that brought to the surface deep resentments against industrial mining activities and its collusion with the dictatorship in the past.[3] It was a conflict about the control of ecological resources that meandered through the twists and turns of national political transition.

The political opportunities offered by the Revolution and by the post-revolutionary period frame our analysis, allowing us to see both the influence of structural political change on grassroots mobilization as well as

---

[1] *Jornal do Fundão*. Nov. 24, 1974.

[2] A machine owned by the corporation, Dramin, had been strip mining the deposits of tin ore along the Gaia Valley since as early as 1970. After 1974, the foreign capital of the company passed on to state control.

[3] Industrial mining in the Gaia valley started in 1914. Until 1949, an American company (Portuguese American Tin Company) used a single bucket dredge to explore the alluvial deposits of tin ore, leaving a trail of environmental devastation that echoed in the memories of generations to come. See SILVA, Pedro Gabriel. *No Rasto da Draga*. Castro Verde: 100Luz, 2013.

the reliance major political forces had on local social movements. The implicit micro-sociological scale reveals how a varied array of political forces, while pursuing their power consolidation strategies, engaged with local social movements as a means to win social recognition and legitimacy.[4]

2. A methodological mix: ethnographic and archival research

The very nature of the object of study and its time-span called for a mixed methodological approach where archival research was combined with oral history, the latter prompted by an ethnographic incursion. On the one hand, written documentary sources could shed light on the representations and memories locals have about certain events and facts. On the other hand, collaboration between oral history and ethnography also seemed an inevitable resource given that anthropological fieldwork can provide for a closer and more thorough insight into social memory.[5]

The available space does not allow for a detailed presentation of the methodological apparatus although some of the basic proceedings will be highlighted, especially those articulating ethnographic inquiry and historical sources.[6] Between 2004 and 2011, a series of visits to Gaia were intertwined with archival research and interviews outside the village, searching for testimonies that could provide a better understanding not just of the 1974-1980 conflict, but also of the social, economic and environmental impacts of earlier mining works in the region. This represented also a basic condition to avoid imprinting a univocal image of how locals and mining companies dealt with each other. On top of that, crossing multiple testimonies with personal and official correspondence helped avoid a monolithic view of the community either during the first decades of mining exploration (from 1912 until 1963) or during the 1970s.

---

[4] CEREZALES, Diego Palacios. *O poder caiu na Rua – Crise de Estado e acções colectivas na Revolução Portuguesa*. Lisboa: ICS, 2003.

[5] COLE, John and WOLF, Eric R. *The Hidden Frontier – Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; SOBRAL, José Manuel. *Trajectos: O Presente e o Passado na Vida de uma Freguesia da Beira*. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 1999; GODINHO, Paula. "Movimentos sociais rurais: questões de teoria e métodos". In: *Mundo Rural – Transformação e Resistência na Península Ibérica*. Lisboa: Colibri, 2004, pp. 89-106; SILVA, Pedro Gabriel. "Collective Mobilization and the Social Memory of Environmental Destruction – A Methodological and Theoretical Frame Proposal to Socio-Environmental Conflict Analysis". In: *Narratives and Social Memory: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches*. Braga: Universidade do Minho, pp. 267-282.

[6] An in-depth look at the methodological and theoretical framing of the present investigation can be found in SILVA, Pedro Gabriel. "Colective Mobilization and the Social Memory…". *Op.Cit*.

In the case at hand, the way in which the 1970s conflict was noticed by the researcher represents a good example of the advantages of articulating ethnography with archival investigation. Indeed, we noticed that a quarrel occurred during the mid-1970s, not while conducting fieldwork in the village and its vicinities, but, inadvertently, when consulting state archives. There, among an assortment of official correspondence, property lease contracts, maps and old blueprints, lurked a handful of photocopied letters signed by local landowners addressed to government officials. These letters, the first to be spotted, dated from 1974 and 1975, stressed vividly the claims of a series of landowners against a mining company, acknowledging that a wide popular mobilization was about to burst. Further research in Belmonte's municipal archives turned up more specimens of correspondence protesting against mining, though the most prolific source of popular correspondence was the private archive of a local informant, only to be found later on.[7] Fueled by these findings, the oral inquiry in the field could be directed to scrutinize the hows and whys of the conflict, its origins and original players, its objectives and results, its repertoires and vehicles, its actors in and outside the locality, its supportive forces and major foes.

Ethnography, again, presented an invaluable advantage when it came to address the issue of the conflict with locals. The conflict was buried deep in social memory and the initial inquiries about it were often confronted with the informants' resistance. The adoption of an ethnographic approach granted access to the hamlet's social network, hence contributing to overcome the obstacles when it came to reach the social memory of the protest. The conflictive nature of the protest should not to be neglected: after three decades, the conflict still oozes resentful recollections of interpersonal relations that went sour, of broken family relationships and shattered community connections. Although it was presented as a community outcry by the protesters in their vast correspondence and in the local press, the mobilization never got to fully engage all the villagers and ended up opening wounds in the tissue of local social relations, scars that time could not amend and people still preferred to veil.

3. A conflict in the village in an era of national Revolution

In 1969, the tin dredge returned to the valley of Gaia, 20 years after the Portuguese American Tin Company (PATC) had shut down their dredging operations in the area. This time, a Brazilian venture group,

[7] One of the protest leaders (subject of a future reference).

Dramin, refitted the old machine salvaged from the scrapyard where PATC had left her, and, from 1970 until early 1974, mined the unexplored tin left by the previous American company. In March 1974, after wandering the western half of the valley, Dramin's dredge reached the vicinities of the village and was about to enter a three-hectare stretch of land called *Marradas*. It was an area previously spared from dredging by the American company, from whose soil Dramin expected to extract 250 tons of tin ore, a "third of the country's annual production", its executives claimed.[8] To the local landowners, the Marradas plots were also tremendously valuable, symbolically as well as materially, since they were filled with subsistence polyculture gardens and olive groves. The property was divided into 1200 to 4000 sq meter plots taken care of by the owners or by other villagers under lease contracts. In terms of land distribution and the local inheritance system, such a property had unique characteristics, especially considering its irrigation conditions and its role as a complement of the domestic economy.[9]

The main force behind the mobilization was António (a pseudonym), a 27-year-old worker in the automotive industry and heir of a couple of landowners with a plot in Marradas.[10] His role in setting up of the movement was decisive, as recognized by himself and other participants, as well as by Dramin's former employees and managers. He organized the first meetings and wrote the earliest complaints. He was also a key element in widening the mobilization to the community and in gaining the support of the municipal authority and some left-wing political parties or organizations such as LUAR.[11] Four other landowners gathered around António, creating the nucleus that pushed the protest forward. This core group mobilized its familial, neighborhood and friendship networks, heightening solidarity around their cause and expanding the movement's social basis.

It is worth mentioning that, among the five leaders of the protest, three of them, aged between 50 and 60 years old, shared a personal and family history of contraband and clandestine mining. They belonged to the few households that did not depend on PATC's wage labor and represented cases of families that prospected and marketed tin illegally. A sixth element

[8] Exposition by a landowner, 25-11-1974, Câmara Municipal de Belmonte (CMB), box 227, correspondence 1974-1976.
[9] SANTOS, António. *Heranças – Estrutura Agrária e Sistema de Parentesco numa Aldeia da beira Baixa*. Lisboa: Edições Dom Quixote, 1992.
[10] António worked in the city of Guarda, 20 kilometers away from Gaia.
[11] LUAR, an acronym meaning "moonshine" in Portuguese, stands for the League of Revolutionary Unity and Action – a left-wing clandestine organization founded in the early 1960s by the notable oppositionist to the New State, Palma Inácio.

would join the group, a disgruntled landowner that had a series of complaints about Dramin's conduct during an earlier dredging on one of his properties.

The April 25 Revolution came at a propitious time for Gaia's landowners. The revolutionary events opened up a series of possibilities for the manifestation of popular dissent. Once confined to clandestine actions, often in line with the strategies of everyday resistance,[12] social contention was, then, replaced by open public manifestations of dissension.[13] The city streets, town squares, churchyards, road crossings, *Casas do Povo*[14] and theaters came to be rallying locations where political discussion took place.[15] Collective rallies, excluded from political life during the dictatorship or confined to the demonstrations associated with the regime's *mise en scène*, became, after 1974, an unmistakable expression of popular participation in national politics. The events following the April 25 military coup opened what Tarrow defines as a political opportunity for the emergence of social movements. In Gaia, post-Revolutionary institutional transformation and the equivalent mutation in the architecture of political powers provided a series of opportunities for landowners to maneuver against Dramin's plans and counter the symbolic, legal and economic power that mining companies had historically acquired.[16]

4. Grab the opportunity, create opportunities: the strategies of collective mobilization in Gaia

Facing the imminent risk of expropriation, the landowners organized themselves into a cohesive core and, between April and September 1974, the mobilizations took shape. During this stage, according to António and two other fellow campaigners, the group met in the evenings or late

---

[12] SCOTT, James. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
[13] GODINHO, Paula. "Movimentos sociais rurais: questões de teoria e métodos". *Op.Cit.*
[14] The *Casas do Povo* (People's Houses) were facilities erected during the New State Estado Novo in the villages and townships intended to serve as community meeting points, to host cultural events and provide health and social care services.
[15] BERMEO, Nancy. *The Revolution Within the Revolution: Workers' Control in Rural Portugal*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986; BARRETO, António. *Anatomia de uma Revolução – A Reforma Agrária em Portugal 1974-1976*. Lisboa: Europa-América, 1987
[16] NASH, June. *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us – Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines*. New York: Columbia University Press; DE WIND, Josh. *Peasants Become Miners – The Evolution of Industrial Mining Systems in Peru 1902-1974*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1987; GUIMARÃES, Paulo Eduardo. *Indústria e Conflito no Meio Rural: os Mineiros Alentejanos (1858-1938)*. Lisboa: Colibri, 2001.

afternoons, after finishing their agricultural tasks, in the cellars of houses and, amid snacks and drinks, devised together their strategy of opposition. On certain occasions, friends, relatives and neighbors joined these seminal conspiratorial gatherings. For the leader, those earlier casual assemblies served primarily to establish a common collective stance of refusal towards Dramin's proposals, to decide which steps should be taken to move forward and, overall, to raise a shared belief that it was worthwhile fighting, because the "times were different".[17]

The immediate strategy implied exposing the problem to a realm of institutions that the landowners recognized as being capable of influencing decisions on their behalf and to the regional press. In the words of António, it was of the utmost importance to "get [everyone] in the scuffle"[18]: political parties, municipal authorities, the state secretaries and ministries in charge of agricultural and extractive activities, the head of the government, the district's Governor, the Armed Forces Movement (MFA),[19] clandestine political organizations (such as LUAR), the press,[20] and, later, the National Environmental Commission (CNA). As another early active campaigner stated, "we had to make noise and call out those who could help us cry louder"[21], which meant calling in the "political parties that stood on the peoples' side,"[22] a circumstance corroborated by a company manager still living in Gaia: "then they came with the parties, the LUAR, the MRPP[23] and all of that, messing with the people's minds".[24]

From the intimacy of the landowners' cellars, the movement finally went public when, in October 1974, the first popular assembly took place in Gaia's elementary school. The meeting, widely attended by the community, also counted on the presence of Belmonte's Municipal Administrative Commission (CAM) president and some elements from the local MDP/CDE structure.[25] This rally broadened the protest to the community, with the

[17] António, interview, June 11, 2010.
[18] António, interview, June 10, 2010.
[19] The MFA was the military branch responsible for the coup. Although the executive power was handed over to a civilian agency, the MFA maintained an important role in the democratic transition process, especially until the end of 1975.
[20] In a letter sent to Dramin, in October 1974, a landowner told the company that he was about to "publicize [popular discontentment] through the means of social communication at their disposal". (Regional Direction of Economy of the Centre (DREC), Proc. 797, v. 1).
[21] Fernando, interview, January 20, 2009.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] PCTP/MRPP stands for Portuguese Workers Communist Party/Reorganization Movement of the Portuguese Proletariat, a Maoist political organization.
[24] Francisco, interview, April 7, 2005.
[25] The MDP/CDE (Portuguese Democratic Movement/Electoral Democratic Commission) was a progressive left-wing party with a significant voice in Belmonte. REED, Robert Roy.

dissenting landowners gaining the solidarity of the majority of Gaia's inhabitants to their cause. By the end of the year, the movement had presented itself as the voice of a collective in defense of a *locus*. Though privately owned, this space was represented as common heritage under menace by a mining company and its dredge – the "people's enemies".

In the search for allies, the movement saw in Belmonte's municipal authority its first major institutional ally. Ideologically and politically close to the progressive left, and strongly influenced by the MDP/CDE's local faction, this interim executive represented a *natural ally* in support of the "poor", "humble" and "plundered" collective, as the contesters presented themselves[26].

Sensing the MFA's prominent role in the regime's transition process, Gaia's contesters soon tried to gain the military's support, inviting them to come to the village and see the locale for themselves.[27] With or without invitation, the MFA did come in January 1975, in the course of the cultural dynamization campaign (*Campanha de Dinamização Cultural e Acção Cívica*) promoted in the region of Beira Baixa.[28] Eager to solve the "people's needs" and "to bring the April 25 spirit to the most remote villages", the MFA's sympathy for the landowners' cause was evident. As the MFA openly announced its willingness to "join the people"[29], the contesters saw an opportunity to gain a powerful ally from the emerging forces of post-Revolutionary change. When asked about the conflict, an informant said that the first recollection that came to her mind was, precisely, the calling of the military and the sense of empowerment felt from the MFA's reaction: "With Dramin, that was a heck of a story! We even went to the Castelo Branco barracks […]. We went there to call in the troops to defend the people. […] The soldiers were on the people's side".[30] On the MFA's side, backing up popular movements fitted its strategy of socio-political legitimation, eloquently expressed by the watchword

---

"Managing the Revolution: Revolutionary Promise and Political Reality in Rural Portugal". PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1988.

[26] As observed by Cerezales, the recognition of the post-revolutionary municipal administrative commissions depended heavily on popular backing; its political legitimacy was, in part, granted through close contact with the population and by keeping in touch with popular demands. CEREZALES. Diego. *O poder caiu na Rua…Op.Cit.,* p. 92.

[27] Letter sent by a landowner to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, 10-04-1975, private archive.

[28] An extensive insight into this and other campaigns can be seen in ALMEIDA, Sónia Vespeira de. *Camponeses, Cultura e Revolução – Campanhas de Dinamização Cultural e Acção Cívica do MFA (1974-1975)*. Lisboa, Colibri, 2009.

[29] *Notícias da Covilhã*. February 1, 1975.

[30] Maria (fictious name), interview, Janaury 30, 2009.

"People/MFA's alliance". During the first three months of 1975, the MFA promoted a handful of meetings and assemblies, although it was unable to reconcile the different groups involved.

The MFA's participation in the conflict can be understood in the context of the erosion of the state's ability to enforce its authority and secure public order.[31] The wearing down of police authority became evident when, in April 1975, a tumult flared up in Gaia when a clash between Dramin's workers and a dozen villagers reached the brink of physical confrontation. As remembered by the movement's leader, the incident was provoked by the visit of an engineer sent by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, to listen, *in situ*, to the complaints of the protesters. When called upon, the National Republican Guard had to be transported in private cars owned by villagers and, once there, they were unable to appease the tumultuous protestors. Perceiving the deterioration of police power, the contesters directed their efforts to call in LUAR.[32] For a week after the incidents, a handful of LUAR's operatives stood in the village controlling the circulation of mining workers and securing the safety of the most prominent activists, especially those whose lives were threatened.[33]

Facing increasing pressure from Dramin and from the state's mining services, and aware of police inadequacy in safekeeping public order, the calling of LUAR shows how the movement perceived opportunities and took advantage of the available resources. Meanwhile, for LUAR, protecting and supporting the *people's cause* presented an opportunity to fulfill the organization's anti-capitalist agenda. Thus, it was in the rubble of state authority that Gaia's protesters moved in search of support. LUAR and the MFA were more than just physical instruments of backup available to the protesters – they represented important symbolic reinforcements.

If the participation of the military in the conflict was more visible, on the other hand, the role of the Government is somewhat harder to grasp, in

---

[31] BERMEO, Nancy. *The Revolution Within the Revolution*. Op.Cit., BARRETO, António. *Anatomia de uma Revolução*. Op.Cit.; CEREZALES. Diego. *O poder caiu na Rua…Op.Cit.*

[32] Besides some vague memories shared by locals, the presence of LUAR in Gaia is testified by a pamphlet instigating popular participation against the mining company's "imperialism".

[33] In the aftermath of the Revolution, forces like the Public Security Police and, especially, the National Republican Guard, were viewed with suspicion, given their role as instruments of public order during the New State. In some cases, entire units were disarmed by the MFA and constrained to operate. Several authors understand this circumstance as a sign of the institutional state crises that followed the April 25, military coup. CEREZALES. Diego. *O poder caiu na Rua…Op.Cit.* REZOLA, Maria Inácia. *25 de Abril: Mitos de uma Revolução*. Lisboa: Esfera dos Livros, 2008.

part due to the vertiginous succession of administrations and the volatility of the political circumstances that accompanied their formation. From the politicians led by Vasco Gonçalves, between July 1974 and September 1975, the contesters expected no less than their sympathy and institutional assistance. These progressive administrations presented an obvious opportunity duly seized by the movement organizers. A clear indication of governmental endorsement can be found in the support given by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Indeed, it was a decision produced in July 1975 by a service under the Ministry in charge of the agricultural affairs that awarded the Marradas' soils the highest quality, thus limiting its use to agrarian activities. By doing so, the landowners benefited from the recently decreed legislation implemented to protect high-value agricultural land. The backbone of the soil protection legislation was the 356/75 and 357/75 decrees, a pair of bold laws focused on preserving agricultural areas against the productivist tide that had characterized territorial management since the 1960s.

During the IV and V Provisional Governments, between March and September 1975, the harmony between Oliveira Baptista's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the anti-mining movement of Gaia was glaring.[34] However, soon after the VI Provisional Government's fall (September 1975) and with the I Constitutional administration (September 1976), a new political trend, less compromised with radical leftist agendas, moved the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries further apart from the protesters.

As the early institutional allies began to lose their political influence, the soil protection laws of 1975 kept sustaining the anti-dredging claims. After 1976, besides thist legislation, the movement counted also on the endorsement of the National Environmental Commission (CNA), with its highest official, Correia da Cunha, getting personally involved in the

[34] Fernando Oliveira Baptista was called to head the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries under Vasco Gonçalves' IV and V Provisional Governments. Though not affiliated to the Portuguese Communist Party, Oliveira Baptista was a progressive agrarian engineer who stood at the head of one of the Revolution's most dire tasks: agrarian reform. See BERMEO, Nancy. *The Revolution Within the Revolution*. *Op.Cit*. Like his Secretary of Sate, Agostinho Carvalho, he held a high esteem for small-scale family agrarian systems and a critical view of large-scale productivist systems. Consult BAPTISTA, Fernando Oliveira. *Portugal 1975: os campos*. Porto: Afrontamento, 1978; SILVA, Pedro Gabriel. *No Rasto da Draga*. *Op.Cit*. Indeed, some of the programs implemented under his ministry were directed at smallholding peasants. It is not strange that it was under Oliveira Baptista's leadership that the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries became one of the most prominent allies of the Gaia movement.

quarrel[35]. His vigorous participation ended up reinforcing the validity of the soil protection decrees in Gaia, presenting the State mining services with an unexpected campaigner against mineral extraction. Thus, Gaia became a battle stage, not just between Dramin and the local smallholders, but also between the agendas of opposite state organizations like the CNA and the General Direction of Mines and Geological Services (DGMSG). Accordingly, the conflict in Gaia served as an opportunity for the CNA (by then, an agent in the forefront of Portuguese environmental policy) to bolster its claims for the adoption of an alternative form of development that would not compromise the nation's scarce agrarian resources. On the DGMSG side, a resolution in favor of Dramin would allow an exception in the application of the soil protection law, thus consenting a precedent that could influence mining projects in other sensitive locations elsewhere in the country.

The CNA, through the commitment of its president, established itself as the ultimate – and almost certainly unexpected – institutional ally of the movement at a time when all political opportunities seemed to be shutting down one after the other. This agent's attitude and role in the quarrel can be understood in the frame of inter-institutional conflict. For the movement, the CNA presented an opportunity when institutional allies were running short. On the other hand, local collective mobilization against mining came at the right time for the CNA, providing a solid base and a concrete case to exercise its mission of environmental regulation.

The public utility of the Marradas plots was finally declared in 1979, under the IV Constitutional Government led by Mota Pinto.[36] The decision opened the way for the expropriation and subsequent dredging of the area. Vital to this overturn was the 36/79 Law, exempting mining activities from the 1975 soil protection legislation. Dramin and the DGMSG, under the direct involvement of its head, Soares Carneiro, were decisive in the process.

---

[35] Correia da Cunha was one of the first Portuguese politicians to openly embrace an environmental agenda. Before the 1974 Revolution, he held a seat in the National Assembly as part of the so-called parliamentary "liberal wing", participating in a series of international high-profile meetings to discuss environmental policies. Soon after the Revolution, he took hold of the presidency of the National Environmental Commission where he was particularly active in resisting the advance of public and private construction in high-value agricultural land and natural habitats.

[36] Mota Pinto headed the IV Constitutional Government (1978-1979). This administration was formed in accordance with President Eanes' initiative, revealing a clear center-right tendency. Its actions were marked by political pragmatism and a will to cast aside post-Revolutionary progressive political agendas. See SILVA, Pedro Gabriel. *No Rasto da Draga*. *Op.Cit*.

However, the expropriation never took place. In 1980, the landowners agreed to lease the plots to Dramin. The conflict, staged in public since the first moment, faded out in the discretion and intimacy of individual bargaining between property owners and the mining company. After five years of incessant protest and resistance, the anti-mining movement in Gaia did succeed in stopping the expropriation process, thereby delaying the dredging of their most valued plots, and, ultimately, increasing their property value. Indeed, the lease of the plots provided their owners with substantial monetary gains compared to the amounts initially offered by Dramin, enabling the property to be reclaimed after dredging.

5. Beyond political opportunity structure: identity and emotions in the forging of contentious repertoires

The most prominent instrument of dissent used by the protesters in Gaia was the sending of letters and petitions.[37] Besides serving as a gauge of the collective mobilization's verve, this correspondence provides an inestimable source for understanding how contentious argumentation against mining took shape.

The use of letters is a rather common instrument in the gamut of the repertoires of contention.[38] In Gaia, such a resource is subject of additional interest as it was the most prolific and constant instrument of protest throughout the entire length of the conflict, directed at more than 20 recipients. For the most part, the letters were handwritten and the differences in form and substance of the writing show that they resulted from a plurality of senders. Some letters were dictated by illiterate individuals to their neighbors and next of kin as confirmed by the interviewed informants. Interviews with protest leaders and their descendants as well as with surviving contestants also confirmed the idea that the writing of personal letters was not dependent on any specific

[37] At least 67 letters and petitions related to the conflict over the Marradas plots were identified, scattered throughout institutional and private archives.

[38] TILLY, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1978; DIGGS, Diana and RAPPAPORT, Joanne. "Literacy, Orality, and Ritual Practice in Highland Colombia". In: *The Ethnography of Reading*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 139-154; SCOTT, James. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990; GUHA, Ramachandra. "The Environmentalism of the poor". In: *Between Resistance and Revolution – Cultural Politics and Social Protest*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997, pp. 17-38.

directive, unlike the petitions, that were written by the leading group of protesters.[39]

The first letter was posted in October 1974 and the last one in September 1979. More than 60 letters denounced Dramin's corporate action as hegemonic, persecutory and vile. The toll of subscribers amounted to 163, a third residing in adjacent villages and in the capital city, Lisbon. The letters represent a valuable instrument for the analysis of popular participation in the conflict, since they expose (i) the emotional aspects of social mobilization, (ii) the role of perception and memory of past environmental destruction, (iii) the engagement between individuals and the environment, (iv) the strategies used by contesters to reach power holders and gain institutional allies, and (v) they reveal negotiations with the mining company as a cloaked form of resistance.

In this correspondence, agrarian resources were integrated within a line of reasoning and discourse that refused the assumption that national development depended exclusively on industrial progress. Agriculture, even in its subsistence form, was presented as a viable alternative to mining. Accordingly, the rural landscape was portrayed in idyllic terms, presented as an autochthonous *pastoral* made from telluric images where the Marradas plots stood as a historical landmark connecting the present with a mining-free past.

By keeping a constant flow of written information, in line with Scott's idea of dialogic strategy,[40] the movement tried to maintain an open channel of communication with its interlocutors in the state as well as with other institutional agents, never stopping to promote the movement as a collective body. Throughout the dozens of letters and petitions, the local collective emerges as an inseparable part of the environment, tightly bound to the landscape. A rural landscape that was not portrayed merely as an outlying scenery, but as a living context where people dwelled,[41] where the Marradas holdings were deemed to be "the cause of the people's existence and […] its reason to live".[42]

The Marradas plots, placed in between the village core and the rest of the already dredged valley, acted as a *landscape buffer* – "a real

[39] Though the authorship of petitions fell upon the movement's five leading figures, they managed to gather large numbers of signatories in the village, as well as in neighbouring communities, as will be addressed later.
[40] SCOTT, James. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Op.Cit*.
[41] INGOLD, Tim. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge, 2000.
[42] Petition to the Prime Minister, Lourdes Pintasilgo, September 20, 1979, private archive.

garden"[43] of "enormous and bountiful olive trees"[44] that divided the hamlet from the rest of the valley's extension of "rocks and sand".[45] More than a struggle for the control of ecological resources, the letters show how protesters integrated the environment in their vocabularies and repertoires of contention. These scripts also demonstrate how locals conceptualized a particular landscape in connection with a set of production practices fully dependent on the preservation of agrarian resources.

The main arguments inscribed in the petitions and letters denounced the domestic dependency on these plots while highlighting their sentimental value. The correspondence also conveyed a discourse impregnated with the memory of environmental depredation in the past and self-portrayals of humbleness and disempowerment.[46] A self-portrait of humility was an identity statement meant to broaden mobilization and enhance the movement's cohesion.[47] This humbleness was suggested in at least 22 documents, where protesters claim to be part of the "good dutiful people […] who cheerfully live from what the land provides them with".[48] This was an identity either taken personally – "[I am] a humble woman of this community,"[49] "[I am] a poor illiterate [man]",[50] or collectively – "poor people",[51] "tiny little people",[52] "small",[53] and "weak peasants",[54] "these good people",[55] "the most underprivileged".[56] The register of humility was

[43] Letter sent by landowner to the Presidency of the Minister's Council (PCM), 20-2-1978, CMB, box 228.
[44] Petition subscribed by four landowners sent to the CNA, 15-12-1976, private archive.
[45] Letter sent to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAP), 16-12-1976, DSRG-DREC-ME, folder 797, vol. 1.
[46] The letters envisage a rhetoric conforming to what Peet and Watts call regional discursive formations, meaning "certain modes of thought, logics, themes, styles of expression and typical metaphors [that] run through the discursive history of a region, appearing […], disappearing […], only to reappear with even greater intensity in new guises". PEET, Richard and WATTS, Michael. "Liberation Ecology: Development, sustainability, and environment in an age of market triumphalism". In: *Liberation Ecologies: environment, development and social movements*. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 16.
[47] POLLETA, Francesca and JASPER, James. "Collective Identity and Social Movements". *Annual Review of Sociology*. v. 27, 2001, pp. 283-305.
[48] Petition, 15-12-1976, private archive.
[49] The expression used by the subscriber was *povo*, literally, this translates into "people" and, in this case, it bears a double sense, meaning community or township. Letter sent by a Gaia resident to the PCM, 23-2-1978, CMB, box 186.
[50] Letter sent to the PCM, 20-2-1978, *ibid*.
[51] Letter sent to the PCM, 21-2-1978, CMB, box 228.
[52] Letter sent to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, November 1974, CMB, box 227.
[53] Letter sent to the PCM, 20-2-1978, CMB, box 228.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] Letter sent to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, 10-4-1975, private archive.
[56] Letter sent to the DGMSG, 1976, private archive.

inversely proportional to the portrayal of opponents' hegemonic and prepotent character– the "bogeyman"[57] company, "big landowners, driven by the worst instincts",[58] working "like a pack of dogs",[59] "meaning to drive everybody to starvation".[60]

Embodied in popular narrative, the engagement with the milieu, besides contributing to identity construction, also set the ground for emotions. Preserving agrarian resources meant striving to maintain relational continuums between people and place, as this couple of smallholders suggested in a letter to the Ministry of Industry and Energy (MIE), in 1975: "[the Marradas plots are] a friendly land […] to which we owe everything […] because there's no doubt that it gives us everything we have; almost every inhabitant of this village has an acre or two there.[61]. Or as poetically stated by others: "The people's very existence lies in these furrows […] their roots, their hopes, their bread, their life, their pride and all their wealth; if they were to disappear, you might as well dig a ditch and bury all these humble people in it".[62]

What we are presented with here is an expression of a relationship with the environment built on and maintained through everyday experience and practice.[63] This engagement is vividly illustrated in these lines:

> Here, people work from dawn to dusk, with no fixed hours, no days off, not even Christmas, no dole, no social security, and all for a miserable return. Nonetheless they love their land, for once they've watered it with their sweat; it gives them their bread and their living. They have their roots in this land, it's where their parents and grandparents lived and where they, their children and grandchildren will choose to remain.[64]

Emotions were also instrumental in the conflict: (i) in the negotiation between landowners and Dramin; (ii) in popular resistance against mining; (iii) in the mobilization of community supporters; and (iv) in mobilizing allies. Emotions heartened the pleas directed at institutional powers and

[57] The original expression was *papão* (bogeyman). Letter sent to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, 10-4-1975. *Ibid*.
[58] The expression used to refer to Dramin was *latifundiários* (large landowners), similar to the political rhetoric used by the large agrarian reform movements in the south. Ppetition sent to the MAP, 8-12-1976, DSRG-DREC-ME, folder 797.
[59] Letter sent to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, November 1974, CMB, box 228.
[60] Letter sent to the MAP, 16-12-1976, DSRG-DREC-ME, *ibid*.
[61] Petition, 5-5-1975, CMB, box 186.
[62] Petition subscribed by four landowners sent to CNA's President, 15- 12-1976, private archive.
[63] INGOLD, Tim. *The Perception of the Environment*. *Op.Cit.*
[64] Petition subscribed by four landowners to the CNA, 15-12-1976. Private archive.

political organizations – in addition to asking for their support, the movement's emotional tone contributed to intensify Dramin's demonization. The mining company and the dredge surfaced in popular rhetoric as the ultimate symbol of ruin and death: "we can't allow the dredge to ruin the people's wealth",[65] "they mean to starve us to death by taking away this morsel of land",[66] "if this land was to be destroyed […] dozens of families would be thrown into misery, abandonment, misfortune and famine".[67]

5. Conclusion

The conflict in Gaia can hardly be taken as a manifestation utterly dependent on political and regimental transformation, despite the undeniable influence of Revolutionary changes on local mobilization. Together with structural political factors, local contentious action was linked with the social memory of the region's mining past. Indeed, the campaigners vividly recalled the experience some of them had had (or had heard of) regarding environmental destruction. Another indicator of the conflict's historical depth is to be found in the life histories of some of key participants: common to the most prominent contesters was a family history punctuated by illegal mining activities and resistance against the American company in the first half of the century. Reminiscences of "non-resistance" under authoritarian rule joined the memories of environmental depredation, revealing the conflict of 1974-1980 as an opportunity to settle the score with a past of silencing and repression. As such, opposing Dramin stood also as a means of compensating for the injustices of the past.

This idea brings us closer to Zald's perspective that the opportunities for collective mobilization can also be found outside the political realm.[68] According to the author, the movements themselves can conceive opportunities from past historical events. History is converted into an opportunity for contentious action as the movement uses the social memory of mining intervention and environmental depredation in the past as structuring elements of contentious discourse. Hence, the vocabularies of

---

[65] Letter sent to the Prime Minister, Mário Soares, February 1978, CMB, box 228.
[66] Letter sent by a female landowner to the MAP, 16-12-1976, DSRG-DREC-ME, folder 797.
[67] Petition subscribed by four landowners sent to the CNA, 15-12-1976, private archive.
[68] ZALD, Mayer. "Culture, ideology, and strategic framing". In: *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements – Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Frames*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 261-273.

protest in Gaia emerge as socio-cultural constructs stemming from the memory of past experiences.[69]

On top of this, the conflict of Gaia revealed that political opportunities worked both ways. The protest in the village emerged and grew from the perception locals had of a political time period particularly favorable to public manifestations of discontent; however, the very same movement was able to generate opportunities from the structural political realignments. This is to say that the social mobilization in Gaia represented an opportunity for several emerging forces and state organs battling for political and social legitimation in post-Revolutionary Portugal.

Observing Gaia's conflict through the Revolution enables the Revolutionary process to be looked at from the angle of grassroots political action in rural milieus. This view shows how popular mobilization can stem from within the *locale*, rebuffing the representations of rural population as inactive collectives, dependent on external agency, unable to act on their own. Indeed, the protest held in Gaia reveals the agency of some of its people and their role as social and political actors in the midst of a complex institutional transition. This interpretation questions Tarrow's suggestion that collective action emerges as a response to difficulties in accessing financial, organizational and state resources.[70] Local protestors managed to organize the mobilizations by searching to actively engage with state organs and the powers that emerged through the post-Revolutionary political transition. Ultimately, the vitality of the protest resulted from the successful access to state institutions and the constant support of allies within and outside the state structures.

[69] Taussig offers an interpretation of the importance of ritual practice and discursive arrangements among miners in South America as socio-cultural constructions meant to overcome capitalist appropriation of natural resources and the grievances brought to the indigenous peoples by the colonial market system of exploitation. TAUSSIG, Michael. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

[70] TARROW, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Our authors

Carlos Humberto Durand Alcántara is a Professor in the Department of Law and Head of Human Rights Research and Legal and Social Alternatives at the Autonomous Metropolitan University, Mexico City. He conducted Postdoctoral Studies in Rural Sociology and Peasants at the University of Cordoba, Spain and earned his doctorate in Legal Anthropology from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He is Coordinator of the International Network on Poverty Issues, Regional Development and Indian Peoples and has been a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Vienna and Arizona. He is a National Researcher of Mexico. Among his most recent books are: *Diritto Indigena*. Lecce, Italy, 2014; *The Law and the Agrarian Problem of Mexico*. Porrúa, 2009 and *La autonomia regional en el marco del desarrollo de los pueblos indios/ Regional autonomy in the context of the indigenous peoples development*. Porrúa, House of Representatives, UNAM, 2009.

Cristian Ferrer González has an undergraduate degree in History and a Master's Degree in Contemporary History. His minor thesis earned him the Josep Lladonosa Local History Award of the Catalan Countries in 2013, which was published under the title *Lluitadors quotidians. L'antifranquisme, el canvi polític i la construcció de la democràcia al Montsià (1972-1979)* (Lleida, 2014). Currently he is a Research Fellow on the research project "The Left during the Spanish Transition", where he is also developing his PhD thesis supervised by Pere Ysàs at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. His object of study focuses on the history of subaltern classes, particularly the peasantry and the working class in rural areas during the Franco dictatorship with an emphasis on the forms of organization and struggle of the popular classes in deeply adverse conditions and in harsh situations.

David Soto Fernández is an Associate Professor since 2007 at the University Pablo de Olavide in Seville, Spain. He holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the University of Santiago de Compostela with a thesis defended in 2003 entitled "Productive transformations in

contemporary Galician agriculture. Organic agriculture to the green revolution (1752-1986)". He has taught Master's and Doctoral level studies at several universities. His main research focuses on the analysis of Contemporary Agrarian History from an environmental perspective. In this sense, his work has focused on the study of sustainability of agricultural systems in historical perspective and the evolution of key environmental conflicts. He is a member of several research groups related to these issues such as the Spanish Society of Agricultural History and the Network of Sustainable Agriculture and Agrarian History.

Devi Sacchetto is a Lecturer in the Sociology of Labour at the University of Padua, Italy. His research has focused on economic and social transformations, including industrial conflict and workers' control, and relocalization of Italian SME's (small and medium enterprises) in Eastern Europe and inward migration flows. He has published and edited a wide number of volumes on these subjects. His research is currently focused on two subjects: international comparison of labour conditions and management of the workforce in the Foxconn electronic company in Eastern Europe and in China; and the relationship between migration and unemployment due to the economic crisis in Italy. One of his most recently published articles is: "International Migration and Labour Turnover: Workers' Agency in the Construction Sector of Russia and Italy" (co-authored with C. Morrison and O. Cretu). *Studies of Transition States and Societies*. Vol 5/Issue 2, 2013, pp. 7-20.

Domenico Perrotta is Assistant professor in the Sociology of Cultural Processes at the University of Bergamo, Italy and co-editor of the journal *Etnografia e ricerca qualitative* / *Ethnography and Qualitative Research*. His research interests include migration processes, the ethnography of work, the nexus between culture and power and oral history. He published a volume on Romanian workers in the Italian construction sector entitled *Vite in cantiere. Migrazione e lavoro dei rumeni in Italia*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2011. His research is currently focused on migrant labour in agriculture and on a comparison between Southern and Northern Italy's agro-industrial supply chains. On these topics, he has published a number of articles in Italian and international journals.

Édouard Lynch is Professor of Contemporary History at the University Lumière, Lyon 2 and a member of the Rural Studies Laboratory (EA-3727). His work consists of the political and union history of the contemporary French peasantry, notably under the angle of "representations". His HDR

(2012) studied agricultural mobilizations from 1907 to the 1970s. Concerning this theme, he has also published "Le premier Larzac" ou la genèse d'un mouvement social atypique. In: J. Sainclivier and G. Richard eds., *La mutation du système partisan français après Mai-68 : printemps 1971 – automne 1974*. Rennes: PUR., 2011 ; La violence paysanne, entre construction identitaire et réalité militante (1930-1970). In : F. François Audigier and P. Girard eds., *La violence militante en France des années 1920 aux années 1970 « Se battre pour des idées »*. Riveneuve, 2011 and Détruire pour exister : les grèves du lait en France (1964,1972 et 2009). *Politix,* 2013/3, no 103. Edouard.lynch@ish-lyon.cnrs.fr.

Eric Vanhaute is Professor of Economic and Social History and World History at Ghent University in Belgium. He has written extensively on peasant societies and rural transformations both in a West European and a global context. His recent books are *When the potato failed. Causes and effects of the 'last' European subsistence crisis, 1845-1850*. Brepols Publishers, 2007, CORN Publication Series 9 (with C. Ó Gráda and R. Paping); *Rural Economy and Society in North-Western Europe, 500-2000: Making a living. Family, labour and income*. Brepols Publishers, 2011 (with I. Devos and Th. Lambrecht); *World History. An Introduction*. Routledge, 2012 and *Peasants in World History* (Routledge, in preparation). http://www.ccc.ugent.be/vanhaute eric.vanhaute@ugent.be.

Hector J. Martínez Covaleda is an economist with a Master's degree in economics from the National University of Colombia, a Bachelor of Social Sciences from the Universidad Distrital and PhD in History from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain. He has taught at various universities in Colombia in the areas of macroeconomics, international economics and economic thought. He was principal researcher on two books on competitive agriculture and the agro-industry and author of various chapters of books and articles on the agricultural policy and international negotiations of Colombia. He also published a chapter in a book entitled *Economy and Region: an approach to the economic history of the Huila during the 19th century* and an article "Hypothesis about the impact of trade on livestock farming in the province of Neiva in the 18th century", among others.

María Candelaria Fuentes Navarro is a Doctor in Contemporary History from the University of Granada in 2012 with a PhD thesis on the influence exerted by the Spanish Communist Party on the mobilization of casual labourers and peasants in the democratization process in rural Andalusia during late Francoism and the period of the transition to democracy. Her

thesis is in the process of revision for publication. She is the author of several journal articles and a contributor to various collective works. She was an international research visitor at the Cañada Blanch Centre, the London School of Economics, the University of Paris VIII, and the Colégio de México and has given lectures and seminars at national and international universities in France and Mexico.

Massimo Asta is *cultore della materia* at the University of Enna-Kore. He has a PhD in History from the University of Rome 2 (2011) "Tor Vergata". He was Fernand Braudel Postdoctoral Fellow at the Maison des sciences de l'homme of Paris, and invited researcher at the Centre d'histoire-Sciences Po. His research interests focus on the history of the left (especially the history of communism in France and Italy, the economic culture of the left in France and Italy and history of maximalist socialism during the post-First World War period in Italy), transnational and comparative history, the social and political history of the post-Second World War period in Italy and the history of local elites and the Mafia in Sicily. His contributions have appeared in *Studi Storici*, *Giornale di storia contemporanea*, *Annali della fondazione Giuseppe di Vittorio* and *Maitron: Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français*.

Niccolò Mignemi obtained his PhD in History and Civilization from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 2012. His research interests and publications focus on rural history and peasant studies, with a specific attention to social conflicts and collective action in the countryside. With a Young Researcher Prize from the Fondation des Treilles, he is currently working on migrants in French agriculture. In September 2014, he will be Fellow at the École française de Rome for a research project on the International Institute of Agriculture. He is a member of ERHIMOR, the research group on the history of the rural world at the Centre des Recherches Historiques of the EHESS in Paris. He is the author of *Nel regno della fame. Il mondo contadino italiano fra gli anni Trenta e gli anni Cinquanta*. Rome, 2010 on the Italian peasantry in the interwar period. He is also preparing a monograph based on his thesis, comparing the paths of agricultural cooperatives in Italy and France during the first half of the twentieth century.

Noemí M. Girbal-Blacha is Senior Researcher at CONICET and Professor and Director of CEAR at Quilmes National University. She has a PhD in History from La Plata National University, Argentina. She was President of the Argentine Economic History Association from 1996-2001 and Vice-

president of CONICET from 2008-2010. She is Docteur Honoris Causa, Université de Pau et Pays de l'Adour (France, 2007) and recipient of the Scientific Trajectory Award "Bernardo Houssay" MINCyT - Presidencia de la Nación, Argentina, 2011. She has been a visiting professor at national and foreign universities. A specialist in Argentine agrarian history, her latest publications include: *Vivir en los márgenes. Estado, políticas públicas y conflictos sociales. El Gran Chaco Argentino en la primera mitad del siglo XX*. Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2011; Forjar el "granero del mundo". Inmigrantes y migrantes en la Argentina (1880-1930). IN : Laurent Dornel ; Michèle Guicharnaud-Tollis ; Michael Parsons and Jean-Yves Puyo. eds., *Ils ont fait les Amériques… Mobilités, territoires et imaginaires (1776-1930)*. Bordeaux : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2012 ; Formosa en tiempos del peronismo histórico (1943-1955) ¿Quién es quién en la gubernamentalidad de un territorio de frontera?. *Historia Caribe*. vol. VIII, julio-diciembre 2013, pp. 21-53; De patrones a empresarios. El campo argentino en la primera mitad del siglo XX. *Investigaciones y Ensayos*, núm. 60, Buenos Aires, Academia Nacional de la Historia, enero 2014, pp. 313-354.

Pedro Gabriel Silva is an Assistant Professor at the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD). He holds a degree in Social Anthropology from ISCTE-IUL (Lisbon) and a PhD in Contemporary History from the University of Santiago de Compostela. He is an integrated researcher of CETRAD/UTAD and an external researcher of HISTAGRA (Research Group on Agrarian and Political History of the Rural World, University of Santiago de Compostela). In 2006 and 2011, he held positions as an invited researcher at the University of California, Berkeley and at the University of Roskilde, Denmark, respectively. His research interests vary from socio-environmental conflicts, community participation in ecosystem services and community social work. He has published the book *No Rasto da Draga – exploração mineira e protesto popular numa aldeia da Beira Baixa*, 2013 and co-edited the books *Etnografia e Intervenção Social,* 2011 and *Economia dos Serviços de Ecosistema*, 2014 along with a dozen book chapters and peer-reviewed papers on socio-environmental conflicts.

Abstracts

Carlos Humberto Durand Alcántara

Hegemony, agrarian problem and Indian peoples in Mexico (A legal perspective).

This essay seeks to demystify the vision that has been built around the relations of land ownership and production that have unfolded in the Mexican countryside. Going beyond the nationalist canons forged from a revolution of social origin, but which had capitalist results, it emphasizes two factors: the importance of Indian peoples as the true owners of the land and influence of the United States in defining the economic structure of the Mexican countryside. In particular our analysis focuses on the nature and consequences of Constitutional Article 27 that organizes the juridical framework for rural land ownership and use.

Cristian Ferrer González

Popular empowerment, peasant struggles and political change: Southern Catalonia under late francoism (1968-1976)

Despite great advances in “history from below”, the rural world still represents only a small part of studies of the anti-Francoist movement in Spain. This has led to ignorance of the wide range of social responses to the regime that occurred in rural Spain. This article proposes to explain the dynamics of the rural world in relation to the anti-Francoist movement based on a case study of southern Catalonia. We analyze the social struggles arising from the “collapse of the peasant’s moral economy” while paying attention to the political learning process that these confrontations provided for rural workers. Far from being apathetic and demobilized, rural areas experienced a process of opposition comparable in many ways to that of large urban centres.

David Soto Fernández

Community, institutions and environment in conflicts over commons in Galicia, NW Spain (18th - 20th centuries)

In this article, our aim is to explore the importance of different factors in the explanation of the sustainability of common lands over the long-term. We will analyze the importance of the rules (formal and informal), but also the making of identities by local communities regarding common lands. We also explore the role of changes in the environmental and economic functionality of common lands. Our case study is located in Galicia in Northwest Spain. We will analyze a particular example of common lands not recognized by law until 1968, trying to show how the legal clarification and the construction of clear systems of rules are not sufficient to explain the sustainability of the commons. The Spanish liberal state did not accept the singular character of the Galician common property since the Cadiz parliament assimilated the Galician commons to the municipal property prevailing in other parts of Spain. From 1960 to 1985, the situation reversed due to a conflict between Galician communities and the Franco regime. In this conflict, two productive alternatives confronted each other: the productive use of forest lands defended by the forest services of the regime and the use of the land for livestock. The victory of the communities did not succeed in the growth of grazed lands, but neither did the forest option. On the contrary from 1970 onwards the common lands lost their productive functions and many left the common lands.

Domenico Perrotta and Devi Sacchetto

Migrant farmworkers in Southern Italy: ghettoes, *caporalato* and collective action

This paper focuses on migrant workers in Southern Italian agriculture. After a brief description of the general background, an analysis will be given of two themes: the state of *seclusion* and segregation in which the workers live; and the organization of recruitment and the labour process through the *caporalato*, an illegal and widespread farm labour gang-master system. Two case-studies will be compared: the "ghetto" of Boreano (in Basilicata region), which exemplifies the central role of seclusion and *caporalato* in the productive process of Southern Italy's agriculture; and the experience of "Masseria Boncuri" in Nardò (Apulia), where thanks to a strike that involved several hundred African farmworkers in August 2011, the condition of seclusion were broken. The analysis is based on material collected during qualitative research, in particular in-depth interviews and

ethnographic observations of the houses, the labour process, and the struggles of foreign labourers conducted from 2010 to 2013.

Édouard Lynch

The fight against multiple professional land holdings: a new agrarian issue during France's "silent revolution" (1950-1970)

This article focuses on land ownership protests in France between 1960 and 1970. The idea of property access, often considered to be of little importance, returned unexpectedly in the 1960s, whilst agriculture underwent profound and rapid known as "the silent revolution". The French countryside was marked by strong tensions during this period and a sharp increase in protests and calls for direct action. Amongst these, there were actions against multiple land holders triggered by the need to expand productive lands to make them viable. Using unedited judicial sources, this article depicts how agricultural modernization generated uncensored tensions and innovative forms of mobilization around the question of access to land, represented by strenuous collective and professional struggles led by the trade union movement, the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Expoitants d'Agricoles – FNSEA.

Eric Vanhaute

Globalizing local struggles – Localizing global struggles. Peasant movements from local to global platforms and back

In the twenty-first century, new peasant movements have entered the global stage. What can we learn from this fundamental shift from local to global platforms? This article presents a historical-comparative analysis about the scale and range of peasant actions in a globalizing world. We focus on former types of peasant movements and on the twenty-first century transnational peasant movement, *La Vía Campesina*. How were and are peasant actions organized? What were and are their demands and expectations? Who did and do they see as their enemies and adversaries? This comparative exercise explores peasant actions between local, transnational and global scales. The new peasant movements have redefined local resistance within a global context.

Hector J. Martínez Covaleda

Peasants and the revolution of 1781 in the viceroyalty of New Granada (Colombia)

Recent historiography on the revolution of 1781 in New Granada (Colombia) argues that it was a "traditionalist" revolution that did not seek a break with the colonial past or to achieve independence from Spain. After a new review of the documentary sources, recent economic and social historiography and economic theory, it is concluded that the revolution of 1781 was essentially peasant and plebeian, and shows important traits of a modern revolution. The revolution arose in a context of broad economic and social changes in New Granada and the policies of the Spanish Crown. The plebeians had the ability to galvanize all sectors of society in New Granada even the bureaucratic elite of the colonial State for a common political project. In the process, very diverse interests and aspirations of the social groups emerged, but the elite factions that had a greater degree of political and military organization were finally able to impose their political project.

María Candelaria Fuentes Navarro

The Spanish Communist Party and the Andalusian countryside. Rural mobilisation and social empowerment (1956-1979)

This study offers an overview of the interventions of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) in rural Andalusia during the 1960s and 1970s, from the party's initial steps in the late 1950s to their mobilizations in the last years of Franco's regime. Emphasis is placed on the evolution of Communist discourse regarding the “agrarian issue”, especially agrarian reform, the struggle for land and the way in which the party managed to get involved in the everyday life of Andalusian rural workers, who became gradually empowered to fight for their rights as workers and citizens. We believe this certainly influenced the successes of the party in the 1979 local government elections.

Massimo Asta

Between “resistance” to the war and social conflict. Revolts and “peasant republics” in southern Italy, 1943-1945

This article aims to offer a unitary interpretation of the peasant revolts developed in southern Italy and in agro-towns from the Allied landings in Sicily to the first months of 1945. A largely uniform dynamic characterizes these practices of social conflict. The actions of the rebels always focused

on the aim of "state closure": the looting, destruction and burning of public buildings was the common scenario, making these conflicts apparently similar to the urban mobs or the peasant *jacquerie* of the middle ages and early modern epochs. Yet, these forms of social conflict arose in the middle of the twentieth century, which led in some cases to precarious and temporary para-institutional forms of popular, municipally based self-government. In the light of the study of new archival sources, the article analyzes the phenomenon through its community aspects and class conflict, and interprets it as a set of violent forms of "resistance" of the popular classes to the process of the unpopular wartime policies of military conscription and food rationing.

Niccolò Mignemi

Peasant cooperatives and land occupations in the Sicilian *latifundium* (1944-1950)

The peasant movement that emerged after the Second World War was one of the most important social mobilizations in Italy during the twentieth century. In a context where land inequalities and traditional mechanisms of exploitation persisted, rural social conflicts reappeared in this period in the context of specific political circumstances. The decrees of 1944-1946 played an essential role, allowing the peasants, associated in cooperatives, to demand possession of uncultivated lands. However, as the Sicilian example attests, the rule of law was applied according to the evolution of power relations, both at the local and national level. Appropriated by the peasant movement, cooperatives became key actors in the struggles for agrarian reform in Italy during the late 1940s.

Noemí M. Girbal-Blacha

Land conflicts in Formosa, Argentina (1884-1958)

Formosa is located in Northeast Argentina and gained state status in 1884 with a weak political identity. There are few studies in Argentine historiography that have studied social actions and public policies in the region. Precarious settlement plans and poor communication led to conflicts over lands. The indigenous population was disciplined by the state and the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, many factors promoted a population exodus: untrained farmers, poorly demarcated plots, crop production attacked by pests and soil erosion. This historical study focuses on the settlement and construction of space in Formosa, which was historically the poorest region

of Argentina. Social conflicts are revealed in the analysis of national government policies and their implementation within territorial logics, especially those related to the use of common property resources.

Pedro Gabriel Silva

Political opportunity and collective mobilization in post-revolutionary Portugal – the case of a socio-environmental conflict in the Portuguese inland (1974-1980)

The Portuguese Revolution of 1974 pawned a complex set of social movements. In general, the historical literature has tended the revolution as an epiphenomenon of major structural political change. This article analyzes the interactions and interdependencies between local collective action and institutional agents in the context of a study of socio-environmental conflict in the Portuguese inland region of Beira Baixa. The conflict involved a group of smallholding peasants against a mining company that opened an open pit mine close to the village. The motives that drove collective protest are examined in face of the structural political transformation processes, and the theory of collective action is used to observe how institutional agents acted and relied on local mobilizations to accomplish their political agendas.