Of Farms and the State: Changing Relations and Ambivalent Visions in the Dairy Sector in Galicia (Spain)

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Abstract

When in 2013 I started doing fieldwork in the dairy sector in Galicia, I was not aware of the important role of the state for the family farms that I was studying. The state was constantly invoked and, at the same time, reviled. Such ambivalent position was recurrent. This gained momentum with the elimination in 2015 of the milk quota that the EU had imposed decades earlier, which led to further liberalisation of the dairy market and to a drastic drop in milk prices. Through historically rooted ethnographic accounts, I intend to show the relation between Galician farmers and the Spanish state, showing how both local and transnational restructuring initiatives have affected my interlocutors' emotions towards, and vernacular understandings of, the state through different scales. To do this, I will focus on a recent episode of price crisis that affected these farmers, which intensified following the 2008 world economic crisis.

Keywords: State, Family farms, Dairy industry, Galicia, Just price

Introduction

My ethnographic research focuses on a few family dairy farms in the province of A Coruña, Galicia. This territory stands out as one of the areas where the Green Revolution of the 1950s enforced the most intense specialisation in milk production in Spain. For a period of several months I shared the lives and troubles of the farmers (mostly women) that managed nine small and medium-sized family farms. This ethnographic research includes three years of intermittent participant observation from 2013 to 2015 and semi-structured interviews with the members of these farms, but also with other relevant agents, such as secretaries of agrarian unions, technicians and important stakeholders in the agro and dairy sector. My intention was to have a representation of the different types of production (intensive, exten-

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sive and organic), though some of these farms were somewhere between these three models.

The hinterland of A Coruña province is an eminently rural territory whose population –living in small hamlets and farmsteads– mainly lives off milk production in small family farms. The forestry sector, with fast-growing species such as eucalyptus, has also become important to the local economy. Two large cities are less than 50 kms away: Ferrol (68,300 inhabitants)[1], with its port and its historic naval industry, and the capital city of A Coruña (244,000 inhabitants), mostly dedicated to the service sector. The proximity to these cities and industrial areas marked the socioeconomic and the socio-ecological history of this area. The strong depopulation experienced since the 1960s-1970s went hand by hand with the industrial and urban development of Ferrol, Coruña, and elsewhere around the coast. The migration of the younger segments of the local population to European countries (such as Switzerland, France or Germany), but also to urban and industrial areas such as these cities, attracted by the availability of waged labour, and the ageing of the population that remained in the countryside, led to a gradual process of socio-ecological transformation.

While working with these nine farms, my most intense relationship was with Lina's farm, where I was living during fieldwork, and with other two farms within the same parish. These three farms shared ties of neighbourhood and/or kinship in a small parish with a disseminated and aged population (243 in 2018[2]), mostly living from milk production (small family farms) combined with pensions from the older members of the household or waged labour mainly from men working outside the hamlet.

The first of these two farms (Antón's farm) has a connection with Lina's farm because her sister, Sabela, was Antón's wife. The second (Toñita's farm) has neighbourhood ties with Lina's farm. Antón's farm (historically a farm with some more resources than most of the farms in the parish, which means more animals and more land) was in the process of dismantling when I started my fieldwork in 2013. He was trying to sell around 50 Friesian cows suitable for milk production, with important difficulties. He had begun to transform farm activity towards extensive production with cows destined for meat consumption. This change happened due to the lack of generational replacement: Antón wanted to work less, he felt old, his wife Sabela (who worked with him) had recently died, and none of their three sons wanted to work in the farm. According to him, in addition to having chosen other professions, none of them wanted to take charge of the enormous work that the dairy farm entailed. But also, as Antón specifies, because they probably

1 Source: The Galician Institute of Statistics (IGE).

2 Source: the Galician Institute of Statistics (IGE).

would not have been able to maintain the farm for long considering current prices paid for milk.

Toñita and her husband work on her own farm (with 45 Friesian cows destined for milk production), which they inherited from her parents. Her two teenage children also live there, as well as Toñita's parents. The latter make a fundamental contribution to the farm: they work tirelessly in the orchard and also contribute to the household economy with their retirement pension, which together with that of Toñita's husband –due to a disability– represent a very important inflow of resources for the farm. In fact, Toñita comments on some occasions that the farm could not have been maintained if these pensions didn't exist and they had to rely only on the low income obtained from milk production.

Lina, together with her husband, began to specialise their farm in milk production during the 1970s, when both returned from emigration in Switzerland. With the money saved there, the two acquired an important number of Frisian cows (more suitable for dairy production) and also improved farm facilities: they built a new stall, a milking parlour, etc. Throughout this period, they made significant investments and a great effort. Aurelio and Lina inherited the farm when his parents retired. The latter had acquired the farm and surrounding lands after years of working as *caseiros* (farm tenants) elsewhere. They cultivated cereals and vegetables and they had some animals for self-consumption, selling the surplus of their farm in local fairs, where Aurelio's father also sold his house-made baskets.

Aurelio kept a waged job in the construction sector, while Lina and her sister in law (Aurelio's older sister, widow) carried out most farm work. His elder parents worked in the orchard or helped by taking the cows out to graze. Aurelio helped occasionally, by driving the tractor or other machinery. When I began fieldwork in this farm in 2013, Lina was officially retired (as well as Aurelio), but they continued working in the farm. They had 45 Frisian cows for milk production together with their two daughters, who were then in charge of the farm.

The nine farms I worked with represented the three models of production in family farms that are present in the area: one with a relevant dependence on external inputs (intensive), another with elements characteristic of the traditional, or extensive, form of production (e.g. daily grazing)[3]; and a third, the organic one, that is less common but a consequence sometimes derived from the extensive model. Some of the farms, like Lina's, Antón's

3 The main features of these two modes of production are: an important dependence on external inputs (such as animal feed), the permanent stabling of the cattle, and always raise the productivity as the main goal in the case of intensive mode; while the extensive mode seek to reduce dependence on external inputs and producing animal feed in the farm as much as possible, having as main practice grazing. Cows just go back to the stable to be milked.

and Toñita's, were also between these three models (a mix with elements characteristics from the intensive and extensive models). All these are family farms that sell cow milk to big industries, which collect it by truck every two days. But they also grow vegetable gardens and raise other animals (like pigs or chickens) for self-consumption.

Although in decline, such combination of farming activities is still rather common across family farms in Galicia and has important historical roots. In a period spanning from the early 1960s to the 1980s, these farms have undergone a deep transformation of their productive structure from subsistence polyculture to the specialisation in milk production. The former subsistence polyculture was not merely for self-consumption. In fact, there was some degree of commodity production, since these farms sold their surplus in trade fairs or nearby markets and also through traders that came to the farms, as in the case of the cattle or dairy traders.

The change towards the specialisation in milk production started during the 1950s with the Green Revolution and the "modernisation" of production implemented by the Agricultural Extension Service (S*ervicio de Extensión Agraria*), a US-inspired *ad hoc* institutional instrument created by the Franco dictatorship, who used it as the "catalyst" to break up with the previous polyculture model. In this process (starting during the 1950s and intensifying at the end of the decade), Franco's dictatorship favoured a stronger role of the market and the private sector. This implied the promotion of mechanisation, and the technological adaptation of agriculture in order to facilitate the creation of an agro-industrial complex and the specialisation of production (Fernández Prieto 2009; Lanero and Freire 2011).

The measures to transform the dairy sector continued after the end of the dictatorship in 1976 and culminated in the Structural Regulation of Dairy Production of 1981, which sought to change the structure and productive organisation of dairy farms, and also prepare them to enter the European Economic Community (EEC), which would mean, as we will see, more changes and new measures for these farms. In this article, I will elaborate upon the ways in which the agro-food systems started to transform under the pressure of these reforms, in order to shed light on the emotional meanings and dynamics of farmers relations to the Spanish state.

My main argument is that a trend towards the devolution of governmental power of the state to other agencies, both public and private (EU agencies and agrobusiness corporations) led to a transformation in the structure of the markets, which fitted the interests of dairy industry corporations, while structurally damaging the sustainability of the livelihood of Galician farmers. I will focus on the power the Spanish state[4] progressively accorded

4 The state is not a monolithic entity, in fact the farmers never deal with "the state" in abstract form but with its expressions (e.g. regulations) and concrete institutional actors

to these forces (the market and corporate capital) to re-define the normative space within which milk production would take place. That power was limited at first, but largely increased, especially through two moments of "rupture": first, with the Francoist reforms,[5] and, second, with the innovations implemented by EU integration. Therefore, the power was distributed among different state and state-like actors, at different scales. Even more so, in need of the institutional protection of the state, farmers however resented it, for allowing those changes to happen. This accounts for the complex, ambivalent, and self-contradictory structure of feelings (Williams 1961) that farmers transpired in our interactions, and that they seemed to activate when engaging in their representation of, and relation to, the Spanish State. What is important is the double movement of claiming protection and blaming for changes that make these farmers vulnerable.

Finally, I focus on how the notion of "just price", used by my interlocutors, became an arena of struggle in which they attempted to mediate between the mixed feelings and emergent contradictions in their ambivalent and emotionally charged relationship to the state. The notions and standards of justice and equity, as analysed in the framework of the moral economy by Thompson (1971) and Scott (1976), are useful to observe how this structure of feelings and moral concepts in relation to the state are mobilised, redefined and reinterpreted. For both authors, these standards, norms or traditional rights and customs, are supported by the consensus of the community.

The "great transformation" in the dairy sector

At the end of august in 2015, I was spending some time at Lina's dairy farm. It had been a whole summer of tension and social unrest in the milk sector due to the sudden drop of milk prices following the elimination of the EU milk quotas. This was also the mood among Lina and her two daughters, Xulia and Amelia (both working in the farm with Lina). After a hard day of work they would usually gather together in the big kitchen of the house for dinner and talk about all the regular preoccupations (drop in prices, subsidies, new requirements for the Government and the European Union). The elimination of the milk quotas was a new concern added to their list. Their dark mood appeared to be rooted in a long history of milk price falling since the 1990s. When the news arrived that the participants of a *tractorada*[6]

(people in the SEA, people managing subsidies in offices or banks), etc.

5 The most notable would be the creation of the Agrarian Extension Service in 1955 and the application of the Stabilisation Plan (1959).

6 A demonstration where farmers block the streets with their tractors.

in Lugo[7] had decided to keep it on indefinitely, Xulia and Amelia showed mixed feelings: both hope and unease. Eventually, they decided we should go to the city after work to see what was happening. This *tractorada* had just started a few weeks before in several urban areas of Galicia. The main demand was a just price that would allow this people to have a decent life and to continue being farmers.

At the rally, agricultural unions and producers were deploring the passivity of the state. They argued that the state, which is responsible for ensuring that the industry offers contracts to farmers, was not guaranteeing that these contracts were properly negotiated, nor preventing them from being arranged unilaterally by the industry. The situation that the farmers criticised was directly related to the broader process of internalisation of the agricultural business, whose outcome was a transfer of competences from state to capital in markets regulatory functions. Intensified production and contract farming, described by Marc Edelman (2005) as crucial aspects of the subsistence crisis, were also integral to this broader process and was giving more power to the industry, while relegating the state to a secondary position. Yet a wider historical context is necessary to understand this situation.

Milk industry in Spain and Galicia started developing during the first three decades of the 20th century. The main feature of this period was the importance of agrarian associations in Spain and Galicia. Different unions and associations intervened closely together with the state in the social diffusion of agricultural innovation. This happened mainly through an institutional framework in which IIA (the Institut of Agronomic Research, in Spanish initials) was central.

Some authors, such as Fernández Prieto (2000), highlight that the innovation that occurred during this period fitted and matched the productive strategy of the Galician peasantry. For example, these agricultural associations promoted the use and purchase of new technology through reciprocity mechanisms, such as mutual aid, which was central to the balance of labour exchange in Galician peasantry, or even through collective acquisition.

This trend ended with the Spanish civil war and the following period of autarchy during the Franco dictatorship. The above-mentioned innovative framework was then paralysed completely, even reversed. Agrarian associations disappeared and were replaced by Brotherhoods[8] (*Hermandades*). All this happened within the framework of strongly interventionists policies by the state. The few opportunities for collective action that lasted during this period were relegated to instances of resistance, which took the form

7 One of the main urban centers in Galicia and head city in a primarily farming province.

8 Farmer union brotherhoods. Representatives of the vertical unionism of the Franco dictatorship in agriculture.

of old formulas originated in the Old Regime, more than a century before. For example, in the context of conflicts over property, resistances to forced expropriations (mainly of communal lands) used mechanisms such as fires (destruction of massive plantations) and lawsuits (the only legal method of resistance at that time). There were also fiscal strategies of resistance, such as a refusal to pay for the Brotherhood dues (Cabana 2017).

Some other forms of resistance were individual (Hervés et al. 2000; Scott 1985; Scott 1990), such as those around the commercialisation prices of agricultural products in a context of strongly interventionist economy, where the strategy was to resist the requisitions of the Tax Office[9] (*Fiscalía de tasas*). The means used for this type of resistance ranged from the concealment of crops to the sale of some products on the black market. There were also some tactics to evade the actions of the General Supply Commission[10] (*Comisaría General de Abastecimientos*), such as to inflate the number of family members in order to increase the amount of rationing, while at the same time reducing the portion of food that had to be delivered to the General Supply Commission.

Due to the Civil War (1936-1939) and the post-war period, in the 1950s the degree of commercialisation and transformation was still very low and most of the milk that was produced in family farms was for self-consumption. The few existing industries at that time were mostly dedicated to the processing of milk products (such as butter and cheese). It is in this period that foreign companies, such as Nestlé (which was already present in other regions in Spain), began to operate in Galicia and to promote a more market-oriented form of milk production (Iturra 1988).

The creation of the Dairies Plan (*Plan de Centrales Lecheras*) in 1952, which introduced the prohibition of selling raw milk in cities with more than 25,000 inhabitants, fostered the creation of small dairy industries in areas of consumption outside the traditional areas of production. These small industries became the leading collectors of milk and began to compete with each other and with larger dairy products industries (butter and cheese mostly) (Langreo Navarro 1994).

The Stabilisation Plan of 1959, which sought to normalise commercial relations between Francoist Spain and the rest of the World, ensured a growing presence of transnational companies (especially from the agro-industry, dedicated both to supplying and processing) and, at the same time, a progressive dependence on them. Although this plan appeared to revitalise

9 Law of September 30, 1940 on the Tax Office (*Fiscalía de Tasas*). It is a law created to apply sanctions in hoarding crimes.

10 This is the body (created in 1939) that is responsible for the collection and centralisation of products considered as essentials, also for their redistribution through a rationing system.

the dairy sector, it also subordinated it to the interests of the agro-industry. Transnational companies entering local markets, meant a hierarchical transformation of the dairy economy, implying that the work carried out in family farms was relegated to just the initial stages of the productive process, disconnecting these farms from the processing and the supplying of the product.

The transformative process (that started in the 1950s in Spain) generally known as "Green Revolution", implied the construction of a more normative relationship between the state and the market. The state started to implement agrarian policies focusing on: 1) favouring the market and the private sector, and 2) pushing the mechanisation and technological adaptation of the agrarian areas. In Galicia, these aspects facilitated the configuration of an agro-industrial complex.

It was also in this period, and increasingly during the 1970s, that claims to the state to act as an arbitrator (meaning, to mediate in favour of the dominance of the industry) intensified. At the same time, the vision of the state as an antagonist grew among farmers due to this lack of mediations and what they saw as the alliance with the market.

The promotion of the technology and innovation model took place in Spain and Galicia through the Agrarian Extensión Service (*Servicio de Extensión Agraria*, SEA) created in 1955. As Lanero and Freire (2011) illustrate, it came alongside a tendency to devalue practices and knowledge that had emanated from the rural community during the associationist period in the early century, under the guidance of the IIA. The modernising process of agriculture focused on the application of scientific research developed unilaterally by specialists, contrary to what happened before the dictatorship. Fernandez Prieto (2009) also considers that the Agrarian Extension Service was implemented "*ex novo*" through this modernising paradigm, disregarding native traditions as a way of "civilising" farmers and integrating them into the global culture and economy. The Agrarian Extension Service was thus an instrument "conceived as a mechanism for social change and acculturation to spread the dominant values" (Fernandez Prieto 2009, p. 156)[11].

Throughout this period (1950s-1970s), there was a stagnation or fall of the agricultural income. This increased towards the end of the 1970s, after the collapse of the regime. Overall, the late dictatorship era showed what Soto (2002, p. 15) calls the "paradox of modernisation": despite agriculture experiencing its greatest structural and technical transformation, it also de-

11 These dominant values at that particular period of time were related to modernisation and *desarrollismo* (developmentalism), that arose from the different plans of development carried out by Franco regime from 1950s to 1970s to overcome the autarky period that lasted since the end of the Civil War (1939) to the 1950s. Promoting industrialisation and also modernisation and mechanisation of farming were some of the main features.

clined as an economic activity compared to other branches of the economy. The drivers of this paradox were a relative fall in agricultural prices and an increase in costs (Soto 2002, pp. 15, 330), which triggered new tensions between Galician farmers and the state. In fact, already in 1976, important protests took place in Galicia, in which Galician farmers began to demand a just price for their food products, alongside related requests, such as protests around the business tax (*cuota empresarial*) of the Agrarian National Insurance (*Seguridad Social Agraria*)[12].

Already in those early protests, two of the main demands were a price that would cover production costs and that would allow a decent life (*vida digna*). Scott's (1976) concept of subsistence ethics – the moral principle based on the right to subsistence – resonates here. All the demands that are made to the peasants are framed within the standard norm of a right to subsistence. This norm is related to the concept of exploitation which Scott frames as a relation – centred on moral values – between individuals in which the existence of an exploited part implies the existence of another exploiting part. It also consists on an unfair distribution of efforts and rewards. There is, however, a requirement for a standard of distributive equity, but the power of one part and the vulnerability of the other will tend to violate the common standards of justice. Here, Scott notes, both the state and the landowners are "antagonist" to the peasants.

For Galician farmers, "the antagonists" in the struggles for just price and the possibility of continuing with their livelihood, were "political authorities" at different scales (regional, state, and, later, the EU), as well as the dairy industry. The 1976 protests, referred to above, concentrated on the setting of a minimum price for their products at the beginning of the annual agricultural work, and a planning of production that would guarantee the purchase of products, even the surplus. Furthermore, farmers sought the end of intermediaries and of the monopolistic practices carried out by the dairy industry (Fernández Roupar 1979).

Despite these sporadic explosions of resistance before and after Spain entered the EEC, however, the relation between farmers and the industry, as I found it at the beginning of my fieldwork, could be defined as an oligopsony, since a small group of buyers (the industry) has the power to control prices and volumes of production. This generated a disadvantageous situation for milk producers. Even if the price is usually detrimental to their own interest, producers are subjected to the priorities of the industry, for they lack the capacity of changing companies if they are not satisfied with selling conditions because of internal agreements in the industry.

12 This tax considered farmers as entrepreneurs (due to their condition of business owners) and according to this forced them to pay this contribution.

For years, agricultural unions and producers have been denouncing the passivity of the state with regards to this kind of internal agreements among big dairy companies. They argue that the state, who has to ensure that the industry offers contracts to farmers, is not introducing any mechanism to guarantee proper negotiations and a just price. They would want the state to be a mediator, acting to avoid that the contracts between the industry and the farmers are arranged unilaterally, as it has been happening with regularity.

These claims are shaped in a historically deep process that started during the modernisation period of the Franco regime (1950s), and shifted the power to regulate the economy from the state to capital. Consequently, a shift from public to private initiatives, and a shift away from the state, brought private industry into play (McMichael 2009).

In the next sections, I will, first, present the situation I encountered when I arrived at the nine farms for my fieldwork. This situation was itself the product of another vertiginous transformation of the normative frame regulating milk production: the integration of Spain within the EU. Second, I will show how EU governance introduced the abolition of milk quotas, which became itself another major trigger of change in farmers' livelihoods.

It is –I will show– throughout these long sequences of historical variations that claims over the state tend to change, giving birth to ambivalent visions among farmers wherein the state is seen as an arbiter or mediator, but also as an "antagonist". In this ambivalent relation, the notion of "just price" (Thompson 1971, Scott 1976) and the claims around the possibility of continuing with one's livelihood, are pivotal elements and the objects of struggle.

Joining the EU

During my fieldwork at the family farms, one topic was always present in farmer's conversations: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU). In their words, there was a "before" and an "after". It was an unanimous feeling among workers of the 9 farms that the moment in which Spain entered the EU in 1986 had changed their farms forever; yet not for the better. One of the most often-mentioned changes was the continuous and – to them – exasperating drop in prices. A grimace of anger would appear on Lina's face every time the topic came up in our conversation.

As mentioned, Lina and her family had to face important investments and efforts since she and her husband decided to join the dairy specialisation process (during the 1970s) in their farm. Therefore, when prices started to drop (in the late 1980s and 1990s, with the integration of Spain within the

EU), Lina became very frustrated, especially when she compared current prices with those before entering the EU.

According to Lina and other Galician farmers, the drop-in prices began right when Spain entered the EU. In fact, if we compare milk prices previous to the entry in the EU with those of 2008, when the last big increase in prices occurred, the drop is made itself evident. While a litre of milk in 1982 would have a contemporary value of 0.49€, the price paid in 2008 reached a maximum of 0.38€. In fact, data analysis reveals that prices with a value prior to the entry into the EEC remained stable until the 1990s. It was at that time that they began to decline significantly and to suffer from increasing volatility. During this decade CAP settled a significant reduction of the intervention prices[13] to bring them closer to world market prices. Indeed, direct and structural CAP aid became important in the late 1990s and early 2000s in an attempt to compensate for the drop of intervention prices. Nevertheless, farmers have never embraced this "compensation" and disagree with the idea that CAP direct payments replace the price that must be paid for what they produce. Many amongst them would regularly frame this aid as a means for the authorities to control their production, forcing them to produce in a certain way (with an intensive production or more bio-technological investments). This way of producing would be in most cases contrary to their own interests and causes them endless expenses, rather than helping improve the viability and maintenance of family farms. Extensive producers are particularly adamant that European regulations are designed to produce intensively.

Manuel, one of these extensive farmers, inherited his parents' farm in 1976 with only five cows. It was always clear to him that he wanted to earn a living as an extensive farmer. In one of our first interviews he evoked the anecdote of how his father made him choose at one point between a tractor and a flat in the nearest city, and he, without hesitation, chose the tractor. He would also mention how many of the young men of his generation went to look for work in the shipyards of the nearest city (Ferrol), while it was clear to him that he wanted to stay at home and work the land. The idea of a farmer's dignity reappeared constantly through his self-narration, and in the way he represented his work. Consequently, a strong feeling of indignation appeared when the subject of CAP aids came up in our conversation. Manuel and other Galician farmers share views of this aid as charity: "alms" that they receive in lieu of a proper remuneration for the work they do. They also see specific subsidies, such as aids for vulnerable sectors, as a way of giving them a treatment close to charity.

13 At the beginning of the CAP implementation, intervention prices were a main feature. These are guaranteed minimum prices for agricultural products. In case the minimum price is not reached the member states are obliged to buy and store the surplus.

Manuel insist that "the logical thing" would be to have a fixed price for what they produce, thus being able to calculate what they need to invest or produce to survive, to know "how far they can go" in a constantly fluctuating market context. These farmers always say that they would undoubtedly renounce to CAP aids if they could obtain a just price for the milk they produce. Another concern that was regularly raised has to do with the arbitrariness of the criteria by which the aids are granted. For instance, the fact that the amount of subsidy granted – with direct aid or basic payment – by the CAP 2015-2020 was linked to the number of hectares owned (the larger the number of hectares, the higher the subsidy), implied that the largest and wealthiest landowners received the most generous amount of aid. Farmers always mention the example of the Duchy of Alba, one of the wealthiest aristocratic dynasties in Spain, and even that of the English Royal Family, as some of the largest recipients of CAP subsidies in Spain and Europe.

The admission of Spain into the EEC and the subsequent application of the CAP would indeed significantly affect the economic and institutional framework of the Galician agricultural sector. Firstly, this broke the relative protectionism that had hitherto supported many food products in the Spanish market. Spain's previous system had now to open up considerably to European Community exchanges, which were very competitive with the main Galician productions. Secondly, the obligation of the CAP brought about important changes for family farms (Sineiro García 2008).

The first measures to be applied in the early period after entering the EEC were related to sanitation campaigns and required farmers to pay high costs to improve and renovate facilities for the sake of animal welfare. For some Galician farms, these requirements were so strict that they led to the slaughter of all of their cattle (Fernández de Rota y Monter and Irimia Fernández 1998). Also, one of the most restrictive CAP measures was applied to milk production through a quota policy. The implementation of this measure forced the Galician dairy sector into a complex situation that ended up saddling the farmers with debt and even led to the emergence of a black market for dairy products (Langreo 2004, Martínez Álvarez 2018).

The same ambivalence held by farmers with regards to the state extends now to the European Union and its application of the CAP. There are – indeed – aspects of the CAP that are seen as positive, such as the aid that was initially granted for the improvement of infrastructures –changes in the livestock stabling, new milking rooms, etc. Some of these measures made farmers' work more bearable. However, farmers feel that the damage outweighs the benefits. A large number of demands were imposed on them that were not later compensated. The general perception is that production has become costlier and the prices paid to them much lower. The CAP implied the application of strict controls considered unnecessary by the farmers, and to only increase production costs, such as certificates for the sale of live-

stock, prescription books or even vaccines that can have dire consequences for the cattle.

As I have mentioned, the state was giving way to a greater weight of the industry (especially of foreign capital) already before Spain entered the EEC. This further accelerated with the application of the CAP. In the dairy sector, farmers lament that the entire agro-industry (including, of course, both the processing and distribution dairy industries at once) was able to position itself at a more and more privileged place, leaving increasingly less control and decision-making capacity to farmers.

The dominant regulatory capacity held nowadays by the dairy industry is evident if we observe the price formation rules. The industry generates an important diversity of criteria in the payment for quality and complementary bonus and a considerable ambiguity establishing the floor price. This could be seen as a transfer of regulatory power from the state to capital associated with supranational organisations, such as the WTO or the EU. This connection allows the institutionalisation of industrial power in the world food system (McMichael 2009). Once the relation between CAP policies and the industry's growing power become evident, farmers' perception of the UE as an antagonist starts to be more comprehensible.

The end of the milk quota

One of the elements that more brutally affected these dairy family farms was the dismantling of the milk quotas, imposed by the CAP in 2015. This led to further liberalisation of the dairy market so that state and supra-state institutions no longer had any control over supply and demand.

Before the elimination of the milk quota, while I was living at Lina's farm, some unions in Galicia denounced that a few dairy industries had started lowering the price in the contracts they offered to farmers. The industries threatened not to collect the milk unless the farmers signed lower contracts. Still, the price of milk in Galicia was already the lowest in Spain. The companies were initially offering annual contracts with a price of 20 cents of euro, and when the farmers refused, the company offered another three months contract with a higher price, around 26 cents of euro. In June 2015 (after the elimination of the milk quota), three of the major companies in Galicia stopped collecting milk from several producers, arguing that the required quality standards were not being met. Tension grew in the dairy sector. From then until mid-September, protests and *tractoradas* took place, including blockades of major companies and logistic centres to prevent products from leaving. Producers, industry players, distributors and the government attempted to reach an agreement, but this did not end satisfactorily for producers. The farmers' main demand during this time was the

creation of a free and public mediation system to ensure that the sale agreements would no longer solely reflect the interests of major corporations. But above all, what the farmers demanded was the payment of a just price for the milk they produced. This would allow them to live with dignity; that is, live only off what they produce, enabling the reproduction of the domestic group and maintaining farming as their way of life.

The situation has not improved nowadays and during 2020 some unions denounced that dairy companies were breaching the Food Chain Law (Ley de la Cadena Alimentaria), which requires the inclusion of a clause whereby it is necessary to make a reference about whether the price agreed between the company and the producer covers production costs. Due to the absence of an official reference on production costs, industries are imposing their own criteria under the threat of not collecting the milk from the producer if they do not agree with the price. The average price in Galicia, from January to April 2020, was 0.32€ per litre of milk (according to FEGA, the Fondo Español de Garantía Agraria), while studies carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture placed the average production costs in Galician dairy farms at 0.39€.

The issue of the just price in the framework of these family farms is a source of conflict with the industry, but also with the state. They accuse the regional government (*Xunta de* Galicia), the Ministry of Agriculture of the Spanish government and the EU of inaction and collusion with the dairy industry. Yet, at the same time, they demand the state to act as mediator around the issue of price[14]

The price crisis related to the elimination of the milk quota in 2015 further enabled grassroots understandings of the state as an antagonist. In addition to condemning the passivity of the state, Galician farmers felt that a confrontation was taking place. Their concept of just price was met by another concept during this crisis: the "sustainable price", mainly used by central and regional government and by the industry and distribution companies. At first, during the preliminary agreements in which farmers sought

14 Scholastic authors understood that maintaining a community seeking prosperity for all its members was essential for establishing a just price and they thought that the state was the guarantor of this process. As noted by David Friedman (1980), Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics viewed institutions as utilitarian artifacts that were justified by social considerations of the concept of public good. The family and the state were "natural societies" for these authors (Dempsey 1935). One of the main functions of the state would be to ensure the economic prosperity of its members as well as to promote and protect the different relations that kept the community together in an attempt to meet their material needs. Similarly, Friedman (1980) points out the importance of the arbitration to which Thomas Aquinas makes reference in the just price doctrine: the idea of the unjust was here associated with what they considered the opposite of public welfare. Dempsey (1935, p. 485) points in the same direction when he explains that: "Scholastics writers demanded a just price because purchase and sale is a social transaction and social transactions are governed by justice".

to guarantee minimum prices by law, the "sustainable price" was defined in a vague way as a price that guaranteed the end of production below cost price. But between this preliminary agreement and the final agreement, the National Commission of Markets and Competition (NCMC) declared that it was not reasonable to prohibit selling at a loss because in certain situations it could be competitive, and advantageous for consumers. These statements by the NCMC were reflected in the final agreement[15], in which the initial allusions to price that covers production costs disappeared and were replaced by something vaguer: payments of dairy industry should contribute to the "sustainability" of farms.

Throughout this process, farmers felt that the "sustainable price" was not clearly defined and that it was used by the government to favour the dairy industry and distribution companies. As a result, both the industry and authorities could avoid guaranteeing a just minimum price; the price that allows farmers to live with dignity. As such, the use of the concept "sustainable" (both for the "sustainable price" and for the idea of the "sustainability" of the farms) was based on the idea of a price that guaranteed the existence of farms that supply the market and consumers. But it did not specify whether these farms should be family farms or, on the contrary, large farms producing in an industrial way. On the contrary, with the use of the concept of just price, farmers were claiming the need for a price that allows them to live with dignity from what they produce, enabling the reproduction of their domestic groups and way of life, present in a relevant way in rural Galicia. The idea of social worth, of taking into account both the immaterial value of the material and the value of the people, are essential to the concept of dignity that is at the core of the demands for a just price made to the state and the industry by Lina, Manuel and the rest of these Galician farmers (Franquesa 2018, Narotzky 2016).

Conclusions

In this article, I have been trying to let resonate some of the harsh feelings of anxiety, disappointment and frustration that many of my informants had developed towards the Spanish state, the CAP and the EU. These feelings were accompanied, however, by still strong sentiments of hope and expectations of the state to act in their defence, or rather, in defence of their right to have a dignified life.

I have tried to bring into light how these ambivalences were the product of a larger and more general social transformation, itself the product of two

15 This final agreement is not finally signed by the main agrarian unions since they disagreed.

macro processes of structural re-adjustment. The first one was the devolution of ruling capacity (especially over the markets) from the Spanish state to both supranational political institutions (like the EU and the WTO), and corporate power in the agrobusiness. The above process of change occurred at increasing speed with the integration of Spain within the EEC, but had started long before, with the implementation of Francoist reforms (such as policies like the Dairies Plan of 1952 or the Stabilisation Plan of 1959 mentioned before, that helped opening the field of action to transnational corporations, especially the agro-industry and dairy companies). The second one – a consequence of the above – was a transformation in the structure of the agro-industrial markets and their reproductive dynamics (such as the dismantling of market regulation instruments that led to unbridled liberalisation, as was the case for milk quotas removal, or the establishment of contract farming and similar practices, reshaping the dairy products market towards its current oligopsony form), in which the bargaining power of farmers was consistently reduced, while that of agro-industry exponentially increased.

The pressure these transformations exerted on Galician farmers lives, is also responsible for the complex and ambivalent structure of feelings they held towards the state, as it emerged in my fieldwork frequentations with them. Their response was the creation of the notion of "just price", which they used as a dynamic field of struggle in which they attempted to express their claim for a dignified life, and their request for an intervention of the state in defence of their right to the former.

In this sense, one could argue that the idea of social worth implicit in the concept of dignity, as well as the tensions between capital and life are underpinning the farmers' structure of feelings, and the political posture the latter gave shape to, in the expression of their claims.

Through the request for a "just price", Galician farmers want the state to play a strong role in solving the problems of the dairy sector. They demand it to act as an arbitrator that ensures the proper functioning of their economic activity and punishes those actors that are responsible for any faults, flaws and defects. The just price is seen in this context not as a free-market price but as the result of a controlled or managed market, as Polanyi (2014) defined it. As he showed, this is a market in which exchanges are developed by channels controlled by the government, and business is governed by administrative methods.

In light of this, what Galician farmers seem to demand, is a regulation of the market by the state, in order to guarantee that the price obtained for the milk is sufficient to maintaining a dignified life. This means a price that permits the reproduction of (and within) the farm and, at the same time, allows a quality of life in line with the typical standards of consumption in contemporary homes in Galicia. Some farmers also argue that the state must

establish a method of control that allows them to produce enough to maintain a decent life, while avoiding the intensification of production, which is considered one of the main causes of the sector's worsening situation.

As we could see, these ambivalent demands and visions are brewing in a historical process in which the needs of farmers, such as maintaining their livelihood and the possibility of a decent life, are displaced in favour of the needs of the market. They are thus inseparable from the changes experienced in the relations within the state-market-farmers triad over recent decades. This situation shows how, for many social groups such as Galician farmers, the state plays a crucial, yet ambiguous role in the generation and possible solution of capital-life conflict. Delving into ways to resolving these conflicts with (or without) the help of the state must continue to be a field for future enquiry.

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