

Memory and trauma of the Portuguese Agrarian Reform: a case study¹.

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Avis. Military order headquarters, the name of a dynasty of heroic kings. From its glory days there is not much left, but a convent in ruins, two churches, parts of the city wall, three towers... By the eighteenth century Avis was already an obscure village, lost in the middle of the Alentejo region, with little interest to its landlords who lived off their rents. Many of this region's features remained throughout the centuries: a very concentrated agrarian structure, a homogeneous group of landowners and a high percentage of land workers on wage, mostly journeymen. During the nineteenth century many tenants of the largest estates bought their lands and became landowners of their own, but the elite group remained the same and its social and economic behaviour was not altered. Nor was its local political control: the same families presided over Avis' political institutions for at least two centuries, several revolutions and three major changes in Portugal's regime (from Absolutism to Liberalism in 1834, from the Monarchy to the Republic in 1910, and from the Republic to Salazar's New State in 1932).

The contrast between this elite group and the land workers was huge in many ways, specially housing, food, clothes, education and healthcare. This originated tension, which was dealt with differently in different times. In the southern region of Alentejo, which occupies 41 per cent of Portugal's area, the most spectacular reaction to these tensions came as a result of the Carnation Revolution of the 25th April 1974. After radical legislation produced by the early governments in 1974 and 1975 (which included the goals of "liquidating fascism and landowners" and "a general attack to private property and the capitalistic exploitation of the

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land”), and the replacement of all the local political elites, with the help of the military, an Agrarian Reform was set in motion. Over one million hectares of land were nationalized and occupied by workers and cooperatives were created to manage them. Avis was one of the municipalities where this process was more overwhelming, with 40.666 hectares occupied, which represents 67 per cent of its total area and 71 per cent of its farming area. Six cooperatives were created, each with an average of 6.000 hectares and 137 workers each. The main one reached 11.000 hectares and 400 workers.

In this research project my aim was to discover the motivations of this movement, both in the revolutionary central government and in a municipality which assumed a leadership attitude in the region, particularly in regard to a population who lived with its head down and hat in hand for centuries. Why eyes were suddenly raised and action was taken to overthrow “oppressors” and assume control of lives and workplaces?

For the reconstruction of these events different and varied sources were used, including written local documents, literature, ethnographic, political and economical studies, legislation, the press, and specially a particular source which proved to be the most valuable of them all: local memories and oral history. The result of more than sixty interviews was an overall feeling of frustration and deceit for an entire population who did not benefit from the Agrarian Reform and still feels betrayed by “someone” which cannot clearly be identified. “They” misled them, “they” kept the money “they” had promised, “they” kept everything and the poor remained poor. “Everything is worse off now”, “everybody has departed”, and the images of rural desertification and an aged population are ever present.

There are three periods clearly marked by the following dates: before 1974, the revolutionary period of 1974-1977 and after 1977. The first one is the period of the Estado Novo regime; the second one is the transition period in Portugal, when there was a crisis of the Portuguese state; and the third marks the beginning of the consolidation of the democratic

regime in Portugal, after the presidential, legislative and local elections held in 1976. In January 1977 the first elected mayors in over fifty years started ruling local communities. And that was the year Portugal applied as a full member of the EEC – European Economic Community, later EU – European Union. It was also the year António Barreto, the Agricultural Minister, wrote the law that marked the beginning of the end of the Agrarian Reform. Even though most lands were returned to their owners only after 1979, some only in the late eighties and nineties, a movement which was called “Contra-Reforma Agrária” (Against the Agrarian Reform, Roux, 1982) took form in 1977 and led to a climate close to a civil war, in which arms were fired, bombs were placed and people were killed.

1. Before 1974

The Portuguese “Agrarian Question” has occupied scholars for centuries and created the most imaginative solutions (Cabral, 1974, Santos, 1993a). Our history is filled with treaties and legislation that were written with the Alentejo in mind and the ever-present desire to transform the region into the Portuguese barnyard (Santos, 1995). Forcefully it had to produce all the corn our country needed to survive and when it didn’t deliver, which it didn’t most of the time, something had to be wrong with it. Either the lack of water or the lack of people, or the laziness of its population caused by the heat, or its Moorish origins. Any cause was possible. But mostly the fingers were pointed to the largeness of its estates and the latifundia regime. And the solutions were always very simple: divide the property, put other people in the Alentejo, take people from the North and make them work on the South, build dams, irrigate. Even though some attempts were made throughout the centuries to put these projects into practice, the results were always precarious. The region’s specialty is its “montado”, a typical Mediterranean ecosystem that includes cork trees, pastures for swine and goats, olive trees and cattle breeding in general. Corn is always the poorest of its products, even when incentives are given to

farmers. And this type of culture can only be profitable in large dimension estates. Of course only a few could own the land. And those few enjoyed hunting and had a lifestyle that was quite different from the rest of the population.

This situation is portrayed in political treaties and in the Neo-Realistic literature from the nineteen thirties and forties, where all landowner bosses were evil and all journeymen were poor and great sufferers. Alves Redol, Manuel da Fonseca, Fernando Namora and later Nobel Prize winner José Saramago (in 1980) wrote a few of the best pieces of the Portuguese literature on this subject. And they all heard the same stories told by the same people about the hardness of rural life, the unemployment periods, the hunger, half a sardine to eat, children with no shoes, little boys helping shepherds and swineherds, little girls waitressing in houses or begging on the streets. These were the same stories I heard about a remote past that is not forgotten. But which were already part of that remote past in the early seventies when the agrarian reform was set in motion.

Since the beginning of the sixties, life in the countryside had changed, mostly due to emigration and the mechanization of agricultural work. At the same time a new middle class had been given the chance to rise in this rural society: journeymen who specialized in providing services with recently acquired machines paid for with subsidized credit, and tenants who sublet parts of land to tomato growers during the summer season. Yellow cornfields were turning into red tomato crops to feed ketchup factories. These industries had grown and benefited from Portugal's adhesion to the EFTA in 1960. And they provided an alternative to agricultural work in traditional rural areas. Wages rose and living conditions improved. The children of those workers who had gone to work bare feet when they were 6 years old could now go to high school, and even to the university. Illiterate grandparents had grandchildren who were doctors and engineers. But their awful past was there to haunt them.

2. The revolutionary period of 1974-1977

With the April 25th revolution, all the former regime's political elites were dismissed or exonerated. Law number one, dated the same day of the revolution, dismissed the president of the republic and all the members of the government and the parliament. Civil governors were discharged by decree, also issued the same day. From May 2nd on, mayors started being exonerated one by one, and administrative commissions were appointed for each municipality. These commissions were supposed to be composed of "independent personalities or groups and political currents which identify themselves with the Movement of Armed Forces" (the authors of the revolution), and should function until the first democratic local elections. In most cases, local citizen committees affiliated to the communist party presented the list of the commission members to the Ministry of Interior and were immediately approved. In the Alentejo region, this was accompanied by a huge people's movement, led by local communist representatives. All farm workers were out on the streets and landowners started to be afraid. There were road blocks and arms searches made by "people's committees", and any sign of luxury became a symbol of "fascism".

Radical legislation established the concept of economic sabotage: when it was considered that an industry or a property weren't producing as much as they could, they were classified as underused and were supposed to be a target of government intervention and nationalization. This law was the perfect excuse for the first land occupations in the end of 1974. Farm workers adhered immediately. With their psychological and social background, when the revolution came and communist propaganda told them they could own their boss's land, they believed it (Carvalho, 1977, Garin, 1977, Maltez, 1989). When they heard the military, with long beards and red scarves and flags, telling them to move on and occupy the land, they marched on. Women first, shouting and showing off like they had never done before.

In Avis a charismatic communist leader had the power to move crowds. He led them throughout a whole spring and summer of parties, banquets and cattle slaughtering (in 1975). He even led the occupation of lands in neighbouring municipalities and was known, feared and admired everywhere. People came from Lisbon and from abroad to live and be a part of the agrarian reform. They wanted to participate in the movement, to work on the crops, to sweat with the workers who fed the country. It didn't work. Land concentration was too much for these workers to manage. Too many salaries to pay and not enough money. And no: production and productivity levels did not go up during those euphoric years, as claimed by the Portuguese Communist Party reports. On the contrary: corn production did not reach the high levels of the sixties, even though corn fields were enlarged. Cattle was reduced, olive oil and wine production fell practically to zero, and cork, the region's biggest wealth, was stolen by corrupt industrialists. Salaries remained the same as before: the only advantages to the workers were job stabilization and the end of unemployment. But all those sharecroppers who'd improved their lifestyles earlier, now had to enter cooperatives in order to survive, and this was a step back for them. They didn't like being paid the same as all the others. And they were the first to leave when conditions were created for them to rent land again.

Meanwhile, landowners, tenants and traditional farmers were expelled. Some collapsed when they saw their life's work ruined. Especially tenants, who were treated exactly the same way as landowners, for they were "bosses" and therefore "fascists". Older people remained in their houses, living off their savings and on a survival subsidy given to them by the government. Younger landowners had to find jobs in other areas. Many of them were agronomic engineers and veterinarians who had to work as high school teachers, because it was the only job they could find in the region during those years. Most of the younger generation went away to school, found jobs in different areas, and never came back.

3. After 1977

By 1977 cooperatives were living on borrowed money, with huge interests to pay. When Prime Minister Mário Soares told the agricultural minister Lopes Cardoso that he didn't want to support any further the communist revolution in the Alentejo, the minister quit. And António Barreto, the new minister, proposed a new Agrarian Reform. One with socialist, rather than communist, characteristics: splitting the land instead of concentrating; giving away parts of the occupied farms to single farmers, and therefore, taking land away from the cooperatives. These policies were latter known as the Sá Carneiro laws, because of the prime minister who enforced them. And it worked, for every single anti-communist farmer applied to rent a piece of land, and every former sharecropper and tenant left the cooperatives in order to work for himself. It was war on a system that couldn't function and the victory of individualism. In top of everything, credit was restricted, and without money to pay for salaries, cooperatives couldn't survive.

There were strong local reactions: cooperative workers offered enormous resistance to giving away the land. Former landowners and tenants who were claiming their lands back had to hire bodyguards and requested the help of the army. Some were ambushed and beaten up and, on the other end, some workers left the lands at gunpoint. All sorts of protests occurred, houses were bombed and landowners families were killed by a terrorist brigade called FP25, whose leader, one of the heroes of the revolution, was latter sent to prison and submit to trial. The Agrarian Reform had a slow death, but with a considerable amount of conflict.

These facts launched an open discussion: why did the Agrarian Reform and the cooperative system fail? Was it caused by mismanagement or was there intent on the government to end it? Both answers are correct, but the argument was kept alive throughout the years (Barros, 1986, Estrela, 1978, Barreto, 1987, Balabanian, 1987, Baptista, 1978, 1982, Bermeo, 1986, and others). The laws changed and political circumstances too. Right wing governments begun giving lands back to previous owners and agrarian reform laws were

revoked. But the general feeling of my oral sources always points to the mismanagement factor. Why didn't the cooperatives survive on land they bought or rented during those earlier and profitable years? The most common answer resumes to a single word: theft. Where is the money?

Of course, after spending it the way cooperative leaders did, after paying for all those salaries and interests on borrowed money, surely there wasn't much left. But local communist leaders were considered responsible for all that went wrong. And no one else remembered them. After a few years of being heroes, they became people no one spoke of. And the whole movement had the same destiny: it is something not worth mentioning, nor remembering. Nowadays, this rural society is completely changed; nothing is the way it was before or during the agrarian reform.

With Portugal's European Integration in 1986, several changes were inserted in the legislation in order to adapt Portuguese agriculture to European standards. A new vocabulary was produced and new concepts invaded the fields, originating a totally different approach to a profession that had remained the same for centuries. As early as 1977, the Barreto's law introduced new concepts such as landscape, environment, agricultural multi-functionalism, biodiversity, and an attempt to close the gap between Portuguese agriculture and its European counterparts. In order to move towards Europe, Portuguese farmers were urged to behave differently; to straighten bonds with the local community; to improve their workers social and economical conditions; to protect natural resources; to increase soil fertility; to intensify, modernise and diversify their agricultural activities; to promote agricultural associations; and, most important, to foment forestry areas and to combine the production of raw materials with hunting, fishing and pasture in an integrated economy scheme. This wasn't any different from what was being made for centuries in the Alentejo region and throughout the whole country until the late eighteenth century. But for the first time it was put to law, regardless of the need to

increase wheat production. Finally cereals were cleared away from the first place position they had occupied for centuries in the minds of urban intellectuals and other products and activities in the rural areas were considered more important.

This pioneer concept was enforced throughout Europe with the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 1992 (EEC Rule number 2078/92), which introduced new functions to rural areas: a space for leisure and natural reserve, where farmers and agricultural workers depend on the help of subsidies to perform their new jobs as nature's gardeners, and not to direct their products towards the market. There are even those who accept a subsidy to completely abandon agricultural production and cease their agricultural activities. With CAP's new orientations, agriculture is supposed to be multifunctional and perform non-productive functions, such as preserving landscape and natural spaces. In Portugal, enforcing these measures was quite a successful process, for it contributed to farmers' income and allowed them to maintain a practice that they already had and did not intend to abandon, and being rewarded for it.

Agenda 2000, based on EEC Rule number 1257/99 (RURIS – development plan for 2000-2006), strengthened this orientation with three major guidelines: reinforcement of agricultural and forestry sectors; improvement of rural areas competitiveness; preservation of the environment and rural landscape, now considered patrimony. Several practical measures were foreseen in this legislation in order to promote rural development: direct investment in farms; the settlement of young farmers; early retirement; establishment of ill-favoured areas; forestation of agricultural land; and others.

Portugal's adhesion to the European Community in 1986 made European agricultural policies available to our country. In the scope of the European Fund for Agricultural Orientation, a special program for the development of Portuguese agriculture was created: PEDAP (EEC Rule number 3828/85, December 20th, 1985), with a ten year deadline and a large amount of

money to spend in order to correct Portuguese agriculture's deficiencies and to improve its production and marketing. Alentejo region received 25 percent of the money, which was used mainly on roads construction, fences, and taking electrical power to agricultural establishments. Large estates benefited, small farms could not compete. With the farmers' new job as subsidy's managers, older and less educated people simply abandoned their lands and retired. Their children had other professions, which were more rewarding. And even landowners with larger properties had to adapt and improve their management skills (or hire someone to do the job) in order to survive. Michel Drain, a long-time observer of the Portuguese revolution and agrarian reform, stated that one of the negative impacts of the EEC on the Portuguese fields was the increase of state intervention, which is inefficient, bureaucratic and discouraging to the producers' initiative (Drain, 1995). On the other side, Scott Pearson wrote that Portuguese farmers were quite capable of responding to price changes, and indeed they saved, invested, introduced technology and prospered (Pearson, 1987). Besides, Portugal has revealed itself surprisingly efficient in the draft of European funds.

This was especially positive to *young farmers*, a new professional category introduced into Portuguese legislation in 1979, which allowed people up to 35 years old (latter enlarged to 45) to receive an installation subsidy and special credit conditions. This was used mostly by the sons of farmers who initiated their professional farming activity based on their family's properties. Without family approval, candidates had to buy or rent land, which was considerably more difficult. The aim was to introduce a younger generation of farmers, with an improved technical education and advanced ideals. Candidates had to prove technical skills, attend agricultural courses and present an executable project for the land, which had to be approved by the Agricultural Cabinet.

4. Thirty years later, the new rural world

Anyway, rural abandonment continued in Portugal, cities grew by the sea, as they always had grown, and the countryside became more and more a place to visit on weekends. Small rural villages are nothing but old age homes nowadays. Municipalities provide most of the employment to the few young people who remain. In the Alentejo region, city and village councils have also changed with the revolution. A new group, with completely different origins and professional categories, among which there are clerks, civil servants, doctors, teachers and bank tellers, has replaced old elites (mostly landowners) as mayors of the municipalities (Almeida, 2003). Definitely, the lords of the land aren't the lords of the village anymore, as they had been for centuries (Santos, 1993b).

There are a few possible explanations to this fact. One of them is the agrarian reform itself and the post-stress trauma it left on occupied landowners. Although it did not result in a definitive transfer of propriety, it installed fear and took away the desire for any investment in agriculture. Ancient elites were definitely removed from local politics, and, in most cases, from agriculture itself. There were many of these families, whose members had other professions but there was always one of the members who devoted his life to agriculture as a main activity, even if he had another profession (women were very rare as active farmers). Land occupations forced most landowners and their children to follow different professional paths, alternative to agriculture rather than complementary. Present day's farmers of the Alentejo still hold large estates. Many of them descend directly from the old elites. Others arrived recently and bought land just like many industrialists and some other urban groups did in the mid nineteenth century, trying to acquire the social status they lacked. Yet, nowadays land-owning no longer provides the economic status that it did fifty years ago. Therefore, land-owning in the Alentejo is now more of a recreational activity for a few privileged people and the fulfilment of a fashion desire: leaving polluted and stressing cities on holidays in order to have better "quality of life", but maintaining their urban professional activities, their main source of income. This tendency does

not apply to large estates and cork forest landowners, who can still live rather well exclusively from their agricultural activity.

These characteristics of the rural world in the south of Portugal have direct consequences on former elites' absence from local politics: they are tourists and complete outsiders, away from local social life and the the local people, with stronger ties to Lisbon, where they arrive in little over one hour. Also, low use of local workers in present day's agriculture diminishes contact with the rest of the local population. Fifty years ago these farms hired dozens, sometimes hundreds of journeymen during the crops, not counting permanent staff. Nowadays, hired staff is minimal, machines do all the work and outsiders perform specialised jobs. The situation may be described as follows: large estates owned by a few who do not participate on social and economic life, contrasting with a population of elder people, with practically no job opportunities and whose children moved to Lisbon or abroad. This situation makes way to resentment and reflects on electoral results. The Communist Party still has a strong presence in this region and it will take a few generations for local voters to remove, forget and overcome the motives that led to the agrarian reform.

On the other hand, city people began acquiring the habit of travelling to the countryside. In the words of David Lowenthal, we are in the middle of an "eco-nostalgia crisis", which promotes eco-tourism (Lowenthal, 1985). It is not only a trip to *nostalgia*, but mostly it is fashionable to spend a weekend in the Alentejo. Roads were improved, a highway was built and distances shortened. People with old farmhouses were given incentives (and subsidies) to renew their *montes* (a farm's headquarters) and laws were produced to increase rural tourism. In the Alentejo, rural tourism is mostly a complement to an active agricultural activity. Old houses were rebuilt, but tourism definitely cannot replace agriculture and cattle breeding, it can only help to keep the house in a proper condition and provide work for a few former farm workers, while the landowner entertains his guests with old hunting stories and regional food tasting. New

functions were introduced in the rural world and old farms: they became a space for recreational activities. Not that those functions were a novelty: but they were traditionally reserved to a very small and privileged group. And farm managers were forced to embrace new specialities to their jobs: grants manager, nature gardener and preserver, host, cook, nature and tourist guide, horse-riding school manager (sometimes teacher), bicycle renter, hunting organiser (and zoology teacher to people who have never seen a live rabbit or deer).

For city people, these days are paradise. They can see a vegetable garden, pick a fruit from a tree and eat it, and listen to a cock singing in the morning. Their children can see real eggs, from real hens, not the dead chicken in the supermarket. But most of these new tourists are hunters. Nowadays they no longer need to be friends with the landowner to have the privilege of an invitation to hunt: they simply pay for it. After the revolutionary extermination of species (free hunting was one of the conquests of the revolution), new animals were artificially introduced and some species were recovered and raised for the pleasure of hunters. New laws were made and special reserves were created, in order to civilise and control this activity. Not only the wealthier ones can benefit from this regime: there are still free hunting grounds, where general laws are enforced, and municipal associations, approved by the forestry department, which control large areas of land and where each hunter owns a share. The big difference is local consumption: while rich hunters stay for a few days in those rural tourism facilities and eat in restaurants, all the others leave Lisbon at 4 am, hunt all day, take a picnic and come back home at night, tired, sometimes drunk, and on Sundays roads become very dangerous places...

In Avis there is a hunter's association with an historical name: Master of Avis, in honour of fourteenth century King John who spent his childhood there and presided over a chivalry institution stationed there. Recovering traditions and names from the past is usual in all that is related to these activities. Restaurants are also named after these sorts of themes. As for the association, it concerns Avis' people favourite sport for ages. Fifty years ago their parents

hunted for a living, in periods of unemployment. There were professional hunters who sold partridges and hares. Sometimes they didn't even have a rifle and used traps. When they had the good fortune to be hired as scouts they could keep some of the game. Nowadays this activity is their main form of sociability: when they organise a hunting party for wild boars or simply for pigeons or rabbits there is always a series of rituals, beginning with breakfast, gate selection, lunch or dinner, discussion about shot pieces, laughter and jokes about past hunting parties... Of course, women are not allowed: this is still a rural masculinity ritual, especially in the lower classes. Old elite families had great women hunters who occasionally performed, but only on very rare occasions.

This municipality has four large farms where rural tourism is practised. All four of their hosts are active farmers who take guests as a complement to their agricultural, forestry and cattle-breeding activities. None of them could live on this activity: definitely there are not enough guests to support it. The rest of the population is as described above and local authorities try hard to attract other economic activities to the region, based mainly on promoting patrimony, history, landscape and local products. There are historical places to visit, such as a seventeenth century convent in ruins, medieval churches, walls and towers surrounding the old part of the village, dolmens and old megalithic stones spread throughout the countryside, lots of water in a dam to fish, swim, row or ski, local food to eat and to buy, such as goat cheese, olives and olive oil, wine, bread, sausages, cakes. And cork artefacts, embroideries, and so on. Unfortunately, and everybody complains about it, there are not many facilities for tourists, apart from restaurants and a camping park with a swimming pool by the lagoon. As people say, the machine is not set up. If you want to take a bicycle or a hiking tour you will have to bring your own bicycle and find your own way. If you want to see the fabulous dolmens, you will have a hard time finding them, and you will have to ask permission to the landowner to enter the gate and most probably he won't even be there. If you want to visit the beautiful seventeenth century baroque church, with a

unique woodwork and tiles, you will have to find the lady who keeps the key, whoever or wherever she is...

Other neighbouring municipalities promote fairs, such as Sousel's hunting fair, Nisa's cheese fair and so on. But the region is still deserted; people simply do not live there and only go on special occasions, from time to time.

This is a very sad portrait, which is not very different from the rest of the country. Rural tourism is a fact, but has indeed a very limited weight on the local economy. The Portuguese countryside is in fact dying along with its old aged population. Except for a few cities like Évora or Covilhã, which survive and are quite developed because of their Universities and state services, the rest of the villages in the eastern part of the country are a demographic catastrophe: no children, schools closing down, no jobs, no nothing.

Anyway, large properties survive. But not solely from their agricultural activity as before. Nowadays landowners sell forestry products, such as cork, wood and timber; invest on cattle, mostly cows; sell hunting parties, entertain guests. Specially, they preserve nature and make it "nice" in order to attract tourists. They breed hunting species such as dears, pheasants, ducks and so on, and take care of huge packs of hounds. It is the multiplicity of products, and not a single one, which supports a modern agricultural enterprise. And farmers have to be real entrepreneurs and have to improvise everyday.

Variety is the rule and agro-tourism is an important part of a modern farm. But it depends on the maintenance and the preservation of nature and only experienced and skilled farmers have the knowledge to take care of it. Just like hunting depends on agriculture to feed the game (partridges, for example, need corn fields to survive), agro-tourism needs a beautiful landscape and its natural products to attract tourists. Trees have to be trimmed, land has to be groomed, and fields have to be wed. When stressed out tourists go to the countryside they want to see healthy and well-fed cows grazing in the pastures and show their children the newborn sheep in

spring. Otherwise they will go elsewhere, for they are also tired of overcrowded beaches. And they want to take home fresh oranges and figs, taken from the tree, and olive oil to replace dangerous margarine, and cheese that tastes and smells like cheese. Therefore, an agro-tourism host cannot abandon any of his former activities, for only multi-activity farm will produce all of this revived past and nostalgic return to nature, in order to survive nowadays.

Conclusions

After analysing all the images that have been constructed about the Alentejo region, both in scientific and philosophic treaties and in legislation and literature, there is no doubt that all of these were of great influence to the production of agrarian reform legislation during the revolutionary period. Clearly those governments had the goal of changing power relations on all economic sectors (they also nationalised industry, banks and so forth) and giving away the land to those who worked it. The presence of ministers and secretaries of state in manifestations and rallies promoted by workers unions controlled by the communist party in the main cities of this region were a formal way to legitimate the advance of the workers towards the lands and the beginning of the agrarian reform. The physical presence of military forces on farms that were going to be occupied completed the apparatus that brought about enthusiastic crowds previously motivated by decades of clandestine work done by members of the communist party. Rural workers responded to powerful and effective propaganda and were completely deceived as to the real goals and possibilities of the movement they were getting themselves into. By then, there were no longer the apparent reasons for such actions, but the ghosts of hunger and unemployment that were real twenty years earlier, were again brought about. To create such a climate of fear and motivation, there was a strong contribution of the military press and the military "Cultural dynamics campaigns". Therefore, the army had a fundamental role in the

process, both in its institutional support to the occupiers and preventing any kind of resistance occupied landowners could possibly think of.

Agrarian reform in Avis may be described in three words: leadership, precocity and totality, both in local politics and land occupations. The role of communist party local leaders was fundamental to the attraction and mobilization process of the people who actively participated in the replacement of the local mayor and all the presidents of economic and corporative institutions.

The Agrarian Reform movement was directed by central governments both in its origin and its end. In the late seventies, right wing governments were interested in creating more favourable conditions to Portuguese integration into the EEC. For such purpose, physical and economic support was removed from the cooperatives. Consequences were an utter failure of the whole process and a general feeling of frustration to all social groups that were involved. Especially for rural workers, who could not keep the necessary group cohesion to move forward with its cooperative project. For landowners, those were lost years, and what they took back were abandoned lands, sick cattle, worn down machines and absolutely no money to start again. They had to borrow, with heavy interests, and decades went by until they could recover their traditional lifestyles, when they did at all.

As for local political elites, the revolution totally replaced them. Landowners don't even run for local elections. And economic power is no longer a way of conquering local political leadership. New professions emerged in the group that controls political jobs. Economic elites based on landownership are completely and deliberately absent from local politics. The change resulted from the fact that elections are now held and the communist party continues to obtain the victory in the region. Also, political jobs are no longer interesting to these groups, whose professional activities either in agriculture or others are increasingly more time consuming and provide them with incomes that are by far more appealing than a mayor's salary.

Nowadays there is little left from the Agrarian Reform. It remains in the memories of the older generations who experienced it. But among youngsters there is no interest in the theme, just as there is no interest in agriculture as a professional activity. Nature became a hiking ground or an all terrain vehicles track. The future is elsewhere.

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