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Agrarian Reform in the context of the Portuguese revolution.

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Abstract: The Agrarian Reform is a fundamental issue in the Portuguese revolution of 1974. It reflected the moment, the enthusiasm, the popular adhesion, as well as the ongoing political evolution, with all its forward and backward movements, mistakes and corrections, and divergent political behaviours of the successive governments. The Alentejo region has the lowest population density in Portugal and it occupies 41 percent of the country. In 1975 it was the stage for a political and social movement quite new and bold from a legal perspective. From a case study, this research analyses a critical issue for its time, for it affected a strategic sector, it implied political decisions which concerned the use and possession of the land and the general functioning of the local political institutions and society. There was an alteration on the concept of property, which was so clearly imbedded into legislation since the Liberal Revolution of the early nineteenth century. For the first time new laws defined principles of economic sabotage and ownership limits and originated unprecedented land occupation. According to the 1975 agrarian law, there was a clear intention to “liquidate fascism and its bases” and create “a general base for attacking large properties and the capitalist exploitation of land”. These laws were associated with others regarding the nationalization of strategic sectors such as industry, transportation, banks and communications. How did society react in face of such changes in politics, economy and social structure? What made people take to the streets and obtain control of local government and economic resources? For this research there was a consistent study of local sources, as well as an important gathering of local memories through interviews.



1. Introduction

The Alentejo region, in the South of Portugal, occupies forty one percent of the Portuguese territory. But it has the lowest demographic density and has always been so, due to its history, geography and water distribution. 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. This is the region where the Portuguese revolution is associated with the Agrarian Reform, which dominated the region's politics, its economy and its social life throughout a long period after April 25th 1974.

In order to understand this process, we need to analyse a bit of the people's lives before 1974. And the agrarian issue throughout the Portuguese History. Only then can we observe what went on during the PREC: "período revolucionário em curso" – the ongoing revolutionary period, from 1974 to 1976, up to the approval of the Constitution and the first presidential, parliamentary and local elections. It was the Barreto Law in 1977, issued by a Socialist Government and followed by the policies of Social Democrat Governments that brought an end to the Agrarian Reform process in Portugal.

These were the main research questions for my project: How was life in the Alentejo region up to 1974? What were the social evolution and its dynamics? Had there been change already? What brought about the Agrarian Reform? Was it a top down revolution or was there mass initiative? How was it directed and conducted? What made people take to the streets and obtain control of local government and economic resources? How did society react in face of such changes in politics, economy and social structure? Why and how did it end?

In order to answer these questions, a case study was selected and there was a thorough research of local sources and archives in municipalities, local institutions and private companies and family records. Lists of each districts' agriculture properties were consulted, as well as deeds for the new Collective Production Units, each with its own list of occupied properties and members, and ministerial orders for expropriation published in the official government bulletin. All this information was inserted into a database and it was analysed, taking into consideration all the laws produced at the time and news in the national and local press.

Ethnographic, political and economical studies were important references to create a better picture of the social and political environment of those years (Almeida, 2006). Literature, particularly neo-realist authors such as Fonseca, Namora, Redol, Saramago and others, was also a fundamental part of the research. Those authors were associated with the Communist Party and acted throughout the Estado Novo regime as important collectors of rural memories and experiences. They portrayed lifestyles and problems totally unknown in the big cities. Their work was the only way readers had access to themes and issues such as workers' misery, class tension, landowners' cruelty and so on. Their stories took place mostly in the 1930s and 1940 (Almeida, 2012) and the problems they exposed had mostly been overcome by legislation issued in the 1960s regarding social benefits, by emigration, by the introduction of mechanization and some industry in the fields. Regardless of better work and living conditions for agriculture workers in Portugal in the 1970s, those traumas and works of fiction were still vivid in the collective memories of rural people and in the minds of urban intellectuals who had read them and formed still portraits of the Alentejo region and its social issues. And they were used to justify the Portuguese Agrarian Reform.

Notwithstanding, the most important source of all was local memory: the main participants of the process were interviewed, both locals and main figures in politics, government and unions, such as Vasco Gonçalves, the Prime-Minister from July 1974 until September 1975, and António Barreto, the Minister of Agriculture from November 1976 to January 1978.

Oral history proved to be a main component of the research, with different truths coming out and being exposed, revealing opposite interpretations of the same events, as well as choice and selection of topics, each one trying to conceal or to elevate issues and make relevant (Martin, 2000).

2. Before 1974

The Portuguese “Agrarian Question” has occupied scholars for centuries and created the most imaginative solutions (Cabral, 1974, Santos, 1993b). 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.

How did people actually live? There was a project in the ISCTE, Lisbon, from 1998 to 2002, titled PACO – Occupations Analysis and Classification Project. In this project, a team of researchers classified jobs in agriculture, industry and fishing and it produced a *History of Work and Occupations*, with three volumes of dictionaries with historical definitions for each job. In the agriculture dictionary I wrote seventy entries, including cartwright, cow keeper, farm helper, farm machine renter, farm servant, foreman, goatherd, harvester, hay binder, hay cutter, journeyman, journeywoman, kitchen-gardener, labourer, muleteer, sharecropper, shepherd, slave, tractor driver and others (Martins, Monteiro, 2002).

This project gave me a particular insight as to what life in rural areas was all about. It enlightened me to work relations, hierarchies in farm work, gender issues, families and so many other aspects of living and working conditions that we can no longer imagine to be possible in our days.

For example, in the 1960s a new middle class had been given the chance to rise in Alentejo’s rural society: journeymen who specialised in providing services with recently acquired machines paid for with subsidised 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.

Collecting local memories was fundamental for understanding all those issues (Almeida, 2010). Nowadays oral history has become an important part of research, using ethnography and anthropology tools, in order to divulge images of past events (Thompson, 1978). Those memories are often different from historical records by journalists, researchers and historians.

A series of interviews were made to the main participants in the Agrarian Reform process in a municipality of the Portalegre district, whose leader directly influenced the entire region. The selection process obeyed a simple rule: I aimed for a sample of the local diversity, as I tried to interview people from each social group. The analysis of the interviews reveals that each group member is reminded of the facts which are the most important to his/her group, and that are included in the public representation of the group's past (Tonkin, 1995).

Here are a few examples of some journeymen's childhood recollections:

"There was a traditional discontent from way back, for generations. People worked hard, made sacrifices. Look: I can tell you that when I was four or five years old, and my parents weren't so poor, and I was an only child, we had one sardine a meal. My father ate a piece of the head, my mother ate the tail and I had the middle portion. A sardine for the three of us. We had three meals a day, bread all the time."

"There was a lot of suffering in the Alentejo. We went bare feet to the fields when we were seven or eight years old. I suffered quite a lot. We didn't have what we can afford today, such as capes for the rain. I had my first shoes when I made my primary school exam, when I was about ten years old."

In rural workers memories, resistance against the regime and working for the Communist Party are important issues, which include strikes, nostalgia for the heroic times of clandestine work and meetings, prison and resistance as a prestige factor during the revolutionary period.

"There were a few communists in those days. They protected each other as they were outlawed. I joined the Communist Party when I was seventeen years old. My first assignment was to affix posters at the doctor's palace. He was a member of the state party. He was out there in the parliament. And he had huge dogs in his backyard. And they were nasty. We were supposed to affix posters with insults to the man, because he wouldn't find us work, and so on. Do you know how we deceived the dogs? There were two of us, one called them to the side while the other affixed the paper. When he left his house in the morning he found the paper. The other day there were guards everywhere asking about who had done it."

Regarding work for the clandestine Communist Party:

"Once I was carrying a handful of papers, hidden under my shirt, to distribute in a nearby village. A police patrol showed up on horseback. We heard the horses and hid in an abandoned house. That was how it was back then. I did a lot of work for the party."

"There was a military repression. A journeyman was digging the dirt and the boss arrived and everyone had to stand up and take off his hat. We could only go back to work after he told us so. Others weren't so bad. Others just got there and said good day..."

"My father wasn't a member of the party, but he appreciated it. I can't say I knew what communism was like. All I can say is that I lived poorly. For every 24 hours I worked about 17 or 18 hours. My pay was not fair and I was unhappy with it. Our only support was from those papers we read from the Communist Party. They opened our eyes to make demands. They were spread around there. And we talked about them throughout the night, people talked."

Gender was also an important issue. Women described the joys of youth and they also felt the need to participate in the social struggle, but were stopped by men:

"My job was to do errands, clean the bathroom, dust... I kind of liked it, but I liked it better on the fields, to harvest, pick olives, weeding... We had a privilege inside the houses: we could eat. Our bellies were full. We didn't starve. In the fields, during the harvest, women were paid less than men. And we had to work as hard as they did. If we didn't, we were fired."

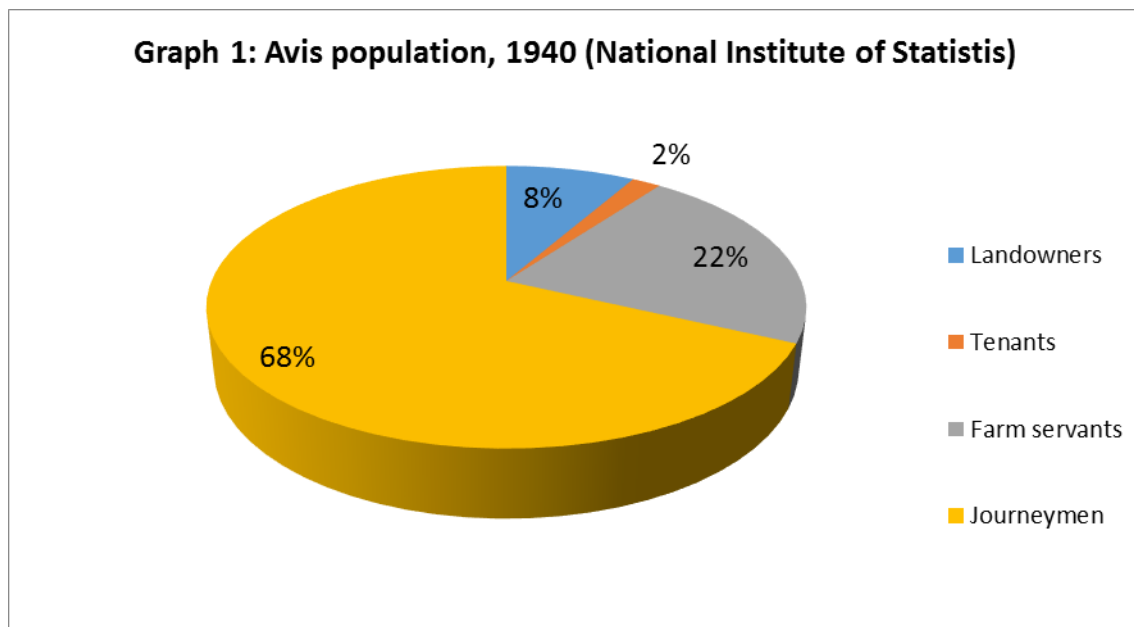
"We dated during work. We talked on the way, the road was long, sometimes a hour and a half, there was no transportation like today. We could talk to boys, coming back from work, sometimes we sang... We made a party on the way home. We were young. We would sing and danced. We were tired but we were young. It wasn't hard. And we had a lot of friends. Even with all those hard time, my younger days were great."

“Back then people talked about the Communist Party. I became a member only after the revolution. Before that I was a sympathizer. There were reunions throughout the night, but women weren’t allowed. Only men. People always talked about the Agrarian Reform in this region. They said the lands were... Look, the lands were the way they are now, abandoned, full of weed. No one picks the olives. I don’t know how it was when the party was clandestine. Men went to reunions, but they didn’t want women to go there.”

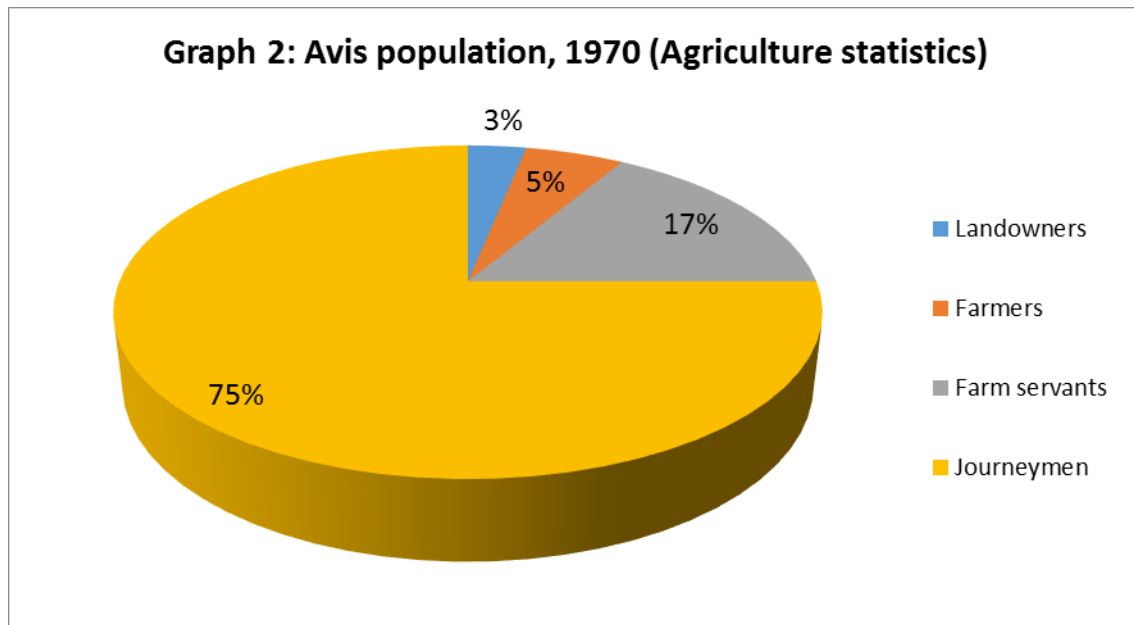
2.1 Demographics

The chosen case study shows us a rural society dominated by landowners and tenants, with a large majority of the population employed by them: according to national statistics, 90 percent of Avis population in 1940 worked in agriculture as journeymen or farm servants (graph 1).

Graph 1:



Graph 2:



In the 1970s, agriculture no longer played the most important role in the Portuguese economy. It supplied food and exportations, but regarding jobs it had been replaced by industry. Nevertheless, agriculture still occupied 24 percent of the active population. In rural areas it occupied over fifty percent of the population. In Avis farm servants and journeymen were still 92 percent of the population (graph 2).

3. Revolution

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 comities 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 comities", 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 nationalisation. 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 bosses' 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. The women came first, shouting and showing off like they had never done before.

The Agrarian Reform was a critical issue in the Portuguese revolution of 1974. It reflected the moment, the enthusiasm, the popular adhesion, as well as the ongoing political evolution, with all its forward and backward movements, mistakes and corrections, and divergent political behaviours of the successive governments. In 1975 the Alentejo region was the stage for a political and social movement quite new and bold from a legal perspective. It affected a strategic sector and it implied political decisions which concerned the use and possession of the land and the general functioning of the local political institutions and society.

4. The walls of the revolution

Posters and paintings on the walls revealed the spirit of the times, not only in Lisbon, but all over the country, and they were used as huge incentives to action. Inspired by the Soviet and Chinese revolution posters, they implied the association of all labourers, from industry, agriculture, fishing, teaching, the military, men, women and children.

Figure 1: Briz, 1999.

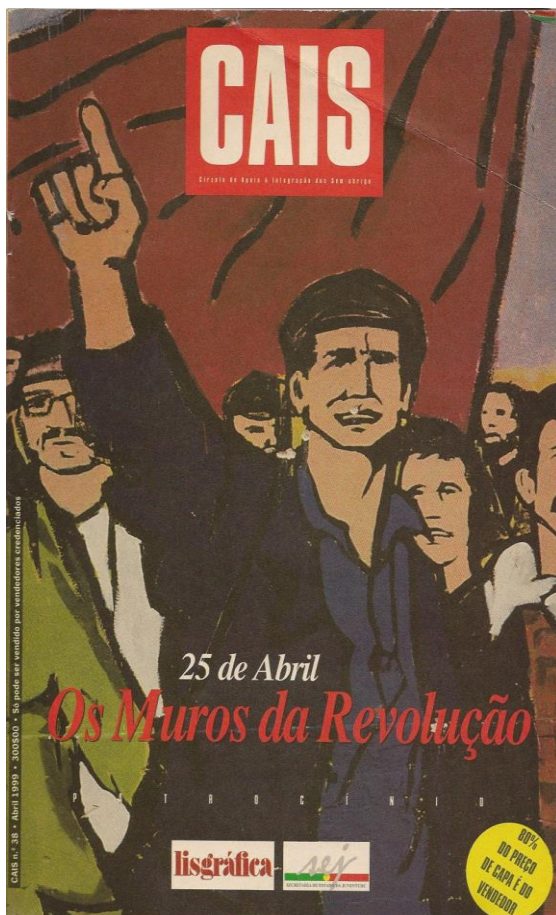


Figure 2: Briz, 1999.



Figure 3: Briz, 1999.

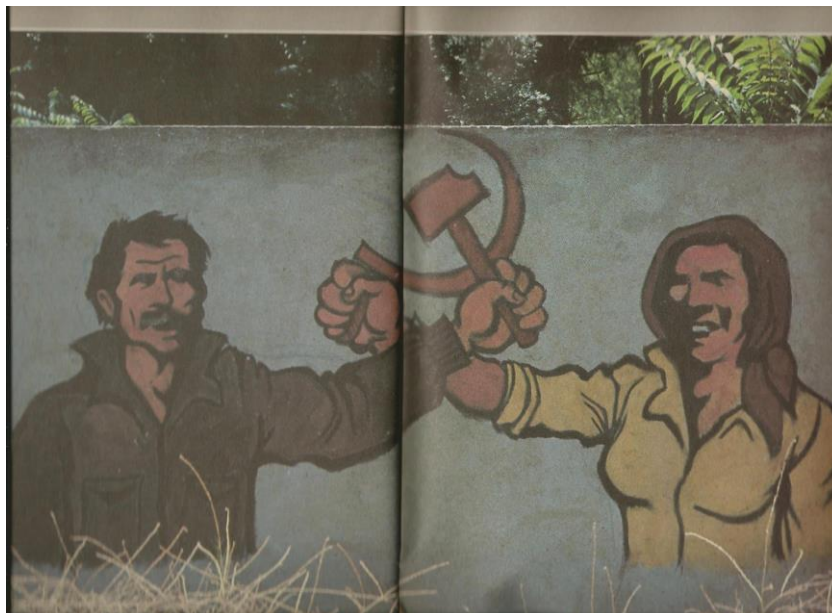


Figure 4: Briz, 1999.



Figure 5: Briz, 1999.



Figure 6: Briz, 1999.



Figure 7: Briz, 1999.

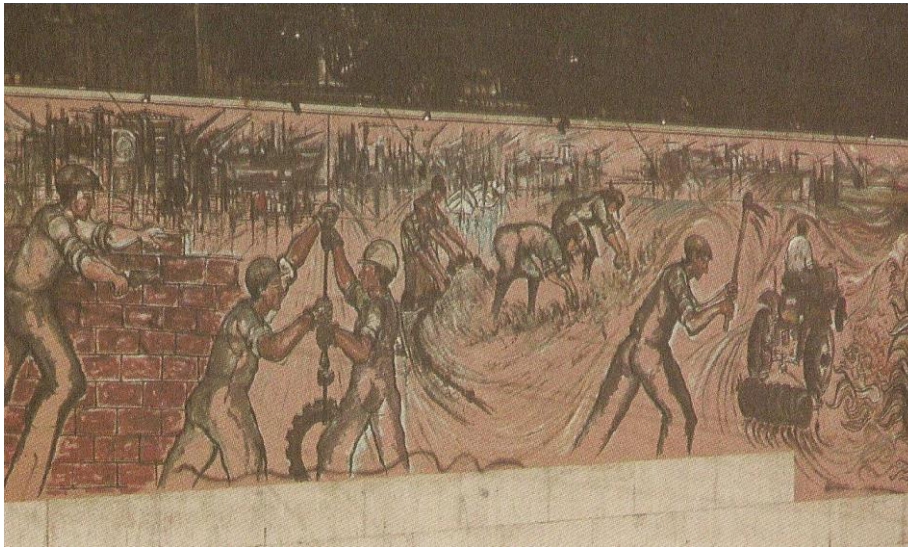


Figure 8: Exhibition at Tate Modern, London, 2014, picture by the author. The walls of the Portuguese revolution were inspired by Soviet and Chinese revolution posters.

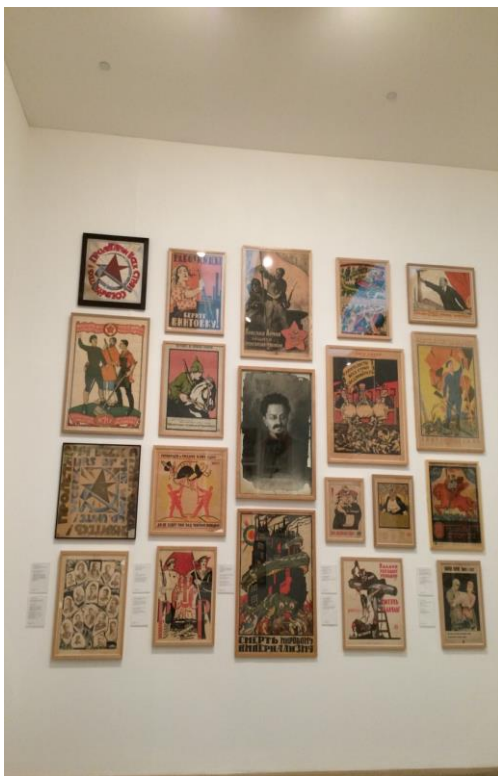


Figure 9: Salgado, 1999. Labourers occupy the house of João Nuncio, horse riding bullfighter and landowner in Alcácer do Sal, Alentejo. Photos by Sebastião Salgado.

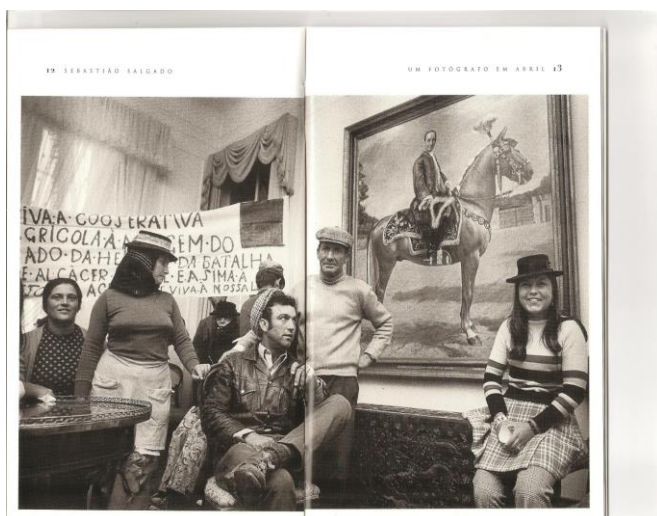


Figure 10: Salgado, 1999.

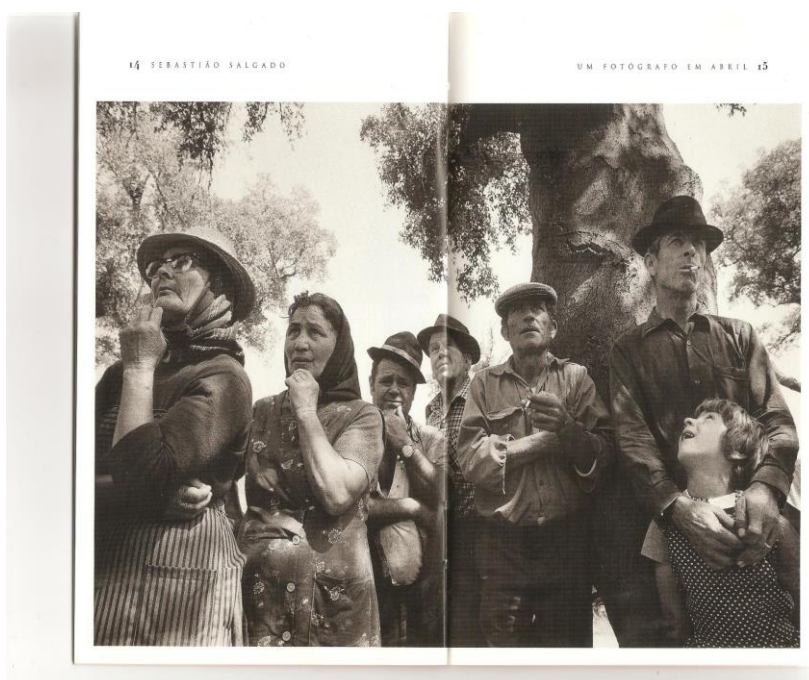
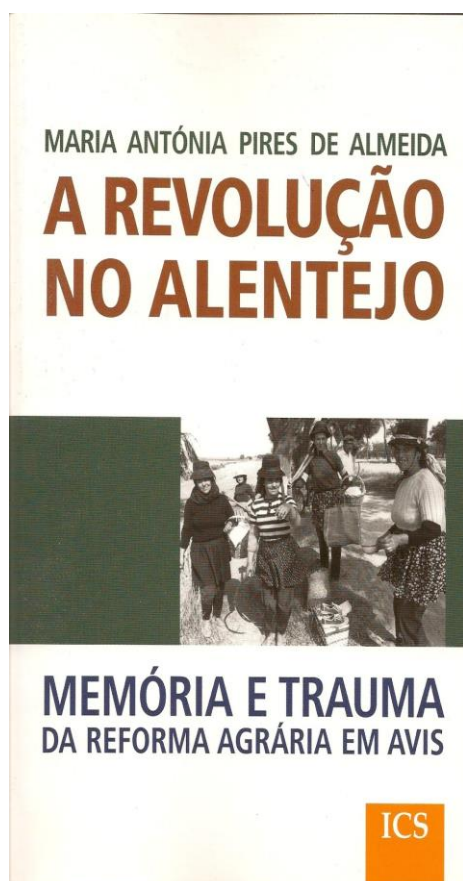


Figure 11: A labourers meeting at the Fundação Abreu Callado, civil parish of Benavila, Avis, Portalegre district, 1975. Local souce.



Figure 12: Almeida, 2006.



5. The laws of the revolution

There was an alteration on the concept of Property, which was so clearly imbedded into legislation since the Liberal Revolution of the early nineteenth century. For the first time new laws defined principles of economic sabotage and ownership limits and originated unprecedented land occupation.

Legal Framework:

Decree n. 203/74, May 15th 1974: Defined the program of the Provisional Government and obedience to the Program of the Movement of the Armed Forces. General lines: freedom for unions, strengthening of local government, public investment, cooperatives, agriculture enhancement, reform of the agrarian structures, minimum wage. It established Portugal's adhesion to the Universal Convention of Human Rights, which states that every individual has a right to property and that no one can be deprived of it.

Decree n. 660/74, November 25th 1974: Established the concepts of economic sabotage, government intervention in firm's management and a nationalization policy. In agriculture it was applied when farmers or landowners were supposedly under using their lands.

Oliveira Baptista's law, Decree n. 406-A/75, July 29th 1975: According to the 1975 agrarian law's goals, defined the introduction, there was a clear intention to "liquidate fascism and its bases", to "destroy the economic and social base of those classes" which exploit "the mass of agricultural workers" and stole from small farmers. The Agrarian Reform is defined as "a political process which is fundamental to liquidate large landowners, who dominate the fields". This law created "a general base for attacking large properties and the capitalist exploitation of land."

These laws were associated with others regarding the nationalization of strategic sectors such as industry, transportation, banks and communications.

Lopes Cardoso law, Decree n. 236-A/76, April 5th 1976: defined the Agrarian Reform Intervention Zone (ZIRA) and prohibited land expropriations under 30 hectares and from land belonging to autonomous producers.

5.1 Land occupations

There's been a discussion regarding the thesis of popular and spontaneous initiative, which has been abandoned by scholars, versus the thesis of a top down agrarian reform, initiated by the early revolutionary governments with explicit legislation, followed by strong popular adhesion. In the whole process considerable importance is attributed to strong charismatic leaders and the early presence of the Communist Party and its decade long structures.

5.2 Timeline of the social movement

As soon as the revolution took place, the first May Day was celebrated all over the country with huge joyful manifestations and rallies. In the Alentejo region, the first agricultural workers meetings took place in Beja, in early May 1974. Immediately the first Agricultural Labourers Unions were created in each district. Their goals were pay rises, employment to the unemployed, reduction of the work hours. José Soeiro, the leader of the Beja Union, was interviewed for this project in 1998: "It wasn't hard to move forward, because the structure was already in place with work done for decades by the Communist Party. We'd go to the villages, to meet with the labourers, and a committee was put in place immediately. This was rapidly spread in the three Alentejo districts."

There were rallies and gatherings throughout the entire Alentejo region. And women were on the frontline of meetings and organization, which was quite a novelty, after decades of being denied political participation by the Communist Party. Here is a woman's testimony (local Communist Party leader): "With the revolution I had a great time. I was everywhere. I was a member of everything. I went spontaneously. But it was the party who organized everything, let there be no doubt about it. Then we proposed the administrative committee for the municipality and we took off. I also went on campaign for the elections. It had to be done. I made speeches at the rallies, I distributed papers, I was a voice for the party. The 25th April was the best thing that ever happened in my life. I've paid my membership fees to the party all these years and I'll continue to do so until the day I die. The worst part of all this are the ones who aren't real communists. Those are the ones who got good houses, good cars. And how did they get them? The revolution did everything for them. They had nothing before 1974. And they got what wasn't theirs. Some of them kept things that didn't belong to them. I sure got nothing..."

Slogans were cried out: *Give the land to labourers! No more private property! The people is in command! Down with the reaction!* There were insults to the *fascists*, the *capitalists*, *latifundia owners* and *agrarians*. People in rallies were called *workers* and *comrades*, which implies a previously inexistent class solidarity, particularly in different levels of rural workers, such as labourers, shepherds, herdsman, sharecroppers, servants and others, who traditionally obeyed a rigid hierarchy.

And the MFA, the Movement of the Armed Forces, intervened with physical presence on the fields, on the lands and on local meetings. It promoted *The Campaigns for Cultural Enhancement* and published the journal: *Movement 25th April. Bulletin of the Armed Forces*, since October 1974 it was distributed for free to the military, with a language of encouragement towards an Agrarian Reform. The MFA was particularly active in enforcing the laws for expropriations.

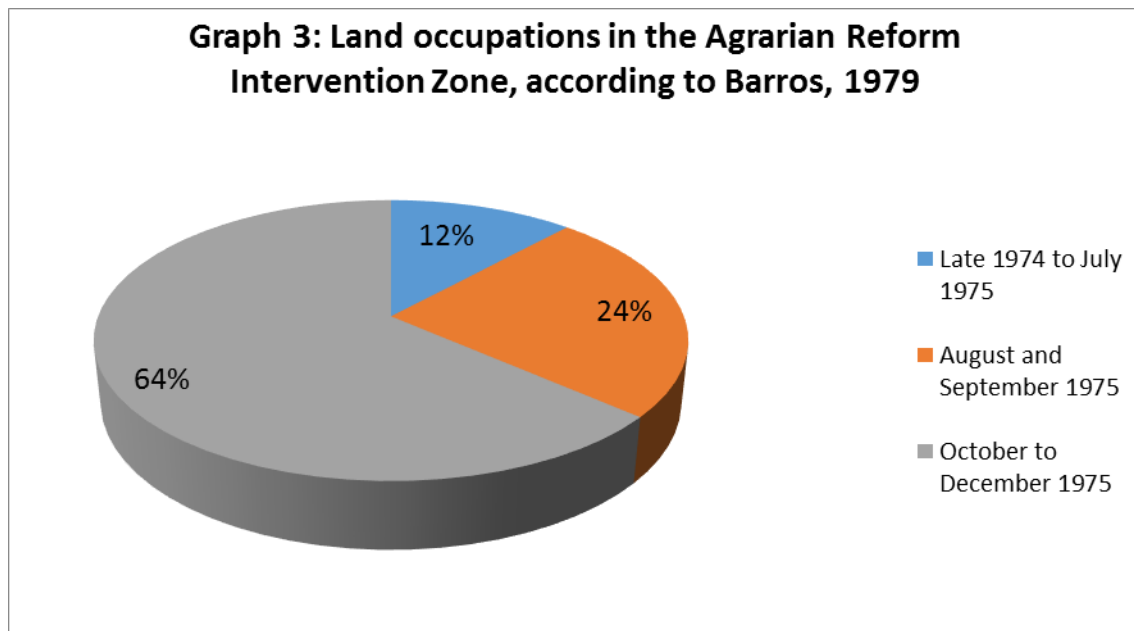
On October 1974, Esteves Belo, the Secretary of Agriculture on the Third Provisional Government of Vasco Gonçalves, sent a team of agronomists to the farms to check the lands and how they were being used. They were supposed to write reports on the possibility of intensifying production. Those reports went missing. But Cultural Intensification Committees were created, there were compulsive placements of workers in farms and allegations of underuse of the lands and threats of unemployment, enhanced by propaganda.

The first land occupation occurred in the Outeiro estate, at the Santa Vitória civil parish, municipality of Beja: 774ha, owned by José Gomes Palma, occupied on December 10th 1974 allegedly for "economic sabotage", applying Decree n. 660/74 and supported by the MFA, Movement of the Armed Forces (the military on the ground).

Then there was the Torre Bela case study: this estate was owned by the Duke of Lafões and it was occupied on April 23rd 1975 by labourers from the estate and others from elsewhere, supported by the MFA. There is a documentary which is an important ethnographic document. On this documentary we can observe an ongoing land occupation and the issues that were discussed among the workers, such as tools ownership. There are several testimonies by the estate labourers.

Most estates were occupied and legally expropriated from October to December 1975, as shown on graph 3.

Graph 3:



In order to manage expropriated land, about 500 UCP – Colective Production Units, known as cooperatives, were implemented. They covered over one million hectares, one fifth of the country's farming land (Baptista, 1993: 72). These UCPs enforced Decree n. 406-A/75: statutes and production organization should be created by local initiative and the will of local assemblies.

6. After 1976

Several reasons may be appointed for the end of the Agrarian Reform, all of them valid and cumulative. For starters, Collective Production Units (UCP) were not economically viable, due to excess workforce. In the words of José Luís, the leader of the UCP May 1st (Labour's day), Avis: "People lived happily around here. And they had jobs. We employed 320 people! Plus their families, we supported 600 or 700 people. We paid seven of eight million escudos every month. We had two accountants in a huge office..." Then there was emergency credit for agriculture, which was used to pay wages, with over 30 percent interests. Finally, government policy: there was a political intention to end the Agrarian Reform and give lands back to owners.

And 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 stabilisation 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 (Almeida, 2007a).

The process of reversing the Agrarian Reform: on the first legislative elections on April 25th 1976, the Socialist Party won with 35 percent. The Communist Party got only 14 percent and

did not accomplish its goals, even though it won in the South of Portugal. Definitely, the popular plebiscite of 1976 did not validate the choices made during the revolutionary period. Mário Soares' First Constitutional Government inaugurated on July 23rd 1976 and Portugal initiated its democratic consolidation.

António Barreto was appointed Minister of Agriculture and Fishing November 5th 1976. According to his own words, "I wrote a little note that I've kept. 1st: to write a new Agrarian Reform Law. 2nd: I wanted Carlos Portas and António Campos as Secretaries of State. I asked for the Communist Civil Governors to be dismissed and for the military commands who were favourable to the Communist Party to be replaced. Mostly, I asked for the end of the Agrarian Reform Regional Centres and for the end of the Emergency credit for agriculture. That credit line had to be stopped. And it should become an exclusive to the Ministry of Agriculture, and turned into an investment line. And the UCPs were supposed to be forced to pay their debts. Soares looked at the paper and he said: 'I agree'. And he signed his name on it. I started in office the day after." António Barreto's interview, 1998.

"The truth is that what was at stake was the foundation of the democratic regime. For a whole year the military and their civilian allies wrote the laws, applied them with none other than revolutionary legitimacy. This accumulation was one of the sources for despotism. (...) They were a minority and they had no external support. The revolution failed at the elections, as it does most of the time." (Barreto, 1987: 334-335).

The European option: on March 28th 1977 Mário Soares presented Portugal's formal application to the EEC – European Economic Community.

Portugal's frail economy and a loan from the International Monetary Fund forced the government to promote harsh measures. The huge weight of the structures created from the nationalization and expropriation process became incapable of coexisting with the necessary economic convergence with the rest of Europe. And the money spent supporting them was a massive expense to the state, together with a huge state sector, which was inefficient from an economic point of view and absorbed 20 percent of the Gross National Product.

The laws that brought an end to the Agrarian Reform were the following: Decree n. 56/77, February 18th 1977: New rules for the Emergency credit for agriculture. Decree n. 58/77, February 21st 1977: Compulsory payments to the Emergency credit for agriculture. Decree n. 221/77, May 28th 1977: Reorganization of the Ministry of Agriculture on a regional basis. Creation of a Department of Rural Extension with the goal of encouraging farmers to improve their work with technical knowledge and management skills and to overcome their credit, distribution and price related problems. Law n. 76/77, September 29th 1977: Rural tenancy. For the first time contracts had to be signed regarding lands over 2 hectares.

Particularly Barreto's law, Law n. 77/77, September 29th 1977: General Basis of the Agrarian Reform. Introduced the concept of Autonomous Farmer, increased the reserved area to 70.000 points, and separated active and absent landowners. Absent owners would receive only 35.000 points. This law allowed the increase of reserved areas for previous landowners and tenants up to 20 percent in case it was considered technically favourable. And up to 80 percent for societies. Or up to 10 percent for each member of the family household who relied on the expropriated land's income for survival.

Regardless of these laws, it was only with Sá Carneiro and the Social Democrat Governments that land devolutions kicked off. Social Democrat Governments replaced Socialist Governments in 1978. This was the year more landowners requested their reserved lands and more farms were removed from UCPs and given back to previous owners. With the so called Sá Carneiro tenancy laws (Ministerial orders n. 246/79, May 29th 1979 and n. 797/81, September 12th 1981, lands were removed from UCPs and distributed to farmers who could prove that agriculture was their main source of income. Tenant contracts were signed for

private use of the land. This was an incentive to land division in the UCPs and it introduced a different proposal for Agrarian Reform. From a project which was structured around collectivization and large production units, towards old proposals of land parting and distribution. This process produced longer lasting results. It was a more attractive proposal for small sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

There were huge social conflicts during land devolutions, from 1978 to 1980. According to a local witness and UCP manager, "They started taking the reserved areas from our cooperative. That was the worst part of it all. The guards came in. I was there all the time when parts of the land were taken. We were there to say we didn't want to give them away. Some of the lands were ready to harvest. Others were being watered. They said there was a law that forced us to return the land. The old landowners showed up with the guards and they brought rifles. There were gunshots. And some slapping. By the guards. We were over 300 people and there was conflict. We resisted. But then we left. We started noticing that it wasn't worth it. The cooperative had too many expenses. Too much staff. And there wasn't enough income to pay salaries. And that was it. They were all shut down. It was the government's fault. Because it never gave us any support. The government never supported the cooperatives and they went down. Our UCP had a debt of 7 million escudos. With interests, later on would have had to pay over 70 million. There were interests over interests. We went bankrupt. If the government had given us some support, things would have been different."

Nevertheless, the process wasn't over. With Cavaco Silva's government, there was a hot summer in the Alentejo in 1987, with new land devolutions and conflicts. And a new Agrarian Reform Law by Álvaro Barreto, Minister of Agriculture: Law n. 109/88, September 26th 1988. Its goals were "to correct the excess of the revolutionary period. (...) to create a climate of social stability and peace; to provide for the survival of the private sector; to reconsider the Agrarian Reform in order to fit the principles of the European Economic Community..."

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 law introduced new concepts such as landscape, environment, agricultural multi-functionalism, bio-diversity, 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 nineteenth 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.

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.

7. Conclusions

There was direct association between Vasco Gonçalves' Governments and land occupation and then Social Democrat Governments and land devolutions. The Agrarian Reform was a top to bottom process. It was politically motivated and directed. Laws and policies were enforced both for its beginning and its end. In both cases, there was strong popular adhesion. These were strong historical motives and rural southern population's tradition of resistance and support for the Communist Party, which influenced the whole process. In the end there was the failure of the economic model based on a large workforce with low levels of productivity.

"There was an early intention to absorb unemployment with the creation of jobs in agriculture. With the new reality of the European Economic Community and the evolution of Portugal's social and economic structures towards a market economy, it became obvious that these large production units were oversized. They were overstaffed and they were not economically viable without the constant and expensive support of the State." António Barreto's interview, 1998.

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 occupiers could possibly think of.

Agrarian reform in the Alentejo region 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 mobilisation 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 present and the future are elsewhere.

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