

AGRARIAN PRESS, AGRARIAN EXPERTS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO TECHNICAL CHANGE IN GALICIA, ca. 1900- 1950

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1. INTRODUCTION. AGRARIAN PRESS, MORE THAN MERELY A SOURCE.

Agrarian press is frequently used by research investigators in the field of contemporary rural European society as a source for studying aspects such as the associative movement, cooperatism, the processes of nation-building, socialization in politics, etc. To name just a few examples, Ernst Langthaler uses some periodicals to analyse the Nazi period in rural Austria, Johan Eellend to follow the development of the cooperative movement in Estonia and Christine César analyzes *La vie Claire* and Nicolas Woss *Nature et progrès* to reconstruct the genealogy of biological agriculture in France.² Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly, when agrarian press simultaneously reflects and stimulates decisive processes of change in facets such as those mentioned above, it is rarely worthy of historians' attention as an object of study in itself. Local press in general, and agrarian press specifically, have been neglected by historians, and

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² Ernst Langthaler, "Massenmedien in der ländlichen Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel der Agrarpresse", *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, 58/2, (2010) 50-64. Johan Eellend, "Unity through modernity: The agrarian media and the national question in Estonia at the turn of the 20th century", *Nordost-Archiv. Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte*, XVIII, (2009) 25-43. Christine César, "Les métamorphoses des idéologues de l'agriculture biologique: la voix de *La Vie claire* (1946-1981)", in: P. Cornu and J-L. Mayaud (dirs.), *Au nom de la terre. Agrarisme et agrariens en France et en Europe du 19^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris 2007) 335-347. Nicolas Woss, "Un monde agricole insoumis: agriculture biologique et agrarisme à travers la revue *Nature et progrès* (1964-1974)", in: Idem, *Au nom de la terre*, 349-360.

as a topic for research they imply formidable problems.³ In contrast to the main journals, they were often regarded as unworthy of being kept in private collections or archives, and to reconstruct their history means searching for copies scattered in many locations. There has been seldom a institutional continuity of the editing bodies, so that usually no party or association of any sort has held itself responsible of preserving their memory and material legacy (correspondence, documents...) as could happen with the political or trade-unionist press.

If one studies the case of Galicia from the end of the XIXth Century up until the beginning of the Spanish Civil War,⁴ the explosion of local and more specifically, agrarian press, is closely linked to a series of social transformations:

1. Reduced illiteracy rates: in 1887, just 29 [%per cent](#) of the Galician population knew how to read and write. This figure rose to 35% per cent per cent in 1900, 43 [%per cent](#) in 1910, 53 [%per cent](#) in 1920 and 67% per cent in 1930, with extremely significant gender differences (much higher illiteracy figures amongst women).⁵ This improvement came about as a result of greater state and civil society efforts (in particular, emigrant societies) to build schools.⁶
2. Changes of mentality and stimuli for the familiarization of writing: these changes resulted from mass transatlantic emigration, creating an immense

3 See for example for Ireland M-L. Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism. The Irish Provincial Press, 1850-1892* (Dublin, Four Courts Press 1999).

4 Divided into four provinces (A Coruña, Lugo, Ourense and Pontevedra) and constituting a little over 10 % per cent of the total Spanish population in 1900. Its many peculiarities in all domains, including the linguistic aspect (a language comparable to Portuguese), found no legal reflection in a liberal Spain and would constitute the base for a political movement of national vindication from the end of the XIXth century which failed to achieve significant popular support until the nineteen-thirties.

5 C.E. Núñez, *La fuente de la riqueza. Educación y desarrollo económico en la España contemporánea* (Madrid, Alianza 1992)

6 X.M. Núñez Seixas, *Emigrantes, caciques e indios* (Vigo, Xerais 1998); A. Costa Rico, *Historia da educación e da cultura en Galicia* (Sada, Edicións do Castro 2004). The link between migration and an improvement of literacy rates in M. Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (Basingstoke, Palgrave 2010) 180.

volume of essential correspondence to maintain family ties and social reproduction strategies aimed at the remaining rural population.

3. Advances towards greater political socialization and a mass political market at the end of the Restoration, [taking advantage of the recognition of the association right \(law of 1887\) and universal male suffrage \(1890\). The political and social debate during the first decades of the twentieth-century focused around the *foro* \(a peculiar form of hereditary lease\) and the deficiencies and corruption of the liberal system of the *Restauración* \(1874-1923\).](#)⁷

2. AGRARIAN PRESS IN GALICIA 1900-1936: DEFINITION AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

For the research purposes of this text, 134 Galician publications, which meet the necessary criteria for being considered as “agrarian press”,⁸ have been catalogued [for this period](#). Working from a moderately restrictive definition has allowed us to separate the field of agrarian press from local, political or working class press, despite the inevitable grey-zone between these domains. Consequently, those publications that explicitly represent agrarian federations and societies, those referring to the agrarian reality and the agricultural movement, or those declaring the rural population as their target reader segment in their titles or subtitles, have been taken into consideration. Therefore, general information newspapers have been excluded, including those reporting frequently on questions related to rural economy or the exploits of the agrarian

⁷ Miguel Cabo Villaverde, and Antonio Míguez Macho, “Pisando la dudosa luz del día: el proceso de democratización en la Galicia rural de la Restauración”, *Ayer*, 89 (2013) 43-65.

⁸ Miguel Cabo Villaverde, *Prensa agraria en Galicia* (Ourense, Duen de Bux). Each example is presented with a file containing its formal characteristics, chronological data, contents, archives, collaborators, and ideological tendency.

movement, an inevitably documented matter in any press publication given its importance during that time.

Nevertheless, this does not prevent the characteristics of the agrarian press analysed from being extrapolated to the broader field of local Galician press in the first third of the XXth century. The chronological framework in question covers a time period stretching from the emergence of the '*El Campesino*' newspaper in Lavadores (Vigo) in 1900, up to the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), when the majority of press publications, agrarian societies and federations were closed down by those responsible for the military coup, who also saw to it that many journalists were shot dead, jailed or forced into exile. The period after the military coup of 1936 will be analysed specifically.

"Agrarian" and "agricultural press" must be carefully differentiated. The latter includes publications whose characteristics are very differentiable: edited in the cities, distributed free, 100% per cent in Spanish and propelled directly from the administration (technical centres), and semi-official organisations (agricultural chambers) or professional organisations (veterinary or agrarian experts). Concealing a "hidden agenda" aimed at driving agrarian organisations towards a non-conflictive path based on cooperativism, these publications were mostly directed towards technical divulgation without explicit social or political contents. We are not dealing specifically with this official agricultural press in this paper. There was however a link between both of them because agrarian press often reprinted articles first published in agricultural journals or summarized their content.

A series of generalisations may be formed about the one hundred and thirty four agrarian publications considered for the three and a half decades before 1936, allowing

us to characterise this atypical subspecies within the broader universe of Galician press.⁹ In fact, and though the inexistence of monographs¹⁰ impedes us from affirming so with certainty, it is likely that many of the following statements are applicable to the agrarian press throughout Spain.

Commencing with its geographical distribution, the majority of the 134 publications considered are concentrated within the western provinces of Pontevedra (35,1% per cent) and A Coruña (29,1% per cent), corresponding approximately to their demographic weighting, as well as their number of agrarian organisations and their precocity. The province of Lugo edited 14% per cent of Galician agrarian press, mostly social-catholic publications, whilst the principal anomaly remains the low per centage corresponding to the province of Ourense (5,8% per cent), with the rest being published in Latin America or Madrid although aimed for distribution in Galicia. Nevertheless, the Ourense under-representation may be explained by the fact that the principal Galician agrarian publication arose in the capital of this very province in 1921, that being the daily ‘*La Zarpa*’ (*The Claw*) by the polemic priest and agrarian organiser Basilio Álvarez. With nearly three thousand copies and a broad network of correspondents throughout the province, it discouraged the emergence of other local agrarian organs of press.

The evolution of agrarian press quite reliably reflects the progress of the agrarian movement. The foundation of agrarian press bodies did not accelerate until 1907, coinciding with various projects aimed at the creation of Galician agrarian federations (all of them ultimately failed); the exasperation of the conflict for full land ownership and the abolishment of the *foro*; as well as the celebration of the first Galician Agrarian

⁹ A detailed presentation of each publication in Cabo, *Prensa agrarian en Galicia*.

¹⁰ With the partial exception of Y. Acosta Meneses, *La información agraria en España. Desde sus orígenes hasta la agenda 2000* (Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid 2007).

Assembly, which served as a forum for the diverse sensitivities within agrarianism (1908 – 1st Agrarian Assembly in Monforte). During the First World War, few new agrarian newspapers were created and many of those already existing disappeared, consistent with the lower agrarian activity of this period. On the contrary, 1918-1923 represents the period of greatest journalistic and agrarian activity (radicalisation in the fight against the *foro* and maximum expansion of the catholic agrarian societal movement). The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) marked an era of agrarian decline, both organisationally as well as in terms of press activity, a pattern later inverted during the II Republic (1931-1936), a period provoking an acceleration in the political socialisation of the population and the functioning of a political mass market. The eruption of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, in which Galicia found itself siding with those responsible for the military coup, supposed an end to both the agrarian movement and almost all associated press.

The typical profile of a Galician agrarian press body had to constantly contemplate its precarious character, with an eventful trajectory eternally threatened by the vicissitudes of the organisation funding them (internal divisions, state repression...), financial considerations, and reprisals from local power groups, the different levels of the Administration itself, or even the Catholic Church. More often than not, in a district where an agrarian newspaper was being edited, those in power locally would quickly print off another rival publication to steal subscribers. These “close enemies” would then put all of their energies into creating polemic between each other, with the defeat of one rival being followed shortly by the disappearance of the other. Some of the dangers threatening local and agrarian newspapers in general are summarised in the following commentary from the newspaper ‘*La Defensa*’ of Marín (Pontevedra):

“One may constantly observe the disappearance of newspapers, victims of cacique oppression; or others founded to counteract their opponents, newspapers whose readers are bribed to “change jackets”, or others thrown out by caciques for failing to create a “bombshell”; and if there ever were to exist a newspaper that sincerely defended the interests of the people, another would quickly emerge from the cacique world to steal subscribers in one clean swoop, forcing it to succumb”.¹¹

Other forms of pressure on agrarian press linked to the agrarian societal movement were fines, the interception of postal applications to subscribers and the inundation of editorial staff with complaints of slander, not to mention the cases of direct physical aggression and attacks on editorial premises. Therefore, it is no wonder that over a third of the newspapers considered in this analysis failed to get beyond a year in print, whilst more than two thirds failed to surpass the four year mark. The exception remain those few publications which lasted over decades thanks to having been sustained by powerful Galician and/or migratory entities, such as ‘*El Emigrado*’ from A Estrada (1920-1940), ‘*El Noticiero del Avia*’ (Ribadavia, 1910-1936) or ‘*El Tea*’ from Pontearreas (1908-1936).

Regarding periodicity, of the one hundred and three publications for which this data is available, the most frequent were weekly publications (44), followed closely by monthly publications (30) and fortnightly editions (21). There were just two daily publications, both from Ourense and both linked to the charismatic priest Basilio Álvarez (who achieved a seat in the Congress as a republican radical in 1931 and 1933): ‘*El Heraldo de Galicia*’ (1913) linked to the agrarian federation ‘*Acción Gallega*’, and the aforementioned publication ‘*La Zarpa*’.

¹¹ “La prensa y el cacique” (The press and the cacique), *La Defensa* (nº4, 1-XI-1914).

The number of copies printed lies within modest parameters. Of the thirty publications (prior to 1936) for which this data is available, the average number of copies is nearly two thousand. However, this figure reflects an upward bias since statistics are only available for the most powerful press publications to reach the streets. The majority of agrarian press bodies reached similar figures to the four hundred copies produced by the '*El Agricultor*' of Riotorto (The province of Lugo, 1906-1916), whilst the most elevated statistics belong to the previously mentioned '*La Zarpa*' with three thousand copies.

The staff behind these press organs were very seldom full-time journalists, but rather part-time, usually linked to the agrarian organizations. They could be farmers or young writers and lawyers who were looking for prestige to cement future careers in politics or literature. We are far from the professionalization analysed by John Fry (2005) for the American Midwest, a process which only recently had been fully accomplished in the general press in Galicia.

Significantly, all of these publications are either local or regional. In part, this reflects both the organisational dispersion of the agrarian movement, which never fulfilled its dream of forming a federation representing the whole of Galicia; and perhaps, the electoral system of the Restoration (until 1923), which divided Galicia into forty single-member districts for the parliament elections (only the cities of A Coruña and Lugo elected three deputies). As a reference, at the beginning of the twenties, the main Galician daily newspapers ('*La Voz de Galicia*' and '*Faro de Vigo*') printed off some fifteen thousand copies.

The contents of these newspapers was determined by the specific organisations and ideologies they served, and ultimately, their main objective was to popularise and defend these postures, converting each edition, in the words of Basilio Álvarez, into a

“daily meeting”. The most part of the four or six pages these newspapers consisted of, was dedicated to relating the exploits of the agrarian societies or federations in question: meetings, reporting on the action taken by political enemies (particularly town and city mayors if they did not count on their support), renewal of the board of directors, cooperative activities... Next, there would be some news about the current situation in the region, generally interpreted to their favour; and finally, other news would refer to broader matters (The Moroccan Wars, Spanish and International current affairs, etc.). Agricultural sections were a common thing in these newspapers, whether dealing with practical advice or reproducing articles from technical publications. Finally, they often incorporated literary collaborations, preferably those of a rural nature and written in the Galician language, the majority being poetry or of a humorous nature. Attaining publicity for the last page (usually they were four-page publications) was fundamental for the economic feasibility of the publication and moreover, became an extremely important channel of diffusion for new agricultural and livestock farming techniques and instruments.¹² As it was frequent in that era, the lower third of the page was usually taken up by a newspaper serial, which could be cut out and collected by readers, in such a way that they were able to collect the cuttings and complete an entire text without ever having to buy the book in question. Above all, this formula was used for novels, but there were also many cases of it being used for texts related to agriculture and livestock farming, or even legal matters, such as the electoral law of 1907 or new legislation on land contracts.¹³

Despite the fact that Galician was the principal language for over 90% per cent of the population, or even more amongst the rural population, agrarian press was mostly

¹² Lourenzo Fernández Prieto, *Labregos con ciencia* (Vigo, Xerais 1992)

¹³ The weekly ‘La Defensa’ (Betanzos, 1906-1910) provides several examples of this formula and its potential applications.

printed in Spanish.¹⁴ In the face of this apparent contradiction, it becomes necessary to make some comments. Firstly, during this era (and in reality, up until the 1980's) Galician did not enjoy official recognition, nor an official version and grammar, for which all sorts of prejudices fought its use in non-colloquial contexts, creating a situation known to socio-linguists as *diglossia*.¹⁵ Secondly, the use of the Galician language in agrarian press was greater than in general and working class press (socialists and anarchists did not look well upon minority languages given internationalist prejudices). It is true that in the majority of cases, Galician was relegated to more traditionalist, literary and humorous subjects and sections, whilst the more *serious* matters (political information, resources articles, prices and markets) were always written in Castilian Spanish, consecrating the vision of a regional language little adapted to the needs of a modern world and only valid for use in family and colloquial contexts.

The majority of agrarian press readers originated from the rural peasantry, a collective recently introduced to the world of the written word. In Galicia during the first decades of the XXth century, the rural population transmitted their knowledge of the environment, agricultural work and visions of the world through an oral culture: sayings, legends, old folk songs... As the nationalist journalist Antón Villar Ponte ingeniously indicated, the true village newspaper was that which its inhabitants unconsciously edited on a day-to-day basis:

¹⁴ There only exists one case of an agrarian publication written completely in Galician language, that of the fortnightly publication 'O Tío Pepe' of A Fonsagrada (Lugo), appearing throughout 1913 in support of the liberal parliament member and future president of the government, Manuel Portela Valladares, who had perfected his support base in the region by creating an agricultural union and a rural bank.

¹⁵ Henrique Monteagudo, *Historia social da lingua galega* (Vigo, Galaxia 1997)

"There are 'editors' who thoroughly prepare an article. Then, there are others who specialise in the art of irony. There are those in charge of civil matters, reports of weddings, christenings and love stories [...]. Even world news has its journalists in these oral newspapers of the river and fountain. Above all, news from America is usually exposed on a daily basis. Since, as you well know, there is practically no rural dwelling without family overseas. And now they even speak of the Moroccan War. For many working arms were forced to abandon their hoes for a rifles".¹⁶

Agrarian press needed to fill the gap separating the written word from the rural culture. It is important to highlight a series of written statements such as almanacs, calendars¹⁷ or determined popular religious literature, which acted as a bridge, assisting the transition between two seemingly distant realities. The work of the Ourense blind journalist and writer, Valentín Lamas Carvajal (1849-1906), constituted a fundamental precedence in this aspect, opening doors to the written culture and arousing interest amongst the rural population. Lamas created two singular initiatives: the fortnightly '*O Tío Marcos da Portela*' (Ourense, 1876-1889) and the '*Catecismo do Labrego*' (1888). He brought forward criticisms of the Restoration system characteristic of agrarianism, speaking out against widely felt injustices referring to military service, taxes or *caciquismo*. In particular, he demonstrated how it was possible to connect with the rural population ('*O Tío Marcos*' produced some 4.000 copies and '*El Catecismo*', more than twenty editions) through adopting the widely spoken Galician language, unorthodox channels of distribution including fairs and markets, and employing stylistic resources that went back to popular forms of expression and assisted collective reading. This practice has been perfectly documented, both orally as well as in the internal regulations

16 "Breviario de la aldea", *Galicia* (11-V-1924).

17 Also very popular in Austria, E. Bruckmüller, *Landwirtschaftliche Organisationen und gesellschaftliche Modernisierung. Vereine, Genossenschaften und politische Mobilisierung der Landwirtschaft Österreichs vom Vormärz bis 1914* (Salzburg, Verlag Wolfgang Neugebauer 1977), *Ibid.*, 206 or The Netherlands J.C.Dekker, *Zuivelcoöperaties op de zandgronden in Noord-Brabant in Limburg, 1892-1950. Overleven door samenwerking en modernisering. Een mentaliteitsstudie*, (Middelburg 1996) 508.

of numerous societies: a member of the agrarian union familiar with books and newspapers would read the journal aloud, so that even illiterate or hardly literate members could have access to the news and take part in the ensuing debate.¹⁸

During the first third of the XXth Century, agrarian press employed a broad range of resources in order to reach an audience still widely unfamiliar with reading:¹⁹

- The ample use of cartoons, images, and photographs (the latter being used when economically viable).
- The employment of rhetorical, often verging on personal writing. It was extremely akin to the spoken language and was achieved through literal reproductions of discourse, the use of exclamations and capital letters, direct interpellations to the reader...
- Galician songs and poetry about current affairs.
- Fictional “dialogues”, that is to say, conversations between two supposed characters of opposed characteristics: an elderly man and a young man, an innovative farmer and a farmer reluctant to new techniques, a villager tempted by left wing ideas and another more conservative individual, etc. According to the tendency of the publication, the desired posture was always created through confrontation. This formula could be used to dissipate widespread reluctance towards the use of chemical fertilizers, sustain a political party, criticise the behaviour of local authorities, warn against protestant preachers, etc. More significantly, the Galician language was always employed in these dialogues in order to increase their credibility (it

¹⁸ Collective reading is a well-known practice dating back to Ancient Roman times and enjoying a long tradition in many historical contexts, as analysed by A. Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London, Harper Collins 1996) 248.

¹⁹ These stylistic resources coincided with those employed by radical British press in the first half of the XIXth century, such as the chartist Northern Star of O'Connor, D. Vincent, *Literacy and popular culture. England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, Univ.Press 1993). Dekker, *Zuivelcoöperaties op de zandgronden*, 508, mentions similar resources for the agrarian press to better reach its audience in two Southern provinces of The Netherlands, in spite of their having much better literacy standards than Galicia.

would be hard to imagine two peasants speaking Spanish with each other).

This kind of fake dialogues were also common in other contexts, such as Austria.²⁰

- Other mechanisms included '*sueltos*' (snippets), mottos or slogans, inserted over various pages with the aim of repeatedly bombarding readers with a simplified idea. An example of this technique was the slogan "Farmers can't be socialists", appearing frequently in catholic-agrarian press.
- The use of religious images and similes, such as those employed in the previously mentioned '*Catecismo do labrego*' by Lamas Carvajal (later imitated with various objectives). This phenomenon was not exclusive to the catholic press. Agrarian discourse was saturated with religious language that fitted perfectly with their moralistic and political ideas. Hence, discourses during meetings became "prayers", campaigns were "crusades", party splits and betrayals were compared to "Judas", and agrarian leaders were considered as "apostles" or "martyrs".²¹ The advantages of this method meant that even the illiterate were familiar with this language, having heard it many a time in local sermons on Sundays.
- Finally, agrarian press (as well as speakers in meetings) sought to connect with the daily experiences of the rural population through the use of metaphors reflecting farming work. Therefore, hostile local politicians were regarded on the same level as boars, foxes and other rural pests/threats (directly urging to hunting them away), rural unions were compared to a flock of birds grouping together to protect themselves from predators,

²⁰ Langthaler, "Massenmedien in der ländlichen", 62.

²¹ Along these lines, Italian socialist propaganda reused Christian language and symbolism in their proselytism activity between the peasantry in Central and Northern Italy. R. Zangheri, "Contadini e politica nell'800. La storiografia italiana", in: *La politisation des campagnes au XIX siècle, France, Italie, Espagne et Portugal* (Roma, École française de Rome 2000) 13-27.

negative habits in associations such as selfishness or quarrels were compared to the weeds that wreck harvests, etc.

The economic obstacle that buying these newspapers constituted for the humble budget of a farmer was eased through the application of price reductions for members of the agrarian society supporting the publication in question, the mentioned practice of collective reading or collective subscriptions on behalf of agrarian organizations. Many of these agrarian unions subscribed to several newspapers and journals, which were then made available to associates within the societies' premises. It was usual for provincial federations to force federated societies to purchase a determined number of copies, according to their membership, as was the case of the catholic societies or the '*Confederación Regional de Agricultores Gallegos*' (Regional Confederation of Galician Farmers), which in 1922 sent copies to 122 societies.

3- AGRARIAN PRESS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO TECHNICAL CHANGE UP TO 1936.

Agrarian unions provided a common ground for technicians and farmers and stockbreeders so they could better understand each other and overcome mutual mistrust.²² The former saw agricultural engineers as lofty and too theoretical in their approaches. Two other traits contributed to their lack of confidence: firstly, they were after all civil servants, and thus representatives of a State that for villagers meant mostly taxes and military duties without much of a compensation,²³ and secondly, only a minority of those working in Galicia were born in Galicia and were familiar with the

²² Fernández Prieto, *Labregos con ciencia*

²³ Furthermore, the local power networks of both monarchist parties (liberal and conservative) not seldom integrated technical infrastructures in their practices of favours and clientelism.

peculiarities of the region and its agriculture. There was only a Central Agrarian Engineering College in Madrid²⁴ and Galician farmers complained that engineers did not understand their language, did not know the local names of plants or plagues and had learnt theories thought for the drier regions of Spain. These prejudices applied in a lesser measure to veterinarians, who were usually from a local (in fact a Veterinary School existed in Santiago between 1892 and 1924) and socially more modest origins than agricultural (and forestry) engineers.

On their side, technicians only gradually came to understand that no other group existed in rural Galicia that could play the leading role in the improvement of the methods of cultivation and cattle-breeding. The later XIXth century had assisted to the fruitless search for intermediaries such as the parochial clergy or the gentry (following the model of the English Agrarian Revolution as thought of in that age). Only in the first decade of the XXth century did technicians begin to assume that only farmers themselves could be the main actors in the process. However, in order to be up to the task, they had to bring together certain characteristics, and the main one was to organize themselves collectively. Agrarian unions therefore were saluted as the pre-requisite to a better understanding between *enlightened* and ~~dirty~~ practical farming, although technicians never concealed that they would have preferred unions to concentrate on cooperativism and technical change and not on political and land-property issues.

How did this mutually beneficial collaboration take place? Unions could send a sample of fertilizer to an official laboratory to avoid frauds in their composition. They could ask technicians to give their members a lecture on exactly the issues they were most worried about. Samples of insects or rotted plants could be sent to the Plant Disease Station (created in A Coruña in 1926) to be identified and receive advice (at the

²⁴ J. Pan-Montojo, *Apostolado, profesión y tecnología: una historia de los ingenieros agrónomos en España* (Torredolones, Blake & Helsey 2005)

same time helping the Station to monitor the region with hundreds of samples every year). Livestock shows became a much more useful event than in the prior century, because emphasis was put now on the breeds really necessary for the villagers and the exhibition was taken advantage of to explain the advantages and disadvantages of every race and to select the studs which would be kept by agrarian unions in order to improve their members' cattle; cattle vaccinations could be organized by the insurance sections of the agrarian unions in order to avoid fears of illness an abortion which often hampered the campaigns launched by the Administration and so the examples could fill several pages.

The agrarian press, as part of the agrarian movement, collaborated in this effort of mutual understanding between technicians and farmers. Articles explaining experiments and novelties tested in the agronomic centers published originally in their bulletins or in journals outside Galicia were later republished in the more modest pages of the agrarian press, in which it was also quite usual to include the index of each number of the technical journals. Furthermore, they were often accompanied by additional explanations in an easier style and sometimes even translated totally or partially into Galician. A remarkable example was the translation into Galician and integral publication in 1913 in the abovementioned 'O Tío Pepe' of a leaflet on meadows by the chief-engineer of the provincial agricultural section.²⁵

On reading dozens of agrarian journals published during the first third of the past century, it is easy to spot a clear trend, although hard to quantify, towards an increasing weight of articles concerning technical matters and improvements. The charismatic priest Basilio Álvarez personified in the 1910s the suspicions against technicians and productive improvements because they could divert energies away from the priority of

²⁵ 'O Tío Pepe' n.14, 20-August-1913, Juan de Eguileor: "Los prados y el ganado".

conquering land ownership and full citizenship for the farmers. It was an understandable fear, not dissimilar from those of the rural activists in Ireland against cooperatives, who saw them as a stratagem within the “constructive Unionism” approach to tame Irish nationalism and rural unrest.²⁶ The “apolitical” and professional approach of the Catholic organizations reinforced this prejudice. The press linked to *Acción Gallega*, the agrarian federation he led between 1913 and 1916, published few technical articles. On the contrary, just a few years later, as leader of the *Confederación Regional de Agricultores Gallegos* and founder of its organ ‘La Zarpa’ (Ourense, 1921-1936), his newspaper paid assiduous attention to technical news and among its regular contributors one could find the staff of the provincial agricultural services. During the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) this trend intensified because under those conditions political and electoral activities were difficult to develop and the agrarian unions took advantage of the favorable economic context to strengthen their cooperative and technical activities.

Some technicians understood the advantages of the press in general but particularly that linked to the agrarian movement and developed a decades-long activity as specialized journalists. Juan Rof Codina (1874-1967), a catalan veterinarian who developed his career in Galicia, published more than 3000 press articles,²⁷ and the staff of the Plant Disease Station of A Coruña published around eight articles every year, while its director Pedro Urquijo (1901-1992) became a remarkable photographer to enrich his science-popularizing activities.²⁸ Javier Prado (1874-1942), the chief of the veterinarian services in the province of Ourense, doubled as a contributor on rural issues

²⁶ Frederick H.A Aalen, “Constructive Unionism and the Shaping of Rural Ireland, c.1880-1921”, *Rural History*, 14:2 (1993) 137-164

²⁷ Lourenzo Fernández Prieto, “Estudio preliminar”, in J. Rof Codina, *Reformas que se pueden implantar en Galicia para el progreso de la agricultura* (Sada, Edición do Castro 1985) (first published in 1913)

²⁸ Miguel Cabo Villaverde, *A Estación de Fitopatoloxía Agrícola da Coruña (1926-1951)*, (Santiago de Compostela, Xunta de Galicia 1999) 172

and a writer.²⁹ He took advantage of his literary skills to deal with professional issues reaching a wider audience, for example explaining in a poem in Galician how to organize a cattle insurance society, using the dialogue formula to explain proper care of animals (the characters could be a well-fed cow and a neglected one or two hens, one raised outdoors and the other one in a poultry factory)

4. AGRARIAN PRESS AFTER 1936.

The military coup of July 18th 1936 and the subsequent repression implied the dismantlement of the agrarian movement. Not only the most obviously ideologized unions were forbidden and their leaders fined, jailed or killed, but also plenty of local organizations which had kept a low profile from a political point of view. Only the Catholic unions, most of the cattle-insurance associations, a few organizations directly promoted by right-wing local politicians -and a handful of apolitical unions survived the repressive wave. Rural Galicia became a desert from the point of view of voluntary associations and the experiences, know how, material and cultural capital of four decades vanished in the air in just a few fateful weeks in that Summer of 1936. The new authorities hurried to destroy the association network patiently built since the end of the XIXth century but it took them almost a decade to implement their own alternative, the so-called *Hermandades Sindicales de Labradores y Ganaderos* (*Brotherhoods of Farmers and Livestock Producers*). In between, there was a void only partially filled by the catholic unions, which expanded during the Civil War and tried to monopolize the business of supplying meat to the National Army.

Most of the agrarian journals were directly published by agrarian unions and federations and were so to say “collateral damage” of the repression of those

²⁹ M. Valcárcel, (ed.), *Javier Prado “Lameiro”. Obras completas*, (Ourense, Concello de Ourense 1995)

organizations. Those which had their own printing houses saw them confiscated and used to the benefit of the falangist party, which had to compensate for a weak presence in Galicia prior to the war. This was part of the broader picture of the patrimony of the agrarian unions being assaulted (buildings, machinery, saving accounts...) by the military and their civil supporters. Other press organs succumbed to the harsh conditions of the civil war years (journalists drafted, paper shortage, a climate of suspicion and accusations). In fact, *Galicia Social Agraria*, monthly edited in Mondoñedo (Lugo) and the main voice of the Catholic agrarian unions in the region, published its last number in September 1936 after having enthusiastically saluted the military coup and claiming part of the merit for Galicia remaining in the hands of the rebels. The reason was simply that paper was in short supply and the new authorities thought other press to have highest priority. Some of the journals survived but had to reinvent themselves as simply local press with general contents just like any other.³⁰

During the three years of the war no other publications centered in the agrarian world appeared. The only exception was the *Boletín de la Federación Católico-agraria de La Coruña*, a catholic publication which edited just one number in 1938 claiming for a stronger role in supplying the Army and denouncing the commercial rivals of the Catholic unions as leftists and profiteers.

Having won the war in 1939, the Francoist dictatorship did not hurry to implement its own alternative to the rural associations of all sorts which had been dismantled. The first years of the regime are a very interesting period from that point of view, because catholics and fascists (as well as other minor components of the coalition sustaining the regime) collided over the kind of associations which should be allowed to exist and, ultimately, over the nature of the regime itself. Catholics agreed with the

³⁰ That is how, for example, *La Voz de Ortigueira*, edited weekly by a powerful agrarian federation in Northern Coruña since 1916 managed to not discontinue its publication, and in fact still exists nowadays.

repression of the leftist and what they called pejoratively *neutral* organizations, but they thought that they were entitled to retain their autonomy of action due to their counterrevolutionary credentials and the complicity of the Catholic Church with the assault against the Second Republic. On the contrary, the hard-core falangistas aimed at building a fascist state following the models of Germany and Italy (Franco's allies during the Civil War), in which each and every single organization had to be controlled and put at the service of the State. Finally, the Catholic unions were tolerated under the form of cooperatives by a new law in 1942 which formally subordinated them to the theoretically only kind of agrarian organization representing every single farmer: the *Hermandades Sindicales de Labradores y Campesinos*.

In Galicia under Franco the trend was towards merging what we have previously called *agricultural* (or technical) and *agrarian* publications, now the voice of the Hermandades (Brotherhoods). In 1945 the first press of the Hermandades in Galicia appears: *Agro* (for the province of Pontevedra) and *Campaña* (A Coruña), and later *Surco* (Ourense). Their characteristics differed clearly from those of pre-war agrarian publications. To begin with, they were now official publications, and besides subject to an authoritarian regime, so that they lacked the spontaneity and vitality of their pre-1936 ancestors. Their sphere of influence was a whole province, while before the Civil War most agrarian journals were local. They printed thousands of copies (7000 *Agro* in 1945, 34000 *Campaña* in 1948), being supported financially by the State and delivered free to the network of state-led trade unions. In accordance with the discrimination of languages other than Spanish (identified with lack of patriotism) under Franco, Galician was absent in the *Hermandades* press or at best confined to folk and humor tales and poetry, all of which underscored the prejudices against it as a language unfit for scientific and modern topics.

Apparently, this press published in the 1940s and 1950s by the Francoist agrarian apparatus showed [content-wise](#) significant similarities with that of the prewar period, mixing technical articles with information regarding the activities of the Hermandades and explaining the Government policies regarding rationing, forestry, agriculture and the like. However, on second thoughts the reality was quite different. The voice of real farmers and local activists was missing, and the burden of the contents was produced by bureaucrats linked to the dictatorship. Although one could find partial critiques to specific policies and signs of the quarrels between different sectors of the heterogeneous alliance behind Francoism, the final sense and objective of the pages of this press was to guarantee the passive support of the rural population towards a regime whose position was quite precarious and isolated in the international context until the pact with the U.S. at the beginning of the fifties. Finally, the Hermandades did not play at all the same role as the prewar agrarian unions. Recent studies show that they did not manage to earn the trust and sincere collaboration of the rural population and were seen as corrupt bodies imposed on farmers from above and accomplices of the forced levies of grain and livestock.³¹ As a result, its press did not provide a meeting-point between the needs of real farmers and the knowledge of agronomists and veterinarians as happened before the war. The chain had been broken because brotherhoods did not display the same level of cooperativism and technical improvement and farmers did not regard them as their tools but an instrument of a State which was more alien and ruthless than any of its predecessors. The only available associations to farmers in post-war Spain were the Hermandades (with the relative exception of the cooperatives with social-catholic roots which were formally subordinated to them) —and they were

31 An updated overview on the subject in Ana Cabana and Alba Díaz-Geada, “Exploring Modernization: Agrarian Fascism in Rural Spain, 1936-1951”, in Lourenzo Fernández Prieto et al (eds.), *Agriculture in the Age of Fascism Authoritarian Technocracy and rural modernization, 1922-1945*, (Turnhout, Brepols 2014) 189-218

correctly perceived as part of the State administration. Under these conditions it was unavoidable to make all the mistakes implied in the from-above scheme to agrarian policies that Scott summarized under the formula *high modernism*,³² because there was no way that the real farmers could make their voice heard and explain their needs, complaints and priorities, so that local conditions and knowledge could be taken into account and policies adapted to them.

Once the autarchic policies modeled on those of the Axis powers left room to a process of relative liberalization along the lines of the U.S. (and its Agricultural Extension Service as a model for popularizing new techniques) in the second half of the fifties, two agrarian publications showed that something was changing in Galicia. *Galicia Avícola y Ganadera* (1954) and *Cooperativismo* (1966) were much less rhetorical and ruralist than the above mentioned Hermandades press, had a business-like profit-maximizing mentality and were supported by the more or less autonomous cooperatives (with Catholic roots) announcing a world where farmers and livestock producers were a profession just like any other and not a way of life or the purest expression of national virtues as in the post-war discourse.

CONCLUSIONS

During the first third of the XXth Century, agrarian press made important contributions to the sociopolitical transformations in Galicia, which may be summarized in the following points:

Comentado [NN1]: the conclusion does not cover the whole article (including the 1936-1975 period)

³² J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven, Yale UP 1998)

1. Redefinition of the social function of [agrarian](#) journalists, no longer perceived as impartial commentators of reality, but as [whistleblowers](#) of the lacks and injustices of this very reality, openly taking sides for a cause, participating in meetings and campaigns, etc. Hence, an alternative access route into a political career was created for young people from the middle classes, or even from the rural peasantry.
2. Contribution to a new political culture, even in the rural context, characterized by a greater mobilization of voters, the importance of the right to vote and the transparency of political authorities' activities (accountability). As also pointed out for Belgium, there is a coincidence between the boom of the agrarian press and universal suffrage.³³ Agrarian press summarized council meetings, analyzed budgets and the distribution of local taxes, debated public works, etc. In short, it stole politics from the hands of an elite few and launched it into the public eye.
3. All social movements require the construction of an identity and complex solidarities. Along these lines, the agrarian movement required a social reevaluation from the rural population, which having been undervalued and relegated in the past, had to become an active member of the society through the use of cooperatives and associations. [The agrarian press was crucial for creating that new image.](#) Another question of course, was the ideological orientation of each specific organization according to their political appointment: the Catholics would insist on their role as an element of social stability and custodians of traditions, the socialists on their shared interests

33 L. Van Molle, "A State for the Peasants or the Peasants for the State? The Two Faces of Belgian Agricultural Policy, 1830-1914", in: N. VIVIER (ed.), *The State and Rural Societies. Policy and Education in Europe 1750-2000* (Turnhout, Brepols 2007) 159-176. In Spain universal (male) suffrage was granted in 1890.

with the industrial proletariat, the nationalists on being the purest expression of the peculiarities of Galician culture, etc. etc.

4. Unlike the French case, local press (and agrarian press in particular) did not play a univocal role as a vehicle for integration into the “national community” (in this case, Spain) on behalf of the rural population. In France, as Eugen Weber explained in his day,³⁴ the press which circulated by provinces, whether edited or not in Paris, relegated local matters to a second plan, focusing on the Parisian vision of high politics and high society.³⁵ Hence, it became a fundamental pillar in the process that Weber synthesized in the title of his famous work *Peasants into Frenchmen*.³⁶ It aimed to create this “imagined community” which forms the base of nationalisms,³⁷ and in whose conformation, the written language plays a fundamental role. On the contrary, in Galicia the Madrid press seldom reached outside of the cities, and if local and agrarian press ever did make an effort to integrate their readers into broader realities (reproducing articles from Spanish and foreign publications, the prices of international markets, parliament acts...) they did so from a point of view which related the matter to local problems. Moreover, the extra-local dimension in Galician agrarian press did not come solely from the Madrid perspective, but also from America. A large part of collaborations, financing, subscriptions and news arrived from Hispano-

³⁴ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford, Stanford Univ. Press 1992)

³⁵ N. Fitch, “Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Antisemitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France”, *The American Historical Review*, 6 (1992) 55-95. M. Lyons, “What did the Peasants Read? Written and Printed Culture in Rural France, 1815-1914”, *European History Quarterly*, 2 (1997) 165-197.

³⁶ A reflection on the application of this debate to the Galician case, in – Miguel Cabo Villaverde, “Quelle nation dans les campagnes? État et nation-building en Espagne, un débat ouvert”, in: Jean-Luc Mayaud and Raphael Lutz (dirs.), *Histoire de l'Europe rurale contemporaine. Du village à l'État* (Paris, Armand Colin 2006) 222-248

³⁷ B. Anderson, *Comunidades imaginadas. Reflexiones sobre el origen y la difusión del nacionalismo* (México D.F, Fondo de Cultura Económica 1993)

American countries thanks to the links established through emigrant associations. For example, during the dictatorship of Primo, articles could be found which unfavorably compared the political situation of Spain with that of Uruguay or Argentina, where thousands of Galicians had experienced firsthand the reality of free elections, recognition of the right to strike, social rights, etc. In summary, in Galicia local and agrarian press was more an expression of diversity than of homogenization.

5. Agricultural (or technical, specialized) press and what we term agrarian press were not separate spheres. The former selected articles thought useful for their readers (primarily members of the agrarian unions) and reprinted them, often complemented by explanations in simpler terms or suggested applications to the conditions in a particular area. The initial mistrust between technicians and agrarian unions decreased as years went by and collaboration proved rewarding for both sides. 1936 put a drastic end to this process, and under the dictatorship of Franco censorship and the ban of any spontaneous form of association made impossible resuming the fruitful avenues of the prewar decades.

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[Both graphs should be explained further to make them understandable for the reader and referred to in the paper](#)

