

**A heart in its breast?
Issues of class analysis in informal economy and Europe's 'regional economies'**

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Please note, this is a first draft; it has not been proof-read and lacks a bibliography.

Not for quotation or published comment.

Introduction

At one point in his critique of political economy, Marx summarized a workers' strike manifesto, to give voice to the plea of the worker addressing his employer.

Suddenly there rises the voice of the worker, which had previously been stifled in the sound and fury of the production process:

"...you and I know on the market only one law. That of the exchange of commodities. And the consumption of the commodity belongs not to the seller who parts with it, but to the buyer who acquires it. The use of my daily labour power therefore belongs to you. But by means of the price you pay for it every day, I must be able to reproduce it every day, thus allowing me to sell it again... You are constantly preaching to me the gospel of 'saving' and 'abstinence'. Very well! Like a sensible, thrifty owner of property I will husband my sole wealth, my labour-power, and abstain from wasting it foolishly... You may be a model citizen, perhaps a member of the RSPCA, and you may be in the odour of sanctity as well; but the thing you represent when you come face to face with me has no heart in its breast. What seems to throb there is my own heartbeat. I demand a normal working day because, like every other seller, I demand the value of my commodity."

The plea seems to contain simultaneously a savvy understanding of the labour contract and an emotional expression of its Faustian agreement. Marx then goes on to emphasise what in essence is the bottom-line reason for an engagement with the politics of class forces.

There is here... an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm...presents itself as... a struggle between collective capital, ie. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, ie. the working class. (Marx, [1867] 1976: 342-4)

Minimally we can take away from this, first that the confrontation between classes begins on ground where no *a priori* ethical code can decide the balance of good on either side: both claims are right. Yet the outcome of the confrontation is ‘the establishment of a norm’. Second, we might note that a distinctive feature of a class relationship is that it is simultaneously one of interdependence and conflict. The parties involved are as bound together as two warring Siamese twins. For political purposes they frequently assert their autonomy and distinction while the grinding dictates of production and reproduction belie their every assertion.

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If current social theory and popular discourse are anything to go by, today there is virtually no realm of the social world where class is pertinent. That’s not to say that class analysis ever had an easy time of it when it came to informal economy. Even when social enquiry was much more sympathetic to the notion, the informal economy provided a challenge; everything seemed just too messy, too impermanent, too volatile. Castells and Portes argued, back in 1989, that what we were seeing in the West was a general, if uneven, *process* of informalization. Rather than dividing society up into its formal and informal components, they suggested, it might be more useful to study this process of informalization. Perhaps they were right, and the challenges to class analysis once thrown up by informal economies, are now pervasive precisely because the messiness, impermanence and volatility then confined to informal economy are now spread throughout the economy.

Perhaps too there is a more pragmatic, more political, issue here. Surely interest at least in the working class was a lot to do with what class solidarity might secure for ordinary people in the conflictual world of mass-production capitalism. Hobsbawm,

for example, has argued that consciousness of class was not the same for the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, because the source of their agency was different. For the proletariat collectivity is a pre-condition for social and political leverage. The bourgeois, he argued however, has leverage by acting alone; class membership is not a precondition of his effect on the present: his agency. In this sense, Hobsbawm essentially argued that the instrumental pay-off for class formation was much higher for the proletariat than for the bourgeois. Of course many of the features that Hobsbawm notes as working against bourgeois celebrations of class belonging are also present in the informalized economies of current neo-liberalism. I think though that to dispense with the underlying principles that drove the original interest in class as the economy becomes ever more informalized may be to take the sting out of social analysis in a way that is far too convenient to well-oiled academics and third way policy makers alike.

Yet what would it mean to try to bring back those principles and apply them to informal economy or a regional economy? Of course I don't have a comprehensive answer to this question. This is a much more tentative, hesitant and incomplete exercise, at best providing hints of where best to look in the haystack. To begin with, if I talk of "those principles" I need to be clear about what those principles are for me. So I start by saying something about class analysis and political economy. I then offer three cases from my ethnography and follow each one with some comments.

Class analysis and Political Economy.

For me there are really three distinctive features of class analysis.

- First it deals with the historical reproduction of social relations within a social formation.

Current social relations can only be understood in historical terms; the present, in other words, is simply a moment of history.

- Next social reproduction generates structural tensions which are experienced by social agents as conflicts.

What gives a special 'class-like' character to these is that they are always *simultaneously* relations of both mutual dependence and conflict.

- Third, as these tensions and conflicts become patterns they produce 'naturalized' differentiations in the social fabric – "the establishment of a norm presents itself as a struggle."¹

My view is that when the social analyst gazes across the reality of informal economy what emerges to view would be filtered through this kind of lens.

Political economy focuses on these processes for a particular kind of social formation, one in which "[T]he reproduction of daily life depends upon the production of commodities produced through a system of circulation of capital that has profit-seeking as its direct and socially accepted goal" (Harvey, 2001: 312) From its inception political economy has been concerned with the issue of *productivity*. It's perhaps a little fanciful to say this, but the term might be seen to refer to the two essential elements of productivity, 'political' referring to regulation and 'economy' referring to creative energy. Informal economy from a conceptual point of view is

¹ In a longer paper I elaborate on each of these points.

confusing and messy, but the applications of these principles of political economy does help bring certain features into sharper focus. Productivity, we might propose, is achieved through the perpetual working out and reformatting of regulation and discipline on the one hand, and freedom and creative energy on the other. This latter is condensed in the term 'labour'. On the energy side, tools can be added to this labour to make it produce more energy. On the regulation side productive activity can be reigned in for the purposes of profit. Tools however have a cost and excessive regulation restricts the flow of creative energy. The dialectic lies in the fact that the value of the one is a product of the other.

Castells and Portes define informal economy as a kind of economy that is "unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities are regulated." But the above frame would suggest that all economic practices are regulated in some way. The question for political economy is: at what sites and in what forms can we find the dialectic regulation/freedom in informalized economies? The question for class analysis is what are the tensions of reproduction both within these sites and between them that produce a class-like character in social relations?

Being a residual category, the term 'informal economy' is sufficiently broad that there is no *a priori* way in which we might surmise about this. When informalized economies begin to become the targets of programmes for the development of a *regional economy* however, certain distinctive features do become pertinent. For example, when Marshall first used the term 'industrial district' he referred to the way in which what he called local 'atmosphere' played a crucial role in both the creativity of the local labour force and specific features that work as forms of

regulation. More recently Charles Sabel has noted that as these kinds of phenomena become more regionally coherent productive economies the entire regional social space begins to look more and more like a factory-without-walls. He emphasises especially the way in which institutions – from markets to hospitals – are no longer restricted in function but morph into hybrid forms in response to local requirements. Regional membership and regional mores become factors in the achievement of greater productivity by playing upon the crucial lever between freedom/creativity and regulation/discipline to achieve productivity goals.

What Sabel and all advocates of the new regional economies spend less time discussing is that, if indeed there is something to be learned from the analogy to a factory of firm, then we would expect class-like tensions and interdependencies. In the ensuing ‘conversations’ emergent norms arise – of what the responsibilities of certain parties are and how these mediate their access to membership in the various collective bodies that make up this super-modernist regional society.

As I have said the underlying assumption of class analysis is that reproduction based on the elementary principles of capitalism can only work through on-going processes of differentiation. Conventional political economy focused on socio-economic differentiation, specifically between those who control the means of production and those who need those means to give their labour value. But Sabel and a whole variety of people writing on regional economies note that they work precisely through the rendering fuzzy of such categories. So it is no longer only ‘economy’ narrowly defined that is the only source of differentiations. We therefore need to use *the underlying principles* of class analysis to explore how a whole variety of

differentiations are given salience or are eroded in historically specific instances of regional capitalisms.

This then is the framework through which I approach the bits of the overall cake I have taken here from the book by Susana Narotzky and me that has just come out, *Immediate Struggles: People, Power and Place in Rural Spain*. In what follows I will present a small vignette and then I will elaborate on it – placing it in its setting and comment on it.

Case 1.

Pablo, a man of perhaps 35 or 40, is the socialist Vice-Mayor of Catral a town of mixed agriculture and manufacturing, on the littoral south of Alicante. A teacher in a nearby college of art and design, he has become deeply interested in cultural projects for the region. These have included a theatre school for teenagers, the construction of a sports arena, and the institution of open air screenings of Bunuel and Antonioni films in the town's plaza – all activities endorsed by the national PSOE and the European Union cultural programme – all in fact 'cultural' activities not approved off by the conservative opposition, the Opus Dei priest, the remains of the agricultural elite or the nouveaux businessmen.

Yet, as we talk one day over a beer, Pablo laughs at my typically English interest in the Spanish Civil war, contrasting it with local sentiments. As an energetic social democrat with modernist proclivities, he says with a certain ambivalence, unsure whether it is a good thing or bad: "People are not political here. There has never been much politics in this area."²

Immediately after the civil war, Pablo's father – Pepe – took advantage of the stores of hemp kept in the church by the Republicans, to make a quick fortune rather than handing it over to the rationing authorities. He used the capital to establish a powerful position within the regional *estraperlo* – the informal economy that flourished during the period of Franco's *autarquía* policy. He soon became one of the 'big' "corredores" involved in industrial hemp black market operations. At the height of his operations he was employing some 20 families headed by men with special skills in processing hemp fibre. Such people were in heavy demand, but Pablo's father was able to retain their loyalty because, he says, working for him

² During the Civil War the town in which we were talking had been divided between Anarchists and Socialists. Large farms had been expropriated. Those run by the Anarchists were collectivized. Local currency was issued and used as a means for assigning responsibilities and rewards among members. A generous reading of Pablo's comment then, would be that he was referring to anarchist rejection of "politics". My subsequent friendship with him however made clear that he was simply practising amnesia, possibly enhanced by the awkwardness he felt at being his father's son.

they got 'a special advantage'. Through his political connections he ensured that they had ration cards for their food and 'government supplies' of tobacco. It was through strategic use of cash that he made contacts in the *Movimiento* in Madrid as well and they in turn would let Pepe know where pockets of demand for cáñamo sprang up so that he could fill them. Eventually a radical shift in economic opportunity resulting from changes in Franco's policies bankrupted Pepe, though his political connections managed to get him the job of running the local post-office which is what he was doing as I spoke to his son Pablo in the 1980s. In those days Pepe was an almost universally hated figure – even by the well-off agriculturalists, one of whose daughters Pablo had married. Generally the confinement of their connections to old local networks made them poorly adaptable to the sharp practices of the new politics of Spain in the 40s and 50s and, though they quickly learned to live with the new breed and use them to their advantage, these *arrivistes* who blended personal political authority with economic advantage, were openly disdainful of public respectability. At one point one of Franco's generals expressed distress at their pervasive practices, to which the *Caudillo* responded,

“Look Dionisio, in the middle ages and also later, there was a custom of sharing out titles, lands, goods, and even the hand of some maiden among the combatants who had excelled in battle...However in our days there is no way of properly rewarding those who we think have efficiently contributed to the triumph of the *Movimiento*. Some are resigned to accepting this fact: but others listen to people who suggest earning some easy money through some commercial operation and fall into temptation.” (Richards, 1998: 134)

Comment

The Bajo Segura is an area where people have long mixed irrigated agriculture with a variety of manufacturing activities. From the time when I was talking to Pablo to now this meant horticulture and carpets, toys, doll's clothing and shoe production organized through a putting out system involving semi-legal workshops and a great deal of women's homework. While up to the 90s these kinds of activities were described as “informal economy”, in the past 15 years they have been referred to as a “regional economy” – that is economic activities that are in some way peculiar to the character of this region.

At least for the last eighty years an apparently quite stable and ‘traditional’ kind of *cacique*-dominated agriculture overlay a multitude of unstable and volatile occupations in small manufacturing and services as well as agriculture. To a certain extent, though agriculture is no longer the basis for formal careers the number of apparently middle class people with formal jobs like Pablo’s perhaps matches the older formal agricultural economy and this appearance likewise overlays a vast arena of volatile informal activities. Nonetheless appearances during both eras would be misleading. On both occasions the apparently more stable and overt formal economic practices were not just built upon the cognate informal ones, they were themselves thoroughly infused with what we might call loosely ‘the culture of informality’. And anyway, the apparent stability either of the older agricultural careers or of the current more professional careers was and is entirely illusory. As this sparsely-watered, and poorly irrigated area has suffered the hazards of climate so too it has shifted from silk, to vines, from vines to cotton, from cotton to hemp, from hemp to horticulture and so on, not to mention the manufacturing sector.³ Moreover, lacking the kind of regional power bloc found in Catalunya, there has been little history of local protection, leaving the economy open to the vagueries of international and national swings in demand.

To begin with we need to note that Pablo’s case serves to emphasise the profound misunderstandings we will have of present-day informal economy or regional economies if we limit ourselves to their immediate current manifestations. This tendency – almost ubiquitous in the policy literature, both on informal economy and on regional economies, is to some extent provoked by the phenomena themselves.

³ And it is worth noting that each of the agricultural crops themselves require processing prior to sale thus threading manufacturing through agriculture.

The volatility and short-term, often individualized or familized, opportunities seem to render the past irrelevant and confine accounts of it to fragmented, personal experiences. Yet Edward Thompson (1978) long ago reminded us that it is impossible to address the issue of class in any other way than historically; popping categories of people into little class boxes later to be laid out in little piles on the table prior to completing the jigaw puzzle of the present is a futile operation having nothing to do with the principles of class analysis.

Pablo, a college-level teacher and holder of a major local political position emerges from a past in which his father was a major figure in the earlier informal economy. Moreover, his father Pepe's economic activities – entirely based on the semi-legal transactions of the *estraperlo* – far from being distinct from formal politics, were entirely dependent on them. Put more specifically, the *estraperlo* was not an outgrowth of institutional regulation *in the sense that it lay beyond that regulation*; it is impossible to conceive of francoist governance without including within it this kind of economic practice. The necessities dictated by the draconian conditions of the post-war economy – wheat production did not reach did not reach Republic levels again until the end of the fifties – of course led to rationing and so on which in turn produced a black economy. But the more important point is that social regulation until well into the sixties took the form of the personalistic *cacique* targeting of individuals and families on an almost random basis. Pepe's skilled hemp workers had been notorious political radicals; it was only through his patronage that they would have acquired ration cards at all. Pepe of course was the kind of person for whom the *estraperlo* was a splendid opportunity but for most people it was simply the only way to get by. For such people all transactions take place in the knowledge of being suddenly exposed – indirectly through a neighbour or directly to a figure of

authority. Yet the informal economy was almost entirely public. So 'exposure' needs to be understood entirely in terms of personalistic repression. When and who might be targeted for exposure was unevenly distributed both in space and time. I will return later to the way in which very different kinds of social institutions arose out of these practices, thereby embedding people socially in quite distinct ways, producing salient classifications of kinds of people and different structures of feeling about collective membership and personal responsibility.

Today, as the special cultural values of the people from this region are literally marketed as a means for promoting the area as a potentially dynamic 'regional economy' endowed with flexible, creative and industrious workers, it would seem surprising if this very particular historical experience was of no relevance whatsoever to current reality.

Usually, when anthropologists go there – to history that is – it is to recover to trophies for cultural memory, but I want to focus on a much more material feature of history. Earlier I noted that a characteristic of informal economy is often the low organic composition of capital – the low productivity of labour resulting from poor tools and skills. I referred to this as the *energy* side of the equation, of which *regulation*, for example of the labour process, was the other element. But evidence from the history of informal economy in this area suggests that political repression – regulation – and the free flow of economic practices were intimately tied together. State endorsement of selective repression by *caciques* allowed local elites to respond to the opportunities and competition of national and international markets through ever more arbitrary means for controlling labour. The local power imbalance meant that, randomly targeted and fragmented along household or individual lines, labour

was unable to drive up labour costs to the point where regional elites might seek a resolution through investment in the means of production. I am not suggesting that this is a universal explanation for the low productivity of informal economies, simply that it is an important factor in understanding the *particular features* of certain kinds of fixed capital and labour in *this* informal economy.

It also helps us to understand how this informal economy transmutes into a regional economy. Henri Lefebvre (1991: 389) noted the mutual constitution under capitalism of what is *transient* and what is *durable*. The terms fixed and variable capital alert us to the inherent transience of *labour* and durability of [fixed] *capital*. Actual, physical labour power is energy that can be used only at the moment that workers engage, through tools, with material. This means that in the ratio of labour to capital, the greater the weight of labour the more the production process is determined by the temporal and spatial dictates of labour – when and where it is available. The transformation of transient labour power into durable capital on the other hand is analogous to the freezing of the flowing stream of labour into ice cubes of capital which can then be stored away for later use here or elsewhere. As Francoist state sought to modify geography thereby to obviate modifications to society – through road building, hydraulics projects and internal colonization schemes – so the dominant class were obliged to use violence not just to drive on labour but to prevent it's movement along those ever more open communications routes. (Smith, 2006). Then, as Spain opened up through the sixties, it was international forces that drove on infrastructural development. While these positively opened up markets, they negatively loosened up labour mobility and this at a time when the state was backing off from endorsing old repressive measures. The enchantment of place was a result. Classes with capital fixed in land or in manufacturing plant – both of which were

technically backward for the reasons cited above now competed not just with French and German big capital in car production and the like; increasingly they faced competition for labour from surrounding shoe and rug producers themselves deeply reliant on informal economy sub-contracting. So the older class bloc met the opening up of movement with an ideology that mystified the pertinence of local autonomy with fantasies of the closed circuit of regional economic reproduction thus patently denying the evident role of wider markets both in terms of supply and demand.⁴

As we would expect regulation of economic activity occurs in a variety of sites in the current informal economy, but the particular form of multi-occupational households and household members maximizing the duration and intensity of labour have their own history. Policy makers who see these characteristics as simply evidence of local social capital or the entrepreneurial worker are blind to these kind of historically produced striations. The same goes for the role locality is seen to play in the emergence of this area as a 'regional economy'. Notions of locality are not the outgrowth of some kind of traditionalist sentiment 'from time immemorial' but the recent results of class relations; as such they are not mutually shared an integral local culture.

Case 2.

On my visits in the late seventies and early eighties, my next door neighbour was a *jornalero* (day labourer). He had three daughters ranging from 20 to 15. They all had jobs that took them out of the house for long hours of the day. One year his oldest daughter, Angelica, announced that she would be getting married at Christmas. I asked her what her *novio* – Manolo – did for a living. She told me that, after two years working in a shoe factory in the local town of Elche, he was now working in a *taller*, which translates as 'a workshop', just outside the our town making moulded rubber parts for shoes. Two or three days later I was leaving a café around 11 a.m. when Manolo arrived hot and sweating on a bike and laughing

⁴ There is no space to illustrate this here, but it would include 'discoveries' of supposedly regional specific fiestas that had never existed before, and the fetishization of the integral *finca* where supposedly everything from bed-linen, to wine, oil and transportation were produced – this in an area that had been crucially integrated into supra-regional markets for centuries.

and joshing with a couple of friends, who invited me to join them for a drink. Perhaps in their mid twenties they seemed more like school kids who'd just run from breaking a window. It turned out that a factory inspector had been spotted through the trees that hid the workshop they were working in, in sufficient time for most of the workers to climb through a window and escape on their bikes.

A year later, Angelica was showing me the video of her wedding. When I asked about Manolo, she told me that he had since worked in three other talleres each on the edge of a different town in the region, not so much in succession but often with one job overlapping another. Currently he was working "with a partner" in a *taller* where he was both part-investor, team-leader, and casual worker. I asked Angelica where *this* one was, after hearing about the others; she said that actually she didn't exactly know, and she laughed.

A week or so later I was sitting on an upturned box beneath the sloping roof of the patio of the house of Angelica's friend – Alicia – talking to her across a floor scattered with half-finished shoe-parts. Alicia knew me as the person who persistently talked to her father about his small farm, the work all the family members were expected to do on it, and the history of his and his father's lives: people who were closely tied to a large landlord who, over the years, had allowed them access to a plot of land which was the original basis for their current small holding. Over the years Alicia's father has managed to buy small plots of land, but even with family labour the farm was not sufficient for family income.

But here was an all-too-rare opportunity for me to insinuate his way into a few hours of the all-too-busy day of a homemaker so, with a self-disparaging smile and a shrug of the shoulders, Alicia had sat down to work and let me sit on the box and talk to her. She got work from her uncle who was a work distributor. But that day, and in the weeks that followed, as I dropped by occasionally or met her in the street, I began to learn that Alicia strained at the yoke of her uncle's imperatives. Weeks later she said to me,

He says I am lucky he lets me have the work; he could be giving it to others. When I started out I was slow and I made mistakes and perhaps then he was right. But now he gives me the hardest jobs and comes by late in the week with extra work he hasn't managed to get others to do. On Saturdays he often makes me clean up the mistakes some of the other women have made on a week's batch of jobs, before he delivers them to the factory. [Fieldnotes, 1978]

I knew her uncle Fernando and was a little surprised, some weeks later, when I was talking with a group of young people as we all watched a soccer game and Fernando had come by and, seeing Alicia, had said, "A girl more wild than wise..." and passed on. A look of youthful disrespect passed among the group and Alicia turned to me and said,

I told him I'd had enough. He said I could find work elsewhere, so that's what I'm doing.

A few days later I visited her in the patio and she put a positive face on her decision,

I am getting work. It's not as regular, but they pay more and he doesn't make me do the upgrading the way my uncle Fernando did. [Ibid]

But it was clear that Alicia was nervous both about her future source of work and about having stood up to her uncle. Alicia is not an *aparadora*, but does a more menial job on batches of shoes. Her mother's big, heavy stitching machine stands in the kitchen and she occasionally takes on work, but often spends time with Alicia, helping her make up her designated batches. She is a big, strong woman, making Alicia look surprisingly small beside her. "I do it for her marriage chest," she says.

Comments

In many ways the figures involved here are classic cases from an informal economy, exemplifying the dialectic of regulation/freedom I outlined earlier – the ephemeral workshop, the young women with occasional work in factories, the young woman taking in home-work and the tensions in families exemplified by the jobbing uncle and the over-bearing mother – It is a dialectic with quite specific histories in each case.

Regulation seems to be at the forefront of the history of Alicia's family. Her father is embedded in place by the simple fact that he owns a small amount of land but this takes on a specific structure of feeling when we note the *way* he owns land. The way in which he acquired the land clarifies the kind of ideology about place, itself the outcome of labour-capital relations in the past. In return for a certain amount of security, in the form of an annual lease on a small plot of land, Alicia's father and grandfather had effectively tied themselves to a *patron*. In the early years after the civil war this occurred in the context of violence and personal selection. Only those who had not supported the Republican cause were eligible, and not only them; but among them those who openly asserted their rejection of that past. Then, as the weight of the yoke lightened through the sixties and the siren-call of migration grew stronger,

so the old naked oppression was replaced by a call for allegiance to place, and the authority of the family head to control the movement of his household members.

For those unable or unwilling to resolve the issue of security as Alicia's family had a more ephemeral practice had to be found. If we see this as an ahistorical 'strategy' rather than a historically-produced necessity, we fail to see how the apparent freedom of movement here (when compared to Alicia's family) is itself a form of *regulation*. It is important to recognize the huge constraints of any form of agency in the context of Franco's repression. A number of writers have pointed out how the effect of this repression was to close down temporal and social horizons. Merely finding bread for tomorrow replaced any more abstract views of the future, making negotiation of the *estraperlo* the entire arena of agency, while selective and random personalized targeting made people "almost as spies on themselves", as one writer has put it. In these contexts each household member maximized their adaptability to a range of opportunities thrown up in niches of the historically heterogeneous local economy.

Against the tied and deeply penetrated family-household of the dependent worker then, there arose a household whose members were highly mobile and adaptable. Yet the very volatility and centrifugal pressures thereby involved, placed great pressures on the household as a contained site offering some security – both in terms of economy and in terms of interpersonal confidence.

We see here too the way in which lines of difference arise out of the inevitable tensions in the processes of production and reproduction:

between the more tied, organic households and households obliged to use each member as an independent *jornalero* or day-worker; and then the ways difference was articulated *within* those households – differences of gender and age of course – but also differences in appropriate work practices and notions of what kind of responsible conduct entitled one to household membership. The husbanding of our sole wealth that Marx refers to, what it is to waste it foolishly, indeed what a model citizen might look like, are all at variance.

This draw attention to the way the household becomes normative in terms of different experiences of class relations. The space of the household is quite different in the two cases from this perspective, not just the way the individual moves through it and beyond it, but more importantly *the character of the threshold between its inside and its outside* and the distinctions of appropriate conduct in these different spaces: fuzzy boundaries and hierarchical allegiances in the one, a sharp distinction between principles of allegiance in one space and principles of conflict in another in the second case .

There are continuities then with the past then.

But there are also the conditions of the present. Nothing is written in stone. Angelica and Alicia have become friends. They have grown up in the relatively prosperous last years of the Franco regime and the recent years of the supposedly new Spain, neither of which periods have done anything to encourage them to explore the possibly varying roots of their pasts. They talk, discuss, and share experiences. I'll mention just two examples.

Home work is a notorious means for keeping down capital investment. In this area homeworkers are expected to buy their own machinery, often through loans from the

work distributor, who often himself gets the loan from one of the factories whose work he is distributing. It is not entirely fanciful to note the parallel here between the tie this produces between the worker and her machine and an older tie, this time through land, that related her father to *his* employer. Yet today there is a price to be paid in surveillance and hence quality control. Goods can be inspected on their return to the factory, but inspection is a timely business and sending orders back is still more so. The use of 'family' labour is a primary means for resolving his problem, reinforced by a prevailing ideology that people of this area are committed to their work: both in terms of quality and in terms of time spent on the job. Neither the ability to use authority to regulate family labour, nor the propensity for self-exploitation are ubiquitous however, or produced through the working out of "the laws of nature". In fact we see in Alicia's case how important it is that the jobber does not stop at the door of the household, but penetrates within it to assert his authority over Alicia, his niece. The sense of responsibility she has toward him was a source of tension for her. It drove her on to work longer hours, to tie her more closely to her mother and to think of her reward in terms of the social reproduction of her position. But all these attitudes had to be worked on and they were not without alternatives.

Alicia had in fact spent a brief period working in a one of the two local shoe factories, immediately after she left school and when her mother was still herself taking in home work. It was there that she had solidified her friendship with Angelica whom she first knew at school. The latter however had never worked at home and during the time I knew her had been in four different workshop or factory jobs. Her *novio* had a similar kind of history. While he had worked through a variety of jobs, all of them in show production, unlike Angelica these had allowed him to accumulate

a variety of different skills related to various stages of show production. As he gathered these skills so he became more useful for workshops. Speaking to me about his hopes and frustrations, Manolo admitted that he had had great difficulty accumulating enough capital to go into with a partner in workshop production himself. But he had been able to accumulate knowledge and eventually had persuaded an older worker to take him on as a partner and Angelica to delay marriage by half a year so he could delay payments on the apartment and buy into his partnership.

If we were to buy into the publicity on the website of this regional economy we might note that both Manolo and his wife's friend Alicia exemplified the much trumpeted *flexible worker committed to their work*. Yet Alicia would hardly experience her own work experience, tied to the house and her uncle day after day as especially flexible. And Manolo's career pattern arises precisely from his lack of commitment to any one work site of even type of job. Even the small amount of capital in evidence in Alicia's family – through the farm and through hers and her mother's machines – seemed continuously out of reach for Manolo. And yet eventually Alicia did break with her uncle and Manolo did manage to combine his work skill with some capital to advantage, if only ephemerally (His workshop closed after less than 18 months operation). We see then the conversations of the present intertwining with the conditions of the past to pattern these people's emergent and elusive sense of 'community'.

But in Alicia's stand against her uncle and in Manolo's delaying of his wedding for the sake of the workshop, we are seeing something else. We are seeing the reforming of the levers of regulation/freedom as the household shifts from being a site of the simple reproduction of labour power to becoming an enterprise more deeply

penetrated by the “the ideology of profit seeking as its normatively accepted goal.” It is not especially insightful to see this in the classic terms of modernity, as a shift from the warm emotions of family and community to the reasoned world of civil society. But the shifting array of means for opportunistically combining regulation and with freedom in the pursuit of productivity give rise to emergent possibilities for division and difference experienced first as conflict but then over time as embryonic norms and patterns of social responsibility.

From what we have seen of the different households we would not expect these changes to be uniformly felt. In the last case I want to focus in the people in the area who most closely approximate those who, freed from any other property have nothing but their labour power to sell. These are an older generation of agricultural day-labourers.

Case 3.

Something every fieldworker knows about is the issue of the ease with which some people will talk to you while others are less so inclined. How much does this issue affect the kind of knowledge we take away with us when we leave the field?⁵ In the first year of my fieldwork I found that a wide range of people seemed willing to talk to me and I want to spend a little time talking about one of these people who became a close friend over many years. Nonetheless it was hard to avoid the fact that one – for me crucial – group seemed off limits and I want to speak too about one of these people. In the large central bar where day labour was hired and where I spent most weekday mornings there was a hard core of older workers whose collective manner and the physical space they occupied in the bar seemed to produce an un-crossable barrier. This was in the immediate post-Franco years when, for all the talk of consensus and transition, in many ground-level rural areas like this labour union organization had been uncompromising, demanding and polarized. This, together with the earlier period of savage repression combined to define the lines of communication for these men. “We have been told that culture is theatre, painting, sculpture and that a particular sensibility is needed to understand it...” a Socialist party local representative noted. “But culture is not only that,

⁵ Firth wrote about the issue very frankly, arguing for the important role of following up on the most immediately promising leads.

that's only a parcel of culture that the dominant class shows us in order to make us feel how difficult it is ... to reach.... Workers have been given a subculture, in a corner of our home with the television, not sharing with others our experience...." A figure of special respect among these men was José Iglesias, known to be a socialist throughout the years of repression, and now strongly committed to a radical day-labourers' union. In the years that followed I came to know him.

Respect was a term frequently used when José's name was mentioned, but only in a very restricted part of the town. In fact about a third of the town was made up of a long strip of small houses entirely lived in by families who at one time had been day-labourers. There Pepe was a figure of respect, but for many, beyond that space, he was simply never mentioned and the topic changed if his name came up. This issue of a space – relatively intimate and shared – where respect was operative and a line beyond which it was not, whether referring to the *barrio*, to the area in the central bar, or the threshold of the day labourer's household, is quite striking and quite specific to the older *jornaleros* and perhaps some of their children (José's eldest son is the same age as me). In José's case, while I never found him in certain spaces in the town – the fore court of the Church, the main *plaza* – in those places I did meet him, especially the *barrio* and in his own house, respect seemed to inhere in his person and increased through turgid compromises of municipal politics in the Transition years, as he increasingly became *the* emblem of the distinctive culture of respect shared among the *jornaleros*. The public and personal humiliations of repression make public respect extremely rare and valued coinage. As a condition of being – as *self-respect* – it is made most possible within the confines of the home, among the people for whom one is most immediately responsible. But it is from this redoubt that a person engages in the business of reproducing self respect further afield specifically through the practice of work. Self-respect had to do the dignity of a day's physical work honestly done and for the *jornalero* this work was carried, with his body from one site to another. Respect, as I am describing it here is directly a product of and a hugely rare response to the violence of selective repression in a small town. Only in spaces protected from penetration can self-respect be felt; with public spaces like the street, the Church or the bar all arenas of public humiliation the one practice that remains entirely one's own and yet fundamentally in demand is one's work.

It is only in this way that we can understand how José, a widely known socialist and a vociferous spokesperson for a hard-line day-labourers' union, was also always the preferred choice for an employer seeking somebody to head a team of workers for a day or week's work. We need too to understand this in terms of the differentiations it reflected and served to reproduce. Insofar as physical toil could be inscribed on the small plot of a tied labourer like Alicia's father so *work* was not carried in the body of the worker but rather immovably carved into texture of his and his family's surroundings. Insofar as physical labour was anathema to

the landed and commercial elite, so the quality of respect they afforded could not be expressed in the same currency as that of the worker.

Comments

No doubt certain features of local social organization and the sentiments that emerge therefrom can indeed be found in certain regions of Europe that then become 'regional economies'. But the organization of selected regional spaces in the manner of factories and the selection of certain sentiments as regional culture are notable the result of well planned political project. As such – as a self-conscious political project – regional economies are not unlike class. In their glee, as they emerge from the jungle of fieldwork declaring that not a sign of class was anywhere to be found, liberal social scientists betray a romanticism rarely found among political activists like, for example, José Iglesias. They believe in the spontaneity of class. This partly explains why Edward Thompson's work has been so popular among anthropologists (among others) and Hobsbawm's work much less so. For Thompson spoke of the emergence of a collective identity among working people (distinct from the bourgeoisie) in terms of the history of a spontaneously *culture* that arose, out of the practices of wife selling and balladeering beyond the strategies and institutions of organized labour. Hobsbawm talked of social institutions and the endless need for political organization. In this sense *regulation* was an issue both for the bourgeoisie seeking to solve the problems of productivity and for working people seeking to respond to it. In the end, however, for both sides purely behavioural regulation was not enough.

In a passage in his book on *The Age of Capital* Eric Hobsbawm notes that as industrialism advanced "management" became a major preoccupation of the

Victorians. They did everything that entered their imaginations to use it to enhance productivity. They dressed workers in uniforms and tried to discipline them like army recruits. They tried long pay and piece work. They convinced themselves that scarcity was good for the lower orders and endowed moral worth on paying people less than their subsistence and then they discovered that uncertainty too serves a useful purpose. This “odour of sanctity” did have some effect but in the end it was not enough. It was in the end, suggests Hobsbawm, the working person’s own sense of respect that became the crucial factor. This neither meant that working people had to buy into middle-class Victorian culture, but nor did it mean that they relied entirely on respectability in their own terms.

No term is harder to analyse than ‘respectability’ in the mid-nineteenth-century working class, for it expressed simultaneously the penetration of middle-class values and standards, and also the attitude without which working-class self-respect would have been difficult to achieve, and a movement of collective struggle impossible to build: sobriety, sacrifice, the postponement of gratification. (1984: 263-4)

It would seem that the issue of respect is no less important and no less complex in this area of Spain. As I have noted earlier, in the absence of factory surveillance, regional economies rely on a wide range of forms of social and cultural regulation to achieve productivity goals. It has become fashionable both among Foucaultian governmentalsists and among EU planners to suggest that self-regulation is a crucial and innovative lever of contemporary governance. Yet Hobsbawm’s evidence and my own suggest that this is an extraordinarily myopic reading of history. Once the labour process is understood as always a dialectic between discipline and freedom the it

quickly becomes evident that mutual and self respect are crucial levers for productivity. It is precisely because of this pervasive *a priori* role of self-respect – itself fundamental to ‘self-regulation’ – among working men and women that planners have taken an interest in the fuzzy notion, ‘culture’. And yet Hobsbawm’s observations alert us to the fact that the way in which respect is produced and reproduced through social relationships is likely to be highly contradictory among working people.

For jornaleros like Jose self-respect relied on reciprocal recognition *within* and *among* the jornaleros themselves. It both stood against exploitation and was the measure for assessing the degree of exploitation that was inherent in their role of ‘free’ [untied] workers. They had to accept exploitative relations – historically enhanced by real and threatened violence and public humiliation but, precisely because of its primitive form here they were not prepared to go beyond the threshold of self-respect framed within the arena of similar working people. It was, so to speak, the ultimate space that could not be penetrated. This fairly pure form of the capital-labour relationship, like that described above by Marx, because it is fundamentally exploitative is also fundamentally conflictive. Self-respect here arises therefore as a norm set against the coherence of corporatism and the celebration of compromise.

By contrast work was a more organic, less individualized affair for those workers tied to *patrons* through land. Respect accrued to the organic unit of the family household and was condensed in the figure of the male head. The dignity of work was less an individual matter here, but rather a household one. What dignity there was in one’s father’s or husband’s work was intimately a product of one’s own self-exploitation. He in turn stood in the same relation to his *patron*. The contribution of his household enhanced the respect of the *patron* and actions imputing the

reputation of the *patron* worked down the hierarchy to impute also the respect of this family – a classic corporatist ideology.

A feature common to the old regime and the new regime of regional economy is the way in which elites place the focus of enhanced productivity on the formal rather than the real subsumption of labour. The old fascination with technological fixes still remain of course but they can be costly, inflexible, hard to get rid off under volatile conditions. The culture of labour therefore becomes a crucial element in the regulation/creativity pair and local forms of dignity, responsibility and respect are caught in the cross-hairs of the planners' weaponry. It is not surprising therefore that when, many years later, after José had died, Susana Narotzky and I, found respectability to be just as complex a matter as Hobsbawm found in his studies of an entirely different period and place.

While the picaresque experiences of *estraperlo* after the civil war and of the informal economy that followed, act as important bases for many actors in today's flexible regime, and old authority structures likewise contribute to what is taken to be 'the local culture', José's kind of self-respect is especially incompatible with two elements of the new ideology. One has to do with the norms advocated by those who engineered the Spanish Transition; the other has to do with the role productive entrepreneur/worker plays in legitimating claims to membership in the regional culture.

The entire technocratic management of the Spanish Transition relied on the idea that 'modern' democracy was, by definition, a thing not of temporary negotiation, but rather a political condition of perpetual compromise. Denial of fundamentally different interests for the sake of the body politic is a classic instance of corporatism.

Something only too familiar in Spain. But, as I have argued earlier capitalism itself is an inherently conflictual social system, so what happens when a space within society – the regional economy – is modelled precisely on the capitalist firm? Here the measure of value is the productivity of the region as a whole, and responsible membership therein relies on demonstrable contributions of human and material capital. I have tried to show here that difference is fundamental to the reproduction of such a system. In our book, we discuss the historical and current complexity of these processes in a manner strangely absent from the endless success stories we hear of the new forms of dispersed production, entrepreneurial workers, and flexible capitalism of Europe's regional economies.