



AIBR

Revista de Antropología
Iberoamericana

www.aibr.org

Volume 15

Number 1

January - April 2020

Pp. 129 - 156

Madrid: Antropólogos
Iberoamericanos en Red.

ISSN: 1695-9752

E-ISSN: 1578-9705

***“He is an Entrepreneur, but I am not;
I am a Self-Employed Worker”: Self-Representation
and Subsistence of Neo-Peasants in Catalonia***

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Submitted: October 9, 2018

Accepted: March 26, 2019

DOI: 10.11156/aibr.150107e

ABSTRACT

The concept of "peasantry" has historically been the subject of debate, where some question its existence and others recognize the role it currently plays in society. This article presents the case of the "neo-peasants" in Catalonia, a specific type of new peasantry linked to the political and environmental back-to-the-land movement. Our qualitative research performed between 2013 and 2017, analysed 29 cases of agricultural and/or livestock small-scale farms in Catalonia, oriented to the production for self-consumption and to the marketing of agricultural products. In this paper, we propose a typology of neo-peasants that intends to cover this diversity and compare their subsistence strategies developed in the context of the social and economic crisis that began in 2008. The analysis shows the importance of the social context in which these initiatives are embedded, which has influenced their transformation, precarization or even disappearance.

KEY WORDS

Neo-peasants, economic crisis, livelihood strategies, social context, Catalonia.

**«ÉL ES EMPRENDEDOR, PERO YO NO; YO SOY AUTÓNOMO»:
AUTORREPRESENTACIÓN Y SUBSISTENCIA DE LOS NEOCAMPESINOS EN
CATALUÑA**

RESUMEN

El concepto de «campesinado» ha sido históricamente objeto de debate, desde posiciones que cuestionan su misma existencia hasta el reconocimiento del papel que desempeña actualmente en la sociedad. Este artículo presenta el caso de los llamados «neocampesinos» en Cataluña, un tipo concreto de nuevo campesinado ligado al movimiento político y medioambiental de «*vuelta al campo*». La investigación, de corte cualitativo, se centra en 29 casos de explotaciones agrarias y/o ganaderas en Cataluña entre 2013 y 2017, tanto aquellas orientadas a la producción para el autoconsumo como las orientadas a la comercialización de productos agropecuarios. En este trabajo proponemos una tipología de neocampesinos que intenta abarcar esta diversidad, para centrarnos a continuación en la comparación de las estrategias de subsistencia desarrolladas en el contexto de crisis social y económica iniciada en 2008. El análisis muestra la importancia del contexto social en el que se encuentran insertas estas iniciativas, el cual han influido en su transformación, precarización o incluso desaparición.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Neocampesinos, crisis económica, estrategias de subsistencia, contexto social, Cataluña.

1. Introduction

The figure of the peasantry¹ has been and continues to be the subject of academic debate. From the classical formulations, which defined the peasantry as a specific form of social organization resistant to the advance of capitalism (Scott, 1976; Thompson, 1971; Wolf, 1982), through the works focused on the peasantry as a historical form of subsistence relatively independent of the political and economic environment (Chayanov, 1966; Hann, 2018; Harris, 2005; Narotzky, 2016) we find authors who even question the very existence of a delimited social group that can be called “peasantry” (Ioffe, Nefedova and Ilya, 2006; Mendras, 1971; Pereira, 1997) or the relevance of the term (Kearney, 1996; Mendras and Jacobs, 2002). However, other authors, such as Van der Ploeg (2008), argue that in industrialized countries, we are in fact witnessing a process of *re-peasantization*, largely due to the increase in inequality and impoverishment in the cities. Rurality and the peasant lifestyle would act as a buffer against the social decline toward poverty (Hilmi and Burbi, 2015 and 2016), which would justify their relevance in times of social and economic crisis.

In this article, we analyze the case of the “neo-peasants” (Chevalier, 1993) in Catalonia, in a political context in which the depopulation of rural areas is increasingly a matter of greater social concern and in an economic context marked by the social and economic crisis of 2008-2014, which has left thousands of households without resources. The neo-peasants would be new peasants who start an agricultural or livestock small-scale farm guided by an ideology influenced by the back-to-the-land movement (Nogué i Font, 1988 and 2012) and who, in addition to ensuring their subsistence, intend with their activity to achieve a more just and environmentally friendly society. In this article, we find out who these neo-peasants are, how they manage their reproduction, and what type of strategies they have developed to face the consequences of the crisis in Catalonia.

To this end, we first briefly address the concept of “peasantry” in literature, with special emphasis on economic organization. Next, we review the literature on neo-peasant farmers, providing comparative information on their organization and subsistence. In the third section, the methodology followed for the development of this study is outlined. The fourth section presents the results for the case of Catalonia, proposing a conceptualization of the phenomenon based on the coordination of the subsistence and market axes. In this section, we also present data regard-

1. In this article, we will use both the generic term “peasant” or “neo-peasant” and the personal form of the terms (peasant, neo-peasant or neo-rural).

ding the economic strategies that neo-peasants present for their reproduction and some problems regarding the legality of the practices they develop. In the fifth section, we discuss the figure of the neo-peasant in Catalonia, and in the sixth and last section, we present the conclusions of the study.

2. Peasant and neo-peasant: a brief state of the art

Toward a characterization of the peasantry

Some of the first attempts to delimit peasant society are found in the classic studies of Firth (1946), with his work *Malay Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy*, or Redfield (1930), with his work *Tepoztlán, A Mexican Village* (Molina and Valenzuela, 2007). Chayanov (1966) presents a classic study of a family farm, in a context of social and political change such as that of the Russian revolution of 1905. In this work, Chayanov presents a model in which the unit of analysis is not the individual endowed with mercantile rationality, but rather the *family farm* and its reproductive cycle.

From French sociology, Mendras (1976) described the main characteristics of peasant society more holistically, based on a set of dimensions centered on the local group and its relations with society. However, as several authors have shown (Ioffe, Nefedova and Ilya, 2006; Mendras, 1971; Pereira, 1997), this characterization is not applicable in contemporary rural contexts due to technological and structural changes with the consequent change in values. Hence, have peasants been displaced by entrepreneurial agriculture, or is there a coexistence of models? Van der Ploeg (2008) and Narotzky (2016) argued that it is important to delimit the line between peasantry and small farms. According to the authors, peasants would differ mainly from small farmers in their economic practice and their growth aspirations. In the case of peasants, the objective of agricultural or livestock practice would be aimed at the social reproduction of households, also seeking to focus on three aspects: "autonomy, dependence, and embeddedness" (Narotzky, 2016: 310).

Peasants depend on relationships with the market for their reproduction and, like small farmers, use a combination of market and non-market resources for their subsistence (Narotzky, 2016). The difference would be the priority in its orientation (to reproduction or to the market, respectively). In the Marxist tradition, Lenin (1954), for his part, differentiates between peasants and capitalist farmers based on access to land. The former would access land through family farms, while the latter through wage labor (Thorner, 1966).

Another characteristic of the peasantry is its historically rooted character of subordination. Wolf (1966) argues that this domination originates from the appropriation of the surpluses produced by the peasants when they have to participate in a market governed by asymmetric exchange rules. Consequently, the peasants find themselves in a situation of constant tension between external pressure, on the one hand, and the need for subsistence, on the other. This tension, according to the author, is characteristic of the peasantry. Wolf also sees the difference between peasants and farmers in the destination of production: the former are governed by the logic of work for household subsistence, and the farmers by the logic of business. Along the same lines, according to Brignol and Crispi (1982), in a context of dependent capitalism in Latin America, commercial capital, for example, tries to extract the greatest value from the peasant in the form of financial intermediation, commercialization or transportation (1982: 148). Similarly, policies implemented for the development of the agricultural sector have focused on economic growth, promoting the growth of a market-oriented agricultural model above the needs of the “poor peasants” (Heynig, 1982).

Lastly, Van der Ploeg (2008) distinguishes between three forms of farming: *peasant agriculture*, *entrepreneurial agriculture*, and *large-scale corporate farming*, depending, among other factors, on the size of the farm and the purpose of production.

In short, the peasantry differs from other forms of farming in the following terms: (1) the structuring of economic life through the domestic group; (2) the lack of accounting for income and expenditures within the household and reciprocity relations; (3) the subordination of growth to domestic reproduction; (4) selective participation in the market; and (5) the separation from the decision-making mechanisms from the general society.

The neo-peasantry: A new political form of peasantry?

Chevalier (1993) considers neo-peasantry as a subtype of neo-ruralism. Neo-ruralism is defined as a “unique migratory movement, with a great ideological content, the result of decisions and conscious choices of the people involved that, once again, affects the rural world” (Nogué i Font, 2012: 35). This mobility aims “to seek an atmosphere more conducive than that of the city to implement their ideas of an alternative lifestyle” (Nogué i Font, 2012: 32). The movement was initially developed in 1960 in the United States, referred to as the *back-to-the-land movement*, mainly led by young people with high educational levels who migrated from the

city to the countryside. This movement spread to France with the protest of May 1968 and entered Spain after the end of Franco's dictatorship, with a greater representation in Catalonia than in other autonomous communities, especially in *Gerona* and the northern part of *Lérida* (Nogué i Font, 2012).

Neo-ruralism mainly comprises people who come from the cities, but, as Chevalier (1993) points out, they can also be the children of people who live in the rural world who return after having spent a period in an urban environment. The neo-peasants are, among the neo-rurals, those who decide to orient themselves toward the practice of agriculture and livestock. According to Chevalier, the neo-peasants try "*to return to a precapitalist economy in a world dominated by competition, profit, and mass production*" (1993: 185).

In the Basque Country, Calvário (2017) shows the case of the new *Baserritarras* (peasants or farmers residing in Biscay) who practice agroecology. In their case, low-input production practices allowed them to start with little investment and proceed gradually. These neo-peasants were protected by a system of regional aid that guaranteed their survival during the early days without attending to production. This support seems essential when analyzing the continuity of this type of initiative (Molina, Valenzuela, Lubbers, Escribano and Lobato, 2018). The *Baserritarras* base their agricultural projects on multiple crops destined for self-consumption and for direct sale, they live near the cities, and the farms are usually less than one hectare. Short distances to cities allow some of them to commute to complementary paid work off the farm. Productive farms, according to Calvário, are usually shared by more than two members not related to the family.

Another example is found in southern France, in the *Parc National des Cévennes*, where Willis and Campbell (2004) show how the neo-peasants settled in the region develop what they call the *chestnut economy*, a practice of small-scale farming and crafts (especially chestnut products) combined with a strong informal economy that presents a passive resistance to capitalism. This economic practice is inserted in a series of patrimonialization policies in the region together with a "complex field of conflict and cohabitation, in which currents of late-modernity and pre-modernity collide, and learn to adapt" (2004: 328). In this context, the neo-peasants have a competitive advantage over other park inhabitants due to their high educational level, which provides them with a capital that they can mobilize for their subsistence.

In the literature, reference is often made to the idealized representation they make, at least in their early years, of life in the rural

world in general. According to this representation, peasants could be considered “bearers of superior morals due to their hard work, their experience in the sustainable use of resources and their ecological knowledge and organizational model, among others” (Harris, 2005: 425). This idealization leads to the situation in which any modernization or development of their economy is seen as an “outrage” (Harris, 2005).

To sum up, although neo-peasants seem to continue productive practices described in the theories on peasantry, their distinctive contribution would be a human, social and cultural capital, acquired prior to mobility to the countryside, and an ideology that differentiates them from other types of peasants.

To understand the magnitude of the neo-peasant phenomenon in the case of Catalonia, we can see how the agricultural sector has behaved in recent years in Catalonia. According to our definition of peasant or farmer, we cannot estimate the magnitude of the neo-peasant phenomenon in its entirety. This is due, on the one hand, to the lack of institutional records of these units when they are established; and, on the other hand, the high number of units that start their activity but stop it after a few years.

Let us now look at the agricultural sector, within which we might find some neo-peasant, but as we will see later, not all neo-peasants. According to Monllor i Rico, Macías and Sidney (2013), with a total population of 3,842,500 active people, 1,906 young farmers under the age of 35 have registered as farmers in 2016. The trend of the sector, according to the authors, is regressive, that is, fewer and fewer people decide to live as farmers or ranchers in Catalonia, registering their livestock or land. This happens not only in Catalonia, but throughout Europe. According to Monllor i Rico, Macías and Sidney (2013) in Catalonia between 1999 and 2009, 24.2% of farms have disappeared, without this having led to a reduction in the agricultural area used. However, according to Institute of Statistics in Catalonia, between 2005 and 2016, farms have increased by 40², while the number of people employed in the sector has decreased³. Furthermore, the number of hectares of land in the hands of societies and cooperatives is increasing considerably⁴.

2. <https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=427&lang=es>

3. <https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=432&lang=es>

4. <https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=426&lang=es>

3. Methodology

For the preparation of this article, we have analyzed 29 cases from three ethnographic field studies, in which the authors have participated. These works have been developed under research projects with different objectives as detailed below; but with the same intention: to improve the understanding of the different subsistence strategies in Catalonia today, of people whose discourse shows a motivation to make a social, political, and environmental change through the lifestyles they intend to lead.

The different field works have been united in a common database with more than 50 experiences related to the neo-rural phenomenon or the social and environmental economy in the region of Catalonia between 2013 and 2017. From this database, cases have been selected for this research that met the following criteria:

- Agricultural or livestock farms within the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, regardless of their size.
- The informants identify themselves as “peasants,” *pageses* or *pagesas*, shepherds, or, alternatively, part of their self-presentation is linked to working with the land or with livestock.
- Informants are both owners of the means of production of the farm and the workers on it (Harris, 2005: 406). In this way, workers who sell their labor in exchange for a salary are excluded.
- In their discourse, an activist component of autonomy and self-subsistence can be distinguished (Calvário, 2017; Van Der Ploeg, 2010).
- Informants have moved from an urban to a rural context, counting on a previously acquired social and cultural capital.

The data collected in all the projects have included field diaries and interviews, which have allowed us to carry out a selective coding according to the interests of the current research. These data were supplemented with participant observation. Pseudonyms are used in this article. The three periods of fieldwork are detailed below.

The first of them, framed in a broader research project whose objective is to better understand the social economy⁵, has given us access to six cases of small-scale farms between November 2014 and July 2015, which we visited between one and five days each to gather information through

5. “Social entrepreneurship: local embeddedness, social networking sites and theoretical development.” MINECO (CSO2012-32635; 2013-2016). Principal Investigator: José Luis Molina.

informal conversations and a semi-structured interview about the beginnings of the project, economic issues, the social support network, both at the beginning and at the time of conducting the interview, and the problems encountered in its development. Information was also gathered about the profile of the members of these farms. The cases were selected using *online* platforms on social and solidarity entrepreneurship, as well as the “snowball” sampling method, and taking into account aspects such as geographic, gender, and productive sector diversity.

The second period, framed in a broader research project of the doctoral thesis of the first author⁶ with the aim of analyzing the role played by *intentional ecological communities* in Catalonia (Escribano, Lubbers and Molina, 2017; Escribano, Molina and Lubbers, 2020), has 17 cases of communities that present themselves as models of global ecological change. These cases were selected by tracking active initiatives online and using the ‘snowball’ method. In these communities, both agriculture and livestock were central. The field work was carried out between September 2013 and May 2017 intermittently with stays of varying duration (from two days to several weeks). The field work included participant observation (participating, for example, in the daily work of the community) and conducting semi-structured interviews on the profile of the inhabitants, the productive activities of the community or its imaginary.

The third period gathers nine cases of rural self-management projects in which people arranged to live in the countryside, between September and October 2016 and September and November 2017⁷. This period is framed in two larger research projects⁸, which aimed to describe the forms of subsistence of the projects and their political function. The cases were selected using the “snowball” method. The field work used ethnographic methods, including participant observation between one day and two

6. Doctoral thesis. “Back-to-the-land” in Catalonia: An anthropological perspective. <https://www.tesisenred.net/handle/10803/670486#page=1>

7. Rural self-management projects differ from intentional communities mainly in the social structure of the initiatives. While communities are made up of more than one family or kinship group and seek social and environmental transformation through this coexistence, rural self-management nuclei can be made up of a single individual or a single kinship group or family.

8. “Popular conceptions of social justice in the face of crisis and austerity policies” (CSO2015-67368-P), Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. Principal Investigators: Mikel Aramburu Otazu and Silvia Bofill Poch, 2016-2018; “Inicjatywy nowo-wiejskie w Katalonii a rozwój zrównoważony—perspektywa antropologiczna” (Neo-rural initiatives in Catalonia and sustainable development—the anthropological perspective, Narodowe Centrum Nauki (National Science Center) MINIATURA, No. 2017/01/X/HS3/00050 (2017-2018). Principal Investigator: Agata Hummel.

weeks per case, applying semi-structured interviews and writing a field diary for each case.

The following table summarizes the number of cases selected for each period. Since some cases have been followed in the different periods, the total of unique units is 29.

Period I (Nov. 2014-June 2015)	Period II (Sept. 2013-May 2017)	Period III (Sept.-Oct. 2016 and Sept.-Nov. 2017)
Generic small-scale farms	Ecological intentional communities	Rural self-management initiatives
N=6	N=17	N=9

Table 1. Field work periods and type of farms (own elaboration).

4. Results

Although the literature attributes to the neo-rurals a middle or upper class origin and higher education (Chevalier, 1993; Nogué i Font, 1988), the majority of the Catalan neo-peasants in our sample are people between 30 and 40 years of age who have secondary or vocational training (although depending on the group, we will see how educational degrees vary). Most come from the cities and inherited and acquired capital play a fundamental role in the economic stability of productive units⁹, as Willis and Campbell (2004) pointed out in relation to the management of the bureaucracy in *Des Cévennes*, France. In our case, economic capital appears in the form of money or real estate; human capital, in the form of university education, languages or specialization courses; cultural capital, linked especially to their aspirations; and social capital, in the form of an extensive personal network to turn to in search of resources. These capitals are especially relevant during the first years of starting the initiative. We have described this issue in more detail elsewhere (Molina, Valenzuela, Lubbers, Escribano and Lobato, 2018) and our observations correspond to the literature (Chevalier, 1993; Ergas, 2010; Kirby, 2003; Nogué i Font, 1988 and 2012).

We suggested that the neo-peasants in Catalonia can be differentiated into three groups according to their production and self-representation.

9. We will use the term *productive unit* as a synonym for *small-scale farm*, due to the rejection of a large number of neo-peasants to call themselves *explotación (operation)*, the name used for legal records. *Explotación* is associated with the exploitation of resources.

Thus, we can distinguish: (1) Neo-peasants who use agriculture and livestock as a complement to their subsistence and occasionally sell their surplus; (2) neo-peasants who orient their production to sale and also have an alternative source of income for their subsistence; and (3) neo-peasants who depend exclusively on the sales of their product to survive (this may include benefits or subsidies intended for this business). It is important to mention that these models are not fixed, but that it is possible to move from one to another more easily than in other periods of history, as a result of the proactive action of institutions and public policies in this field. We will now describe the different groups, where we further develop on this issue.

Neo-peasants who use agriculture and livestock as a complement to their subsistence and occasionally sell their surplus (n=17 productive units).

Almost everything right now is for self-consumption,
except the tomato sauce
(Johan, 29 years old. August 2018).

This group is made up of productive units formed by the neo-peasants who use agriculture and livestock as a complement to their subsistence and occasionally sell the surplus of their production. The main source of subsistence generally varies between a salaried job outside the unit, or income from family capital or state aid as a result of unemployment. The groups have been created approximately¹⁰ between 1984 and 2012, and have between 5 and 25 members. In general, people are under the age of 40 and are not necessarily linked through blood ties. Although the majority are of Catalan origin, we find cases of people who have moved from Latin America, from European countries such as Germany or Italy, from other regions of Spain or from provincial capitals to more rural areas of Catalonia. Almost all of them have completed secondary school or vocational training, and some of them have a university degree. They can reside under the same roof (self-styled *communities*), or they live independently near other initiatives (self-styled *projects*) sharing the same agricultural land and/or herd.

Cultivated lands do not usually exceed one hectare, and are located close to the house. The crops are varied and the degree of control over

10. We use the term, “approximately” since in some cases the beginnings are not easy to date; it may be that the beginning is progressive, or comes from another experience, sometimes in other countries.

pests and diseases is (relatively) low. If used, fertilizers are usually prepared based on plant components. In the fields, we can find rototillers running on diesel, but most of the work is done by hand. If they have animals, they are farm animals, the most common being poultry, goats, sheep, or donkeys. Normally the number of animals is small, and they are used as a complement to food, for cleaning the land, and as a fertilizer for the field.

The organization of work on crops and animals depends directly on the social organization in the dwelling. In the case of communities, the organization of work is usually determined in assembly meetings, in which the group decides the needs (in which the garden or the animals are one of the many tasks to be distributed). Agriculture and livestock, as well as handicrafts in the social reproduction of this group, are mainly intended for self-consumption, which allows them to participate to a lesser extent in the food market. In the communities and projects observed, the sale of the product takes place when there is a surplus (a common case is that of hens' eggs) and is generally limited to close or family contacts. Income is usually low and is not divided between individuals, but becomes part of the common fund¹¹. Less frequently (1 out of 17 cases), the economy is shared, that is, all income is shared and it is the group that decides how to allocate it to people. In this case, we could speak of a single domestic economy.

Agriculture, apart from having a relevant role in the domestic economy, also plays a symbolic role. As part of the ideology of the neo-peasant group, we find the association of crop or livestock ownership with political resistance and social struggle. This may mean that in some cases, the form of production is more linked to ideology than to subsistence needs.

I'm not here to grow vegetables, to sell and produce, or to make a business for myself. I'm here to supply myself with my needs, to supply the people who are going to pass through here and teach people, that is, the more people grow vegetables or make bread... For me, people who make bread are not my competition. People who grow their vegetables are not competition for the organic farmer. It is like someone who has learned and has started to pull their own cart (Pedro, 41 years old. March 2014).

11. In most of the cases observed, the economy of the communities and projects is divided into a group and an individual part. In this way, it is difficult to talk about homes, since the independence between the subjects allows them to develop different lives and have different capitals.

The neo-peasants of this group rarely formalize their productive unit at the administrative level. While the production of vegetables for self-consumption is not legally restricted, the raising of animals, even on a small scale (for example 2-6 goats) and exclusively for their own use, has to be registered both in the Department of Agriculture and in the local town hall. However, the investment of time and formal requirements, for example, health requirements, which involves legalizing the breeding for self-consumption, is comparable to the legalization of a commercial exploitation. Consequently, many units limited to their own use do not legalize their animals. Some have been reprimanded by the administration, but generally the authorities “turn a blind eye” to this type of disobedience, as long as the farm does not increase in size: “Here we have these four goats for us and to be able to live like this, right? The grace is in living in contact with this, not doing any business or anything. So, they (the authorities) have already left us alone. They haven’t come for a year now” (Iván, 40 years old. August 2018).

In some cases, the cultivation of certain plants may be the reason for “persecution” by the state administration. In a town in the Province of Barcelona, a group of young people try to cultivate olive trees and vineyards for their own consumption and with the aim of exchanging surpluses with other groups of small-scale rural producers. However, their economic practices put them at risk. “It is not taken into account that you may have a self-managed vineyard, for your own consumption. Maybe you and your family and friends are harvesting and an inspection comes, and they lynch you with taxes and fines and such. [...] You have to be a self-employed worker to produce wine for yourself” (Sergi, 40 years old. October 2017).

Wine is produced on a large scale in the region and the law is adapted to mass production on large plots of land. The local market is dominated by large producers called by the neo-peasants “the grape mafia,” which makes it more difficult to go unnoticed as a self-managed production project.

The representatives of this group of neo-peasants do not pay taxes, or pay only a small part of what they should, and they lack the status of “self-employed.” This *illegal* status, however, exposes them to greater uncertainty, since at any time the authorities can execute an order against them and deprive them of a significant part of their resources for subsistence.

Since agriculture is not intended for market use, the impact of the economic crisis on the production and reproduction of this group has not had a direct repercussion. However, the crisis has reinforced their values

of independence from the market, as they feel more protected against possible variations in the market. They have also felt its effect in the increase in the number of people who are interested in this way of life, as Hilmi and Burbi (2015 and 2016) said as a buffer against the social crisis, and as we argued elsewhere (Molina et al., 2018).

Neo-peasants who orient their production to the sale of the product and also have an alternative source of income for their subsistence (n=7 productive units).

But what are you going to do, vegetables with a hoe? You are going to serve two families. It's that you don't even pay for the car's diesel (Cristian, 46 years old, June 2015)

This group is made up of productive units of neo-peasants who focus their production on the sale of the product, and also have an alternative source of income for their subsistence. Most of them involve what we have called *projects* and are defined as *agroecological*. They have been created approximately between 1996 and 2012. The people that make up the group are of very different ages, ranging from 25 to 50 years old. In general, the average is a little higher than in the first group. Some of them have university education, in equal parts related to the agricultural sector, and not related to it. Five of the seven cases involve people of Catalan origin, and in the other two cases there are people displaced from within the peninsula, with some members from outside it, specifically from South America.

Despite developing a market-oriented productive activity, the members of the projects do not consider themselves "entrepreneurs," but rather identify more with the concept of "self-employed worker":

I have a friend who opened his first store when he was 20 years old, and at the age of 30, he had 4 stores running... That's an entrepreneur! The guy had two workers in each store... That is, he had four stores under his control and eight workers with payroll, and he had the telephone, suppliers... The material... I have a problem with the idea of the company, of the entrepreneur... It's hard for me to think that I'm a... When I think... The *autónomo* (self-employed worker), I make a greater connection with the autonomous command of autonomous actions... That is, more with the word *autónomo* (-a) than with the word *businessman* or *entrepreneur* (Cristian, 46 years old, June 2015).

The size of the projects usually ranges from two to five people, well below that of the previous group. Responsibility may fall on one or more of the members or be shared among all those involved in the project.

When listening to their narratives about the formation of the projects, the high variability of their social composition can be appreciated: they begin, for example, as a romantic couple who regroup with new partners (not necessarily affective ones) after a separation, or they begin as five partners and finally there is only one partner left. The people who develop the project may have initial training or access it during the development of the activity. In general, there is a point where the project needs its members to be trained on the market tools in order to ensure its continuity. The extension of the land on which the productive activity takes place is usually a little larger than in the case of the first group (between two and four hectares), and the land may be located a little further from the house, or even separated. Pest and disease control is more exhaustive, although the use of fertilizers is still ecological. For the management of production units, we find machinery such as tractors or other specialized tools. Regarding the sale of the product, as Calvário observes for the case of the Basque Country, direct sales are used whenever possible, as one of the main strategies to increase income (Calvário, 2017).

The organization of work is usually more planned and the division of tasks is clearer, although in some cases in the beginning it is not known that the activity will be destined to commercialization, as Lucía, a 41-year-old woman who, along with her partner and father of her two children, runs a project of a vegetable garden and 40 goats, commented: “We started because a man from the village gave us four sheep. No, there were two of them, two in exchange for firewood. Well, we did a trade, right? And that’s how it started” (Lucía, 41 years old. November 2017).

Most projects do not hire workers. However, it is very common to find short or long-term volunteers to cover the work that the founders of the project cannot do (especially in the summer). This extra work is usually well accepted by volunteers given the ideological orientation of the projects. The profits from the sale of the product may be allocated undifferentiated to the home, in the case of a family unit, or divided among the participating partners, even living under the same roof and eating from the same plate.

The role that productive activity plays in the subsistence of this group is that of complementing remunerated work (or alternative source of income). It may be the same person who carries out both jobs, or it may be different people within the group, responsible for rural exploitation and for the income from external activities. In cases where work in the field is combined with work in the service sector, a sense of well-being is common, as Cristian comments.

Do you know what happens? That I too am somehow comfortable with a mixed activity too. As I am lucky that my other part of activity, which is not an entrepreneur, which is not an entrepreneur or self-employed worker, whatever you want to call it, the other part is services, I like it a lot. Of course, then I love to go to a place to work four hours pruning and leave with 80€ in my pocket. Because I like the work I do, I feel well-paid. The client is happy, and I come home with money. It's sunny, it rains, the bees come out, the tomatoes produce or not. So, since I don't have to go to cut cod tails in a factory, many farmers live like that, poor. They have their farm, but they go to the factory. They have cows, they don't have enough, and so they work a factory shift. Sometimes at night (Cristian, 46 years old. June 2015).

The products obtained from the productive activity are not sold exclusively on the market, but a part is destined to the exchange for other products or services such as car repair, Internet business maintenance, or a massage service for workers. While this strategy is present to a lesser extent in the other groups of neo-peasants, it is in this group where it takes on a significant weight.

The fact that much less money is moved does not mean that we are poor, because there are many exchanges that you do not make monetarily, that is, you have your needs covered, using much less money, because you cover them in other ways. Or with your own productive activity, or with exchanges, within your social networks... But it's a different economy from that of many other professions (Lucía, 41 years old. November 2017).

Risk minimization, as Scott (1976) commented, is present when planning crops. If the crop is complicated, they prefer to buy it from other agroecological peasants (*pageses*) or not to include the product in the so-called *organic box*, or package of varied agricultural products destined to be sold. Johana, a 35-year-old woman who runs a two-hectare farm with her partner, referred to this risk when talking about how they no longer grow carrots, because they find it too complicated.

As key factors in the profitability of these businesses, we also find certain special conditions on which the projects are built, which endow them with competitive characteristics. Without these conditions, many of the businesses or projects would not be profitable. This is the case of Johana's business, which is settled under conditions of "sponsorship" by the people who live in the rural area where her farm is located. In her case, the lands are transferred free of charge, as is the heavy machinery (such as a tractor, rototiller), access to irrigation and the premises they used as a warehouse.

The initial investment in the project varies depending on the legality of the project, i.e., if the project wants to comply with all the stipulated regulations, the investment will have to be much higher, and therefore difficult to assume from personal funds. For this reason, many of the projects in this group choose not to legalize their production, to legalize it partially or to legalize it, but not to apply all the regulations. Ferran has 60 goats and has them under sanitary control of the municipality. However, he cannot legalize them as a farm because he does not have enough land with an adequate category. Lucía and Ernesto have 40 legalized sheep, but do not have a suitable vehicle to transport them to the slaughterhouse.

It is not approved, you have to have some kind of a transporter license. I don't know how you get it either, but you have to get it. [...] Or, if not, you have to pay someone to transport for you. Which are not very complicated things... No, it's not very clear. And in the end, you have so many things on a daily basis, and you have so many things in your head, that you don't get to everything either. It's not that you don't want to, but sometimes you don't get there, and until you find that out, "look, you have to do this like this, because if you don't, we're going to go look for you..." (Lucía, 41 years old. November 2017).

In both, this and that of the previous group case, the authorities do not subject agroecological projects to a restrictive control, but at any time they can do so: fine the neo-peasants or at least pressure them to invest in equipment and that the farm complies with all the rules.

Regarding the effects of the crisis, this group orients its economic activity to the sale of its product on the market, so it is dependent on market fluctuations regarding the sale of their product. This has been noted, for example, in the perception of the informants of a market saturation regarding the sale of organic vegetables, as we detail in the next section, where the effects of saturation have been felt more clearly. In many cases, the crisis has also affected the stability of work in exchange for wages, which may cause greater pressure on the yields of the productive unit, and in turn, a shift in choice from this second group to the third, where there is no mixed formula.

Another factor that influences the change of strategy in the units is, as observed by Chayanov (1966), the change in the family composition. Lucía recounted what this transition was like for her:

I worked separately on environmental education issues. But we were already starting—of course, it was an activity that wasn't full-time either, let's say, right? Some days I did that, and other days we were here. And we had started

to have enough surplus to start selling, right? That is, it was already a small source of income, small, but... Well, we didn't declare it and that's it. After Eva [her first daughter] was born, I left the other job and we decided to live only from the farm (Lucía, 41 years old. November 2017).

Neo-peasants who depend on the sale of their product for their subsistence (may include aid or subsidies for this business) (n=5 productive units).

I am 39 years old, and I am going to register as a young entrepreneur, which is the last year that they can give it to me, and I am going to hire the workers (Mónica, 39 years old. June 2015).

In the group of neo-peasants who depend on the sale of their product for subsistence, the productive units have been formed approximately between 1995 and 2012. The units are made up of people ranging from 26 to 60 years old, so it is very heterogeneous in terms of age. Most of the neo-peasants in this group have a university education, in equal parts linked and not linked to the agricultural sector. Except in one case, from Germany, the neo-peasants are of Catalan origin. However, within the farms that make a living from the sale of their produce, we can find "different leagues," as Monica, a neo-peasant who has been growing vegetables for sale in an agroecological way for 15 years, comments. She started with a mixed activity characteristic of the previous group, and now lives exclusively from her agricultural project. By "different leagues," Mónica refers to different ways of organizing production units, not only in terms of administration and management, but also in terms of business growth. This difference is notable, among other factors, in the vocabulary expressed to refer to the units. What for some is a project, for others is a business. What for some is an entrepreneur, for others is a self-employed worker. And while some speak of collaboration between partners in the sector, others speak of competition in the market. We are facing the line that separates the neo-peasants from the farms, as Narotzky (2016) commented. In the imaginary of the neo-peasants themselves, the difference is very clear: the peasants (*campesinos*) are those, who fight for subsistence living from the field; and the farmers (*agricultores*) are the ones who play in this "other league," always on top of the tractor and orienting their production exclusively to profit. "We started out as total pirates, very precarious and very idealistic," says Mónica during the interview. When they decided to dedicate themselves exclusively to farming, they left their other jobs and suffered what she calls *self-exploitation*. She has maintained this pre-

carious condition for 15 years, until she decided to change her business model:

Although we have been struggling for 15 years, we have not been able to achieve certain conditions. Ideally, the project would need four people working full time all year round and the project cannot sustain this economically. So, I took a step forward and said: well, I can't take it anymore. I have been working many, many more hours for 15 years than I have been paid. Thanks to that, I have reached a good level of professionalization, which is not bad at all, but of course, I already... I am going to register as a young entrepreneur, which is the last year they can give it to me [referring to the subsidy] and I am going to hire the workers. From the beginning, we have been self-managing assembly members, we have made decisions in assembly, the profits have been reinvested, we have done training... But there has come a time when the only one who has been there from the beginning is me, the only one who plans is me (Mónica, 39 years old. June 2015).

This type of neo-peasant project usually consists of between two and four people. Except in cases where the partners form a couple, the individuals usually reside in separate households. The fields are located next to the place of residence of one of the members, and there are usually more fields not too far away. These fields are usually planned according to production profitability criteria, as in the case of work with animals. In general, and in comparison with the other groups of neo-peasants, work time is more differentiated from leisure time. Farmland varies in number of hectares, but it is difficult to find farms of less than two hectares in the beginning, which tend to increase over time (but not more than five hectares).

Most start out with hardly any resources and motivated by an ideology (social or environmental); as time goes by, they approach the market in varying degrees. According to Mónica, at first, they rejected all kinds of subsidies, to feel more independent, but this led them to invest more hours of work. A turning point found in some farms is the training received, in many cases coming from a package of measures imposed under the acceptance of a subsidy, such as the Incorporation for Young Farmers offered by the European Union through the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. Through this subsidy, the neo-peasants learn tools typical of business schools (and a new vocabulary), such as how to write a business plan, which they can then use in the economy of their productive unit (see also how Calvário, 2017, related this to the case of the *Baserritarras* in the Basque Country). As we have argued in other studies (Escribano, Lobato, Molina, Lubbers, Valenzuela García, Pampalona, Revilla and Eugenia, 2014), this training is essential when analyzing the continuity of initiatives

in a context in which public policies are aimed at the growth of productive units and their insertion in the market. As we are seeing, market fluctuations and changing regulations are variable and can also modify the orientation of peasant units.

A common point in production units of this type is that they all have billing capacity, which does not mean that they are all legal or registered. Legal strategies are a key factor for the reproduction of this group: registering as an agricultural self-employed worker or under a general regime, registering and with it covering the rest of the members, are some of the strategies that we have found to be able to bill¹². These strategies come from the assessment of regulations as abusive or impossible to comply with. As Raúl recounted, now a retired goatherd who combines his pension with the income of a small herd, but who lived for more than 20 years from the herd of goats: "The reference we had was that, if you had fifty goats, if you wanted to declare them, and start a legalized activity, because you would have to have a hundred goats, to have the same income. The fifty goats were for investment and taxes and the other fifty goats were to have the same income" (Raúl, 60 years old. November 2017).

Legality and seals of approval, such as the organic production certificate, are important in cases where the sale is made outside the circles of trust and direct contact. As in the previous group, direct sales continue to be a component that ensures higher income for this group. However, and given the need of growth that small-scale farms face in order to form a business that is self-sustaining (as we have already commented due to the political context in which they are inserted), in the farms belonging to this group, it is not enough to sell directly to circles of trust. As one of the informants commented: "if you are going to sell further away, trust is no longer useful." It is due to this need of growth that neo-peasants who want to live exclusively from their product are forced to comply with legality and, mostly, opt for the certificates that guarantee their organic production, which means they spend more time on bureaucracy, or destinate more resources to pay a manager.

This group of neo-peasants are the ones who have noticed the effects of the economic crisis the most. First, high unemployment has prompted many city dwellers to change jobs. The countryside has been one of the places where these people have taken refuge. This has led to the perception in the neo-peasants of the saturation of the organic vegetable market niche, namely, that it is not possible to maintain or expand sales, since more

12. In this article, we will not talk about the strategies used by informants to evade regulations, at the request of the informants themselves. The strategy cited here does have permission to be cited.

and more producers are dedicating themselves to the same thing, and yet the number of consumers does not increase. This fact has forced some *pageses* (peasants) to change their career. This is the case of Cristian, who changed the production of vegetables for the production of honey in the north of Catalonia:

If you start growing vegetables here, you are going to have serious problems marketing, because there are a lot of people trying to do it. When I say a lot, I mean eight experiences. There are not that many either, but... There are two who have many years of experience, but the other six or seven have started like me, three years ago. So, there is like a market struggle, because the population sensitive to buying from the direct organic producer is not so big and they are all taken, as they say. So, you say: hey, why are we going to nudge each other more with our partners, who are also friends of ours (Cristian, 46 years old. June 2015).

In other cases, this perceived market saturation and the need to compete is what has forced some projects to focus on the market over self-subsistence. However, in the case of the neo-peasants, for ideological reasons, they have not wanted to cross this border by limiting their range of subsistence strategies. Another effect of the crisis has been the conversion of large producers into organic producers, in the words of Mónica, who started her project more than 15 years ago:

When our project started, there were very few of us... There was practically no one to do what we did, organic consumption was increasing, but production was not very high. Right now, there is a lot of production, a lot of competition, fair and unfair competition that I tell you, right? And then it's much more difficult to achieve the necessary sales to be viable, to serve the clients, the association members in this case, and I believe that the trend is also going to be a drop in prices. More and more large producers are reconverting, who have lower production costs because they already have resources that we small producers do not have (Mónica, 39 years old. June 2015).

In short, this third group of neo-peasant small-scale farmers, compared to the previous ones, is closer to the business model, planning and orienting their production for sale and reducing the number of people in charge of the production unit. Even among the people who make up the group, less resistance can be found toward the term, "entrepreneur," although they did not use it for their self-identification, especially in the groups that have started their activity as a result of the economic crisis in search for self-employment. We do not know if this better tolerance of the term is a result of the training courses received. In no case, having five

production units within the typology, we do not think that this information can be generalized.

The tensions of the neo-peasant in Catalonia

Through the different cases studied, we have been able to see how communities, projects, or businesses framed within the neo-peasant label deploy various subsistence strategies. Neo-peasants play with market exposure in order to survive public policies designed for a business model. When it comes to adopting a business model, the neo-peasant encounters its own morality and ideology, which acts as a constraint to its expansion. In some cases, these resistances are overcome by contracting enterprises within the social or solidarity economy that act as a bridge between the interests of the market and the ideology of subsistence, as in the case of ethical banking. In our field experience, all neo-peasants, including those in the third group, were reluctant to self-identify as entrepreneurs, at least exclusively. This reaction was mainly due to the relationship they found between the label of entrepreneur and its orientation toward a market economy, which would set aside criteria such as agroecology, environmental sustainability, or horizontal and participatory forms of organization.

If we take into account the distinction that we named at the beginning of the article between peasants (*campesinos*) and farmers (*agricultores*), such as (1) the structuring of economic life through the domestic group; (2) the lack of accounting for income and expenditures within the household and reciprocity relations; (3) the subordination of growth to domestic reproduction; (4) selective participation in the market; and (5) the separation from decision-making mechanisms from the general society, we can observe how in the case of the neo-peasant, many of the characteristics are blurred as production and sale are inserted within the logic of the market economy. This leads to a loss in decision-making about participation in the market economy and an atomization of the projects on which production and reproduction fall. However, and according to the operating definition cited in the methodology section, in their discourse, a claiming component of autonomy and self-subsistence can be distinguished (Calvário, 2017; Van Der Ploeg, 2010), which would distinguish them from other forms of agricultural businesses. Something that remains pending given the limitations of this article is to reflect on the relevance of using the term *peasant* within the label "neo-peasant" in cases in which initiatives orient all their production to the sale of their product for their subsistence, as a result of the pressures of the context.

From the field experience in Catalonia, it is possible to speak of a process of *re-peasantization* that alludes to a conversion of people with an urban lifestyle into new peasants, in the sense that Hilmi and Burmi (2015 and 2016) referred to when they identified the peasant way of life as a refuge in times of crisis. Apart from this process of *re-peasantization*, we have been able to identify two more trends in terms of economic practices. The first, as Mónica commented, is made up of companies that occupy the niche of the ecological market using all their productive infrastructure and against which the neo-peasants feel unable to compete. In this case, we could speak of a reconversion in the orientation of production. The second trend would be formed by neo-peasants who, tired of their precarious condition, choose to commercialize part of their production, seeking a more dignified subsistence that ensures better social conditions (such as better maternity leave, free time outside working hours, a less physically demanding job, or health and economic coverage in the event of an accident). As Van Der Ploeg (2008) comments, by adopting the peasant way of life, the neo-peasants also adopt their models of vulnerability and precariousness. As an anecdotal note, there is a moment in which the majority of the neo-peasants begin to record the hours they work and the performance of this work, in contrast to the classic theories of the peasantry, present for example in Mendras (1976), a tendency toward the commodification of peasant life.

When we study the family model of peasant farms, as already highlighted by Calvário (2017) among Basque neo-peasants, traditional family models are altered. Here, we could better use the concept of “symbolic family” (Grau Rebollo, Escribano Castaño, Valenzuela-Garcia and Lubbers, 2018) which refers to mutual support groups in which roles traditionally attributed to kinship are adopted. In the case of communities, these roles can be seen more clearly. In our experience, it is the neo-peasants who depend on the sale of their product for their subsistence who least share the traditional home-field-family union that we find in studies of the traditional peasantry.

One of the factors that prevents the disappearance of the neo-peasants is their self-exploitation (Chayanov, 1966). This self-exploitation, present especially in the neo-peasants who sell their surplus in the market, tends to be more tolerated in the first years of the project's life, trying to mitigate its effects as the peasants and farms age. This occurs in part by an inevitable comparison with the social conditions that are linked to other jobs outside the peasant condition. This self-exploitation, linked to solidarity and the social mechanisms of redistribution, already appeared in Scott (1976), to provide a social cohesion aimed at the subsistence of

the group. In this way, the peasants lost a certain personal autonomy in order to gain a certain subsistence security. However, when assessing the loss of personal autonomy in the neo-peasants, we find a lower tolerance to the dissolution of the "self" within the group. This could explain to some extent the continuous turnover of people within the projects that we have observed in the three types of neo-peasant small-scale farmers in Catalonia. In part, the neo-peasants have a greater number of options for their subsistence than the peasants, some coming from the State, others from the market, and others from the family (this time more related to blood). An interesting concept linked to this mobility is that of *downshif- fers*, named by Chhetri, Stimson and Western (2009) for the case of Australia. These are people who decide to leave their lifestyle for a simpler one in which they receive a lower salary, but have more control of their time. This is the case of the neo-peasants who have been working for companies and have chosen to leave these jobs to live off the land.

Conclusions

In this article, we have presented the case of the neo-peasants, a specific type of new peasant, in Catalonia. Through the qualitative study of 29 cases, we propose a classification of their diversity according to the orientation of their economy, partly guided by the values of the group, partly by the subsistence strategies used to guarantee their reproduction. This classification results in the division of the neo-peasant into three groups, presented from lowest to highest participation in the market economy. Each of the groups is made up of a different form of social organization and has different strategies at their disposal when it comes to ensuring their reproduction.

The effects of the social and economic crisis that began in 2008 in Spain have been felt in the three groups with different results. While in the first group it has meant an increase in the acceptance of the lifestyle of rural agroecological communities and projects, in the second and third ones, it has meant the saturation of the market niche for organic products and the increase in the problem of sales for neo-peasants.

If the neo-peasants we have studied in Catalonia are anything like the peasants described by Scott (1976), it is in their state of constant vulnerability. As we have found, this vulnerability depends, to a large extent, on the public policies that constrain and ignore them, in comparison with the farmers defined by Van Der Ploeg (2008) or Narotzky (2016), who, by orienting their production directly to the market, have a whole legal and economic structure that ensures their subsistence. In this limitation,

we find one of the keys that makes the literature and the subjects themselves question whether the peasants (and in our case the neo-peasants), have a life *worth living* (Hilmi and Burbi, 2015; Narotzky, 2016). Along the lines proposed by Calvário (2017), of recognizing the potential difficulties faced by the new peasants, in the case of Catalonia, questions about access to land, the regulation of production, and access to social protection similar to that of the other jobs are the most pressing problems.

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