

Articles

Peasants, Brokers and the State: Competition and Dividends in Familist Local Politics in Two Villages in the Northwest of Portugal*

To cite this article: Silva, M. C. (2019). Peasants, brokers and the state: Competition and dividends in familist local politics in two villages in the northwest of Portugal. *Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural*, 16(83). <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.cdr16-83.pbts>

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.cdr16-83.pbts>

Redalyc: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=11759286004>

Received: 15 October 2018 | Accepted: 20 January 2019 | Published: 10 June 2019

Abstract:

To explain the peasants 'conservatism' in Northwest of Portugal, as well the obstacles to rural local development, the author, in addition to underline elsewhere the specificity of the peasant economy and several strategies of rural dwellers (marriage, inheritance and migration), in this article stresses the relevance of the political factor, namely the dependency of most residents facing the old or new local patrons (caciques). These, in a strategy of reproduce the local power on a familist base, subject those now by moral imperative, now by the gift, financial and administrative favor, converting these favors in family benefits or economic and political dividends.

Keywords: peasantry, conservatisme, rural development, patronage, Portugal.

Campesinos, corredores y el Estado: Competencia y dividendos en la política local familiarista en dos pueblos del noroccidente de Portugal

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Resumen:

Para explicar el “conservatismo” de los campesinos en el noroccidente de Portugal, al igual que los obstáculos al desarrollo local rural, el autor enfatiza en este artículo –además de subrayar en otra parte la especificidad de la economía campesina y varias estrategias de los moradores rurales (matrimonio, herencia y migración)– la relevancia del factor político, es decir, la dependencia de la mayoría de los residentes que enfrentan a los viejos y nuevos patrones locales (caciques). Estos últimos en una estrategia de reproducir el poder local sobre una base familiarista someten a los primeros bien sea mediante imperativos morales o bien mediante dádivas, favores administrativos y financieros, convirtiendo esos favores en beneficios familiares o dividendos políticos y económicos.

Palabras clave: campesinado, conservatismo, desarrollo rural, patronazgo, Portugal.

Camponeses, corretores e Estado: Competência e dividendos na política local familiarista em dois povoados do noroeste de Portugal

Resumo:

Para explicar o “conservadorismo” dos camponeses no noroeste de Portugal, bem como os obstáculos ao desenvolvimento local rural, o autor enfatiza neste artigo –além de salientar em outro lugar a especificidade da economia camponesa e várias estratégias dos moradores rurais (casamento, herança e migração)– a relevância do fator político, ou seja, a dependência da maioria dos residentes que enfrentam os velhos e novos padrões locais (caciques). Estes últimos numa estratégia de reproduzir o poder local sobre uma base familiarista submetem aos primeiros bem seja mediante imperativos morais, bem mediante subornos, favores administrativos e financeiros, convertendo tais favores em prestações familiares ou dividendos políticos e económicos.

Palavras-chave: campesinato, conservadorismo, desenvolvimento rural, patronato, Portugal.

Introduction: Problem and theoretical discussion

The local rural development analysis requires a brief however relevant revisitation of various models contemplating from the liberal model, through the neoinstitutional model, territorialist model, up to (neo)marxist model, more focused on dependency and center-periphery theory, which would apply not only to a world level as well at national and regional levels. Rural development, in particular at the local level, is dependent on various factors, regarding a plurilevel analysis (Luhmann, 1970/1982; Bader & Benschop, 1988), involving not only the societal or socio-structural level, as well as the organizational and interactional level. On the other hand, development namely rural development is a concept under which of the various theories above mentioned confront each other, to which we will synthesize their core ideas (Long, 1977; Van der Ploeg, 1997; Silva & Cardoso, 2005).

The old liberal theory of growth fostered since Smith (1776/1956), passing by Ricardo (1817/1975), until the positivist thesis of growth and modernization theories elaborated since the fifties and sixties of the 20th century by Rostow's evolutionary model (1960/1974) – supported and justified by other social scientists as Parsons (1988) and Hoselitz (1982) –, assumes the law of supply and demand in a free market as the basis for wealth creation and as source of development and well-being. In this way, and focusing on rural development, traditional local communities must go through various stages of an allegedly necessary route since the primitive societies to the current 'abundance' European and North American societies. Therefore, they must acquire certain tendencies:

(i) to develop fundamental science and apply it to certain economic goals at the local level; (ii) to accept and introduce technological innovations; (iii) have a propensity to progress; (iv) highlight propensity to consumption; (v) manifest disposition to have children.

Facing the contradictions and inconsistencies of old liberal doctrine for various decades and the debacle and failure of (neo)liberal policy, namely at times of crisis (Aalbers, 2013), and inequalities between countries and regions, the neoinstitutional theory emerged, supported by several authors (Myrdal, 1970, 1979; Seers, 1969; Sen, 1999), especially in the post-second war. These authors, partly inspired by the Keynesianism, continued criticism to liberal currents and moved forward with proposals for indicative State intervention to correct the asymmetries caused by the market, to promote full employment, to fight against parasitic elites and boost citizen participation in order to overcome injustices and poverty situations at (inter)national and regional-local levels.

At the opposite side to liberalism, it is important to register that since the 19th century, the marxist approach (Marx, 1974) noting the failure of liberal theories and, later already in the 20th century, it registered the inability of reformist neoinstitutional approach, it advocates a radical transformation of the economy, of society, and of the State as the only way of overcoming social inequalities. In a critical and (neo)marxist line, it matters to highlight the theories of dependency (Prebisch, 1963; Furtado, 1961; Cardoso & Falleto, 1970; Marini, 1973/1991; Frank, 1976) and center-periphery theories (Wallerstein, 1974/1990), according to which the underdevelopment in the dependent or peripheral countries is the result of central countries' development, which structure social inequalities at national level, such as the spatial asymmetries at regional and local level, particularly in rural communities.

Faced with this external and macroeconomic determinism, the territorialist or local and regional development model (Stöhr, 1981; Bailly, 1999), based on the mobilization of endogenous resources, considers the need to potentiate the development from bottom to top. In this field we should underline some elements, particularly on the part of the agro-ecological model sustained by Sevilla-Guzmán (2003) or on the networkanalysis in rural development (Lowe, Murdoch & Ward, 1997). As point Reis (1994), Yruela and Guerrero (1994), Giménez (1996), Villasante (1998), Campanhola and Graziano da Silva (2000), Grammont and Martínez Valle (2009), Cardoso (2012), Van Assche and Hornidge (2015), this model is feasible since, in addition to the suitable demographic density, are present certain technical and economic requirements, collective mobilization, human expertise and institutional capacity for governance, internal management and negotiation with external entities.

One of the conditions of the success of development, especially present in the dominant currents, namely those of liberal and/or neoinstitutional nature, is the need to have brokers that mediated between the policy at the macroeconomic and institutional level and local rural collectivities. And, in this context, one of the polarised debates within the social sciences concerns the role of group leaders and local mediators, and their legitimacy and objectives in conducting information and organisational decision-making processes. The neoweberians such as Dahrendorf (1959) and Parkin (1979) and theory of the elites (Pareto, 1968) tend to overestimate the power and the role of organisations and leadership in the processes of participation and social mobilisation, namely in rural areas. This over-determination is refuted by representatives of the normative-functionalist theory, such as Smelser (1962), and is even more contested by historians and sociologists who have studied social movements, informal networks and patterns of group or collective (inter)action and mobilisation (Moore, 1966; Hobsbawm, 1974; Tilly, 1975, 1978; Skocpol, 1979).

The role of wealthy families in leadership and financial support, as far as collective expenses are concerned, particularly in the symbolic sphere, has been interpreted by some authors, such as Foster (1965, p. 305), as a means of compensation in favour of those who have less so as to restore a certain balance to the community and contribute to the normal functioning of the collective body and to the rural development of the collectivity.

Despite community pressure, such a naïve assumption implies that the generosity of the wealthiest is not stimulated by private interests and strategic objectives. It is possible to explain patronage relations by the key idea that asymmetries in the redistribution sphere are one of the bases of political power and social inequality.

There is a relation of reversibility and convertibility between the possession of material resources and nonmaterial resources (communication, prestige, power). Contrary to the position of Gilson (1977, pp. 168 ff.), I do not regard the opportunities for prestige and hierarchic progression as merely epiphenomenal expressions or subjective ideological moments resulting mechanically from the protagonists' place in the socioeconomic structure.

Following the approach of Bourdieu (1980, pp. 209 ff.), Bader & Benschop (1988, p. 167), patronage is a mechanism of formal or informal binding, psychosocial and sometimes physical coercion, a larger or smaller measure of clients' servility or dependency towards patrons as socially or politically influential persons. There are different types of patronage: patrimonial, statutory and administrative-political (Campbell, 1964; Boissevain, 1977).

Patronage can be analysed from different perspectives: (i) a structural-functionalist one with a psychosocial emphasis on trust (*fides*) and consensual reciprocity in the clientelistic exchanges (Parsons & White, 1961, pp. 90 ff.; Pitt-Rivers, 1961); (ii) a transactional or interactive one stressing the active and dynamic role of the actors in the dyadic or polyadic relations in patronage networks: Barth (1966, pp. 1 ff.), Boissevain (1966, pp. 22-44), Goffman (1974, pp. 7-85), Blok (1970, pp. 226 ff.); (iii) a political approach in which patron-client transactions are imbued by latent or manifest relations of asymmetry and domination – and of exploitation, according to some authors – of clients by patrons: Weber (1978), Weingrod (1968, pp. 380 ff., 1977), Wertheim (1969, pp. 8 ff.), Blok (1969, pp. 103 ff.), Gellner (1977, p. 1), Huizer (1969, pp. 411 ff.), Silverman (1965, 1970, p. 338), Alavi (1973, pp. 54-56), Scott (1977, pp. 21 ff.), Silva (1994).

The connection between familial relationships and local power is another relevant dimension that should be taken into account in the analysis of powers, especially the traditional ones or those in a stage of transition into the democratic-legal power. Familial or kinship relationships in Portugal, though more debilitated than before, were at the basis of the structure of local power, not only in the nineteenth century, as suggested by Descamps (1935, pp. 39-41) and Willems (1963, p. 68), but inclusively and at least until the 1980s, as sustained by Callier-Boisvert (1968), Goldey (1981) and Silva (1994).

Likewise, and contrary to Foster's idea (1965, p. 303) that peasants would be reluctant to accept competitiveness dynamics regarding political leadership, there are, as we see in our research, reports of fights due to interfamilial cleavages and different political affiliations. In this way, public as well as private events recurrently lead to the emergence of local political actors who undertake politics almost full-time. Since the positive re-qualification of some is perceived as resulting from the disqualification of others, it is precisely in the competition for control over public resources, and on significant moments of local public life, that the protagonists try to get ahead of their opponents. These include intra or interfamilial events such as weddings, funerals, and litigations, and public sphere matters such as infrastructural improvements, competition over irrigation water or possession of a piece of property, festive celebrations, Episcopal visits, the arrival or departure of a clergyman and, above all, electoral disputes.

In the rural collectives, families of middle-rich peasants, some tradesmen and construction foremen – whose shops and workshops, functioning as places of recruitment of workmanship or holding a central position in the village for passers-by – constitute, as stressed by Boissevain (1978, pp. 155 ff.), aggregating poles in the creation of local groups which would then transmit messages of information and mediation to the exterior.

As the institutionalisation of power was tenuous, deficient or even absent, those holding and those competing for the same positions were forced to resort, as Bourdieu (1980, p. 217) claims, to 'elementary ways of domination' (Bader, 1991, pp. 254 ff.). To captivate, entangle or take hold of each dependent family demanded constant, daily and personalised devotion. It was therefore not enough to possess property and money to become a broker. The role of a mediator, apart from requiring other resources, such as availability, time, energy and shrewdness, was part of a business whose dividends, as a rule, became palpable only in the medium and long run. In addition, the mediators, in the last decennia, can remove more benefits because they are interconnected and imbued by flows and networks not only at a local-regional level, but also nationally and internationally (Rau, 2012;

Stenbacka, 2012; Camarero, Sampedro & Oliva, 2012; Dubois, Copus & Hedström, 2012; Hedberg & do Carmo, 2012; Silva, 2013).

Hypothesis of work, methods and techniques of investigation

Having already made the introduction, established the problem and exposed the various theoretical positions on the object and on the problem, I will launch a work hypothesis and I will focus on the path and the various methods and techniques applied in the two villages under research.

Empirical data collected by participant observation, interviews and document analysis about two villages situated in the Northwest of Portugal – Lindoso in Ponte da Barca and Aguiar in Barcelos– show that the absence of control or participation by most of its inhabitants allows mediators or group leaders, in a context of patronage relations, to exploit public and organisations' resources for personal or family gains. Thus, most of the residents do not have access to information, do not participate, much less decide on the main issues of their respective communities, especially because there is, by social group, inequality in access and control of various resources: economic, social, informational, educational, cultural and political. According to the aforementioned functionalist thesis, there would be a certain balance and reciprocal compensation between those who have more resources and who are willing to donate some goods or provide favors to the most needy, receiving in return symbolic compensation by these, expressed in prestige recognition, in the assent to local power of his 'benefactor' and, eventually, in the electoral support to the party of the political mediator. Now, contrary to the idea that there would be a balance or reciprocal compensation between material donation and symbolic compensation, my work hypothesis holds that social inequality and power resources admits a failure to fulfil the referred prerequisites of information, participation and decision capacity and, consequently, this failure contradicts the rhetoric objectives proclaimed by functional-liberal approach about the 'common good' and 'community development'.

Being of a more qualitative study in the two villages in the northwest of Portugal, the information about the identities and social differentiations, the processes of interaction between the residents and the representatives of local and municipal authorities, as well as the dynamics and obstacles to local rural development, could not be captured from a quantitative statistics or surveys studies. It was necessary to roll up the sleeves for the qualitative methods and, in particular, for implementing a field work experience with participant observation for about ten months using such traditional anthropological instruments, widely proven and appropriate to unveil the actors experiences, meanings and motivations, a perspective that is convergent with the weberian sociological method of understanding (*verstehen*), as the first phase to access a causal explanation (*erklaren*) (Weber, 1978).

The fieldwork and participant observation framework in the economic, social and cultural-political spheres (for example, the works in the field, the acquaintanceship in the grocery and coffee stores, the public events, the church rituals such as Sunday masses, the parties, and the local, municipal and national elections), as it was mainly in the dwellers' houses that semi-structured interviews were conducted on certain issues relating to social differentiations and (re)classifications, to the strategies of survival and social improvement, to inter-family conflicts and forms of local power exercise and their dividends, as well as participation (or not) processes in local rural development by the residents. On the other hand, before, during and above all after the fieldwork and the application of semi-structured interviews, other tools such as documentary research were also used, collected not only in the village, but above all in municipal bodies as the finance's office and court proceedings. The consulted processes were mainly

from the court of Barcelos (TB) and Ponte da Barca (TPB), as well as orphanological inventories, respectively in Aguiar and Lindoso (IOA/IOL), the proceedings of the Municipalities of Barcelos and Ponte da Barca (AB/APB) and of the parish councils of Aguiar and Lindoso (AJA/AJL), the Books of Conciliations and non-Conciliations in Aguiar (LCNC), the Parish Memoirs of Lindoso (MPL), the Book of Taxes (Décimas) in Aguiar (LDA) and the Book of Sisas in Aguiar (LSA) were also consulted.

Given that the villages do not constitute static and closed realities but local historical configurations, we seek to highlight in a diachronic perspective the permanences and the changes carried out by various internal and external social actors, to analyze the social relations between them, their convergences and divergences, conflicts and (dis)advantages or dividends around the resources control, and what was their role (or not) in the development of their communities.

Analysis of results

Taking into account the discussion around development, namely rural at local level and considering the conditions and/or obstacles to development, in particular the economic, cultural and political factors, it is now necessary to give account of the main research results based on documentary analysis and other qualitative-order instruments mentioned above.

Competences, favours and authorities

At least until the 1960s, the parishes of Lindoso and Aguiar, which as a rule were under the traditional hold of the priest, constituted small solid 'states' within the state itself. Maintaining the orientation of the inhabitants towards the interior of the village and circumscribing the various client-players to their respective places, namely until the emigration wave to Europe which started around 1965, meant that the patrons and mediators retained their oligopolistic positions of reference. Furthermore, in the eventuality that the inhabitants did not abide by the imposed rules, even resisted or tried to invert the statu quo, they would be the object of retaliation, denouncement or fiscal and political control, and even subject to legal action, namely mortgage executions.¹ In a system of rigid hierarchical positions in which social mobility was reduced and the access mechanisms were not based on elective methods, the command of the village was bound to a restricted circle of families, forming, in turn, cliques based on kinship solidarities and deferential relations.

Local political competition took its place within the established system during the corporatist 'New State' regime, particularly in the public sphere. Contrary the positions of Riegelhaupt (1979, pp. 517, 520), Cutileiro (1977, p. 298), and Bennema (1992, p. 187), the functions of the local mediators were articulated with the powers of the city council's and the state's hierarchy², close to which the patrons intervened, pressured or manipulated, often through the usual offerings of wine, a lamb or a prime cut of pork. As verified in similar processes in Spain (Christian, 1972, p. 39), the protagonists of the traditional authority, while co-opted or designated by the city council and circumscribed to their local domain, held between 1850 and 1940 some powers in the sense that their advice and actions worked as the last link of the ecclesiastic, scholarly, administrative-political and police institutions respectively³. Besides negotiating the internal order, judging disputes and, eventually, carrying out local justice (for example, beatings in cases of theft), they monopolised the communication links with the town hall and bank institutions and acted as semi-legitimate mini-guardians of the established macro-political order.

With repercussions in the private sphere, the patrons and mediators would tend either to monopolise resources for their own benefit, or to act as mediators for the allied families and dependents on a diverse range of transactions, sinecures and arrangements in the police and administrative labyrinth. From a book of certificates from the parish council of Lindoso written between 1946 and 1969, a high percentage of administrative certificates can be verified concerning mostly marriages, and also, at a considerable rate of 48 percent, family support, survival or social and medical assistance. Besides these favours, others must be mentioned, which are generally not registered, such as endeavours to cancel fines, to obtain relief from military duty, to arrange for jobs or legal representation for emigrants, to obtain official declarations or simply the parish council's signature and stamp for 'poverty declarations'. Patrons filled in documents and, especially, bulletins for sickness and old age benefits by the Casa do Povo; they provided information regarding legal, pseudo-touristic or even clandestine emigration processes, as well as the concession of loans (cf. AJL: 22 March 1917; AJA and AJL until 1985).

The secularisation process, the establishment of a democratic system and the multi-party system in 1974 allowed for the emergence of a certain self-assertion of the few families opposing the theocratic Salazar regime. This forced the traditionally dominant patrons to take the competition of new political players into account. Patronage relations and, in particular, fights between the caciques thus became diversified and revolved not only around the contradiction of the sacred versus the profane and its respective (dis)continuity of ecclesiastic versus civil power, but mainly around the political partisanship as the central axis of the council-state channels. The interests of the domestic groups which were relatively well-off and self-sufficient did not always coincide with those of the underprivileged groups, towards which the parties did not express a sense of communitarian belonging:

The party system is right at the government level, but not at the parish level. The parties fish the elements who better adapt themselves to their means and objectives, but divide us and do not look after our interests [Celso, peasant].

Observation shows that it is mostly during elections, especially those for the local autarchy, that family resentments and past controversies are revived, and old or new political loyalties manifest themselves, and the families compete against each other in the struggle for control of local power through door-to-door visits.

The creation of family blocks supporting a cacique is built slowly, from small 'bricks' placed in strategic points, alongside the resources with which political players must start or lay their hands on in order to make their actions efficient. Be it in Ponte da Barca or in Barcelos, the strategies of the local individualities and caciques become, in turn, entangled in the municipal politicians' games of influence, whose ramifications often originate in the most preponderant families (landowners, tradesmen and literate people, in particular doctors and lawyers) from the village or town, or from the neighbouring parishes. These, as a rule, are also family-based and despite the political jolts of the revolution on 25 April 1974, they did not succumb, and some have even dominated municipal political life until today.

Each political party operates at a local level through some families or key figures. It is, however, the political parties who are often used in the strategies of some influential families, motivated by underlying economy and prestige-related interests, even if it required changing party affiliation or becoming an 'independent' political actor.

Lindoso

Before the first Republic was established in 1910, the local civil power in Lindoso, *grosso modo*, had been fused with the ecclesiastic, though still connected mostly to the interests of middle peasants. The resignation of the monarchic parish priest Domingues, the disqualification of his direct supporters and the appearance of some new protagonists within the local political context are evidence that the implementation of the first Republic catalysed

breaches and intensified internal struggles in the village (AJL: 15 November 1910, 17 September 1911, 5 November 1911, 16 February 1913).

In the 1920s, the leaders of the parish councils met with strong opposition, not only when they claimed the administration of the parochial residence, but especially when they decided to sell the timber from the forest of Lindoso. This caused embargo threats, the annulment of the council election and also of a bill of sale as consequence of a legal plea. In addition, the then president of the council received a death threat with a reminder that one of his grandparents, who had also been president of the council, had been murdered with a gunshot for a similar motive.

In the successive reassignment of local leading posts (particularly the parish councillors and the regedor, who was a kind of police authority), between 1941 and 1974, and notwithstanding the rivalries between villages, a limited number of peasant families and their rivals⁴ shared or took turns in power, and it is thus possible to verify a relative continuity in Lindoso, especially during the 'New State' regime. In the wake of dictator Caetano's political 'spring' after 1968, the arrival of a new mayor in Ponte da Barca was associated with this internal contestation and had different repercussions on interfamilial litigations (Cf. AJL: 10 January 1972, 15 February 1972).

The new post-revolution multi-party context provoked the appearance of new rival protagonists in the parish leadership, particularly former emigrants. Trying to sustain their familial positions through ecclesiastic or party affiliations, these men formed two opposite groups in a sort of open war: one for the continuation and the other for the resignation of the priest, concerning the financial administration of St. Magdalene's Chapel. One, supported mainly by the families, was opposed to the land expropriations at a low price by the state electricity firm EDP, which was then starting the construction of a dam; the other group was interested in the jobs to be created at the dam and capitulated in face of the company's interests – namely the local council president, Paulo, who was then accused of being a 'robber' and 'corrupt' in a document signed by forty-two residents: 'We are in this struggle [...] for dignity and for the loyalty of our people against the robbery of our President of the Council.'

Aguiar

In Aguiar, the signatures in the parish council minutes and other documents lead us to conclude that, between 1925 and 1974, the families with a seat in the local authorities were, apart from the parish priest, predominantly middle peasants, grocers, a moneylender and a successful emigrant.

Even after the April Revolution, the local civil and ecclesiastic powers were still maintaining a relatively collaborative coexistence, though the emerging and continued presence of a minority opposition inhibited and moderated the cleric's public political influence. Once again, it would be Donato, the emerging broker, who had been appointed by his peers in 1976 and took the initiative of assembling the will, effort and money of residents and emigrants to construct a community centre on allegedly parochial land. He put this in practice first in collaboration with Priest Vaz, and afterwards with Priest Bento Campela (his cousin and landlord).

However, Donato's dominion was not absolute, and he was thereby obliged to consider the strategies and tactics not only of his party's competitor, but also of other confirmed or potential rivals. These included militants of other parties from modest families or recently-promoted farmers: a very few for the pro-communist APU/CDU, and many more for the Socialist Party (PS).

Unexpected events such as Priest Campela's fatal accident as well as Donato's opposition to ecclesiastic conservatism supported by some municipal leaders kept the community centre out of the church's power. He had also organised a movement in favour of Priest Mateus's resignation (successor of Priest Campela), with the support of some renowned priests from the neighbourhood, but without success.

Later in 1993 the new priest Lambeta registered the community centre as church property in a registry office in the neighbour municipality of Esposende. Since the register was not announced in Barcelos and no one had opposed it, the locals pressed Donato to sue the church in court, responsible for this private usurpation. The parish was then divided in two. Despite the protests in front of the Episcopal building, Donato's supporters lost the case. As a result of this defeat, the inhabitants from Aguiar lost faith in justice, which they said had been 'bought' by the church.

The dependants: minimal 'safety'

What have been the attitudes of the artisans, poor peasants and others' dependants regarding their dependence on patrons and local caciques nowadays?

Although exceptionally, some journeymen reacted against their patrons, namely against their agrarian or animal properties already in the nineteenth century, such as the refusal to pay compensation for the death of a cow and for the mistreatment of a pig that died three days later and the demand for the payment of salaries (cf. LCNC L10: 93, 14 August 1837; LCNC L10: 102, 1 December 1837; LCNC L10: 132v-133v, 9 March 1838). However, the way poor people usually behaved was controlled and sanctioned within the scope of the village's authority. The economic and mainly cultural inequalities excluded the poorest from equal access to information and social participation, which according to Bourdieu (1979, p. 549), led to a process of 'de-cognition' and a feeling of self-exclusion regarding local, regional and even national political matters. Though the case is not as extreme as in servitude, we can relate to a certain extent to Tönnies's thesis that a poor man will support or vote for his 'master's' party. Otherwise, he will suffer retaliations with fatal consequences for his lifestyle, property and even physical security, as proven for Corsica by Ravis-Giordani (1976, pp. 175 ff.). In this context of unequal power relations (Shucksmith, 2012), the attitudes of the resident clients – namely their deference, compliance, passive distance, and absence or abstention as a way of 'minimizing their vulnerability' (Newby, 1975; Waterbury, 1977, p. 337) or to grant 'minimal safety' (Scott, 1985, 1990) – were both logical and understandable. These resulted from biographical experience and habitus, a survival instinct and a lack of choice. It can therefore be said that the poorer, humbler and more powerless the residents, the more they would rely on their generous employer-patrons' good will in order to work, rent lands, ask for cattle or agricultural implements (ploughs, ox carts), deal with emergencies (illness, a poor crop, need for financial or social assistance) or, as observed also in Galicia by Tolosana (1979, p. 58) align with the patron in case of legal disputes in order to 'avoid any responsibility and to defend those who employed them'.⁵ As far as the relations between the two classes were concerned, the economically weaker group must express their gratitude through 'free labour', as the journeyman Moreira stated:

As we had no money and no jobs, we had to keep our mouths shut and our heads bowed ...when a farmer killed a pig, he would sometimes give us a piece of fat meat, but then we had to be at his disposal to work in his house...

As the poorest day labourers, peasants and especially tenants were compellingly dependent upon well-off families within the villages, they had to submit, hide their innermost feelings and resentments, and avoid speaking unfavourably or critically about their patrons in order to avoid being ostracised or suffering retaliations. This behaviour is often expressed in the popular aphorism heard in Aguiar: 'In the land of the wolves, one must howl like them'.

The poorest dwellers must thus avoid taking a stand on the rivalries between leading families running for leadership. They must often simulate a respectful subservience, carry information or their neighbours' home secrets (namely those of other employer families), present a beaming satisfaction at work and agree to their patrons' desires, namely sexual ones, in order to remain in their favour and, therefore, keep a job or land on lease. They

must thus show political loyalty – not always unconditionally – to their patrons, voting for the current leaders or, secretly, for the opposition.

The only way to limit or defuse the risks innate to their precarious existence was to support one of their protectors and, preferably, multiply their number. These attitudes were not mere expressions of ‘false consciousness’, but part of a calculated strategy with a view to gain minimal support from well-off inhabitants. Nonetheless, this situation was tolerable, as the clients were aware that the local wealthy peasants, according to the expectations of moral standards, would not let them starve. Otherwise, from what we were able to conclude from the testimonies of three dwellers from Lindoso and six from Aguiar, they would have no scruples about transgressing those moral boundaries and secretly stealing agricultural products at night, which were essential for their survival: ‘We had to steal because there was so much poverty at the time’.

In order to limit their dependency on the wealthier and to avoid any grudges or even retaliation, the peasant families in debt had to deal with their own problems secretly, while they displayed an intact façade in front of their mediators and creditors. They thus intended to hide economic weaknesses and consequently averted the declaration of insolvency and the consequent mortgaging of their assets, avoiding collusions or speculations of potential buyers or local money-lenders, to whom debtors would owe endless obligations: gifts and dinners, availability to testify in court,⁶ to offer their assets at a preferential price, and so on.

The progressive changes in this configuration, which led to the clients holding a larger negotiating ability in many different aspects (wages, renting, administrative compensation), were brought about during the migration waves and the implementation of the multi-party system. These factors would make social and political control even more precarious, destabilising the balance held by traditional authorities and slackening the ties of the (almost) organic dependency of the poor, as stated, for example, by Firmino, a client of the Aguiar’s mediator Donato: ‘If you’re not able to grant me my retirement, I’ll stop voting for your party’.

With the exception of a small number of dependants that had, in the past, dared to take the initiative or publicly declared to be against the locally dominant party or group, the opposition was manned by (the descendants of) the families of small peasants, grocers, artisans and migrants, who had not only outside contacts, but also some educational resources. Nevertheless, only with the appearance of survival resources outside the village and the multiplication of alternative political parties, is it possible to notice tentative critical voices, namely by two former day labourers from Lindoso and six from Aguiar. These day labourers had lost respect for their patrons and were now publicly – i.e. before the opposition representatives – denouncing the pressure they had been under: ‘You have to try to control this [situation] the right way, because when my father voted, Donato whispered to him to vote for the PSD’ (Correia, day labourer). This expressive challenge of the loss of respect toward the dominant traditional cacique and the public threat to support another alternative mediator, and eventually to vote for a different party was one of the first signs of the gradual loss of influence and local prestige of the mediator Donato.

Moreover, if in the past it was unusual for a dependant (whether one in debt or a tenant) to question the execution of any oral contract, with this new conjuncture some dependent families managed to get these relations inverted, or at least renegotiated.

In short, given the strong constraints and local dependencies and the absence of organization of the most deprived of resources, this process was, in addition to being delayed, subject to multiple vicissitudes and obstacles, because it was an unequal relationship of forces lived in dyadic terms. With access to new resources obtained outside the village, the formation of contacts outside the village (glocals) and the emergence of alternative local mediators propitiated by the plural democratic system, the apparent submission and correlative adaptive tactics began, in the 80s and especially in the 90s, to be less expressive, giving rise to challenges and confrontations by dependent actors before their traditional mediators and chiefs (caciques).

‘Serving’ to be served: the dividends

Because of their position as managers of public matters and means, ecclesiastical and civil patrons and mediators could control the community, prevent losses and collect symbolic and material benefits for themselves, their allies and subordinates and also hold more symbolic and economic resources.

Such mechanisms had been known, for example, in the municipality of Barcelos for a long time (Capela, 1989, pp. 131-133): those who held local power in Lindoso and Aguiar, using the town hall’s channels of power and communication openly or secretly, and exercising techniques of manipulation and influence to grant minor favours, had obtained personal or familial benefits rendered in money, prestige and power. The belief that individuals who took initiative, ran for or were invested in public offices did so in order to look after their private interests still lingers in the memory of many inhabitants, though this conviction only comes to light in familial confidences or at times of interfamilial quarrels or local turmoil. Even though inhabitants assess such favours and partialities as being positive or negative according to their social rank, as a rule they find them ‘understandable’ or ‘usual’, albeit reprehensible. The minutes of the parish council of Aguiar and, mainly, of Lindoso, mention the accusations of members and promoters of newly-installed parish councils that the former members had ‘embezzled’ money and taken or allowed someone to take possession of parish resources.⁷

The resources within the reach of the priest, members of the parish council or rich families throughout the eighteenth and especially nineteenth and twentieth centuries ranged from control over leading political positions, which could be seized for free or obtained at a ‘friendly price’, over chapels and other worship products (donations, contributions), wastelands and water-lines, to the management of municipal, state or community funds (cf. MPL: II March 1758, 666; LDA 1821: 13-17v; and LSA M34, 1826: 17).

Along with the rhetoric of service and dedication, parish priests, specifically those from Lindoso and Aguiar, were generally rather demanding, not only as far as payment for religious services was concerned (such as christenings, weddings, funerals and sermons or confessions – which were paid separately), but also in regard to the annual collection of the ecclesiastical tribute known as *côngrua* (*congrua portio*), a compensation for their status and practice of symbolical-pastoral functions. Apart from this yearly income, the priest’s income included the traditional Easter donations and the products of the rented parochial land.

The church was also the main beneficiary of a considerable portion of exceptional earnings proceeding from the sale of communal goods. In 1923, for instance, the revenue from the sale of timber from the woods of Lindoso was spent on the completion of three cemeteries and their iron gates as well as on repairs of the church and parochial house (AJL: 21 January 1923). The occupation of wastelands by well-endowed families and individuals well-placed in the hierarchy of the village – first without permission or control and afterwards with the connivance of the municipality – provides another example of the exploitation performed by certain families in tune with municipal interests because of increasing tax revenues. Thus, in the name of the progress of agriculture, different interests joined forces: those of the petitioners and those of the oligarchic or administrative urban classes operating in the town hall.

In Lindoso, throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, several processes of wasteland fencing, and private appropriation and state expropriation were registered in the minutes of the parish council and some were considered ‘illegal’ (AJL: 21 January 1923; 4 February 1923). During the ‘New State’ regime, namely between the 1940s and 1950s, the holders of political-administrative posts like the grocers Urbano and Raposo also manipulated the management, appropriation and fencing of wastelands, as well as the reciprocal concession of privileged cemetery plots for family vaults.

Notwithstanding the rhetorical statement that ‘the mission of the parish council is to defend the interests of all parishioners and not those of the parish council and its friends’ (AJL: 20 February 1955) and the fulfilment of legal

procedures (the member of the parish council, i.e. the petitioner of the benefit, would withdraw from the meeting), we find cases of a suspicious conveyance of public resources carried out by the parish council: for example, a plot for a tomb of one member, the granting of wasteland to another – the grocer – because ‘it leads nowhere and is not detrimental to others’ (AJL: 17 May 1959).

In Aguiar too, and despite the wasteland distribution made in 1913-14, the appropriation of these lands went on under the ‘New State’ regime, directly and indirectly, as a dispute concerning the nature and destination of already assigned but not registered land. The alienation of some of the last plots of communal land occurred in the 1970s in favour of returned emigrants or the treasurer of the parish council himself, the preferential resident due to his possession of it for over twenty years regarding his ‘industrial’ and commercial activities. Given the passiveness of the parish council, it is even more remarkable how the parish priest of Aguiar, Priest Vaz, decided to sell the most important monument in Aguiar – a stone cross dating from 1621 – to a distinguished foreign family without previously consulting the population. He also alienated parish property, such as statues of saints and valuable ornaments.

In short, despite the rhetoric about the relevance of local power holders to the local rural development, the established practices in both villages not only do correspond to the speeches, as they are located in the antipodes of these.

Discussion of results

The liberal assumptions were not confirmed, since the mediators, instead of promoting the development of the community, instrumentalized the exercise of positions at local level or their social and political influence for their own benefit, such as it was verified in the two studied villages over decades. On the other hand, the context of the dictatorial regime did not allow a local policy driven by a neoinstitutional and reformist perspective, translated in a political direction guided by democratic principles and concerns of social justice and the promoter of participation of local populations. Consequently, a dynamic mobilization of people and resources was not possible in the light of the territorialist model, since, in addition to not being allowed any associative project from the community, devoid of political autonomy, there was no adequate technical and economic resources, institutional and human capacity to manage local social destinations, a situation aggravated by the intertwined patronage relations and economic and political constraints at (inter)national level.

It is, as it were, confirmed the thesis of dependence of the local communities in relation to the municipal power and both faced the centralized power in an authoritarian and dictatorial way, more interested in maintaining the statu quo than in any strategy of local rural development. Indeed, thanks to municipal contracts or other arrangements, officeholders obtained some dividends that are visible in both communities in different periods and public contexts: among others, the avoidance of expropriations for the laying of new roads; the benefit from infrastructural improvements that led to or bordered on their houses and properties, or those of their relatives and friends; the access to jobs for them and their relatives and friends; the granting of favours to opponents in order to ‘soften’ them.

It was, however, among the social actors residing at the village’s perimeter that the most valuable dividends of bureaucratic favours circulated, particularly having at hand a large contingent of wilful extra-familial labour force during sowing and harvest time. These asymmetric relations did not only create agricultural surpluses, but also partially liberated the family work force, thus making it possible for the children of patrons and mediators to go to school or to have a non-agrarian job.

Another relevant aspect of the parish council's policy consisted (and in a way still does) in transferring personal hostilities or family rivalries to the political scene, thereby even using their power to deliberately penalise adversaries, restrain their political initiative or veto their rights and perks: for instance, a project to build an athletic complex, to stop an opponent from acquiring a property. Despite the persistence of the conjunction of the leaders' familial strategies with partisan strategies, certain manipulation plans, which were possible in a context of local power monopolisation especially during the 'New State' regime, became more and more difficult and intolerable due to the inconvenient presence of local opposition and their overt or veiled criticism.

Conclusion

The parish council's minutes, the oral references and stories narrated especially by the elderly as well as the study of the social composition of local religious and political positions lead us to conclude that the most prominent positions were taken by those families which were better endowed: those holding land, money, communication, prestige or other resources. However insignificant the resources circumscribed to the public sphere were, the only way to participate in their management was to have or to conquer a certain status in the local political hierarchy. This goal implied a competitive struggle that comprehended all political contexts.

The evolution of the local political history shows how competing local political brokers tried to use the ecclesiastical authority in their internal disputes in order to serve their dominion purposes, given its fundamental importance in controlling the consciences of most residents. There was a strategy of 'keeping the priest under your control' behind the backstage manipulation carried out by the most influential families. All strategies were admissible, according to the circumstances and to the power relations, from plain and simple adulation or rendering of services, to confrontations, sometimes violent ones, particularly when other methods of persuasion or coalition attempts had failed.

With the new figures as former seminarians and students and with the huge wave of emigrants that left the region in the 1960s and the municipal remodelling during the final stage of the 'New State' regime, the traditional power relations underwent a slight transformation and the old middle and wealthy farmers' families began to lose their subordination powers and negotiation skills to poorer families. Politically, this social phenomenon would lead to a relative decline of the prestige of those holding local power and, correlatively, to a light secularisation and reattribution of some power positions.

With a lack of adequate means of participating in the republica and of supervising officeholders, having resources at one's disposal as well as multiplying influence networks and contacts leads one to stray from one's supposedly collective goals. Under these circumstances, the broker can eventually credit, convert or accumulate economic, communicative and other investments into personal or familial advantages, either material or political-symbolic. However, with the emergence of dissident voices, by internal or external processes, despite the persistence of forms of control in favor of those with most resources, there has been some rebalancing in the correlation of forces and a more pluralistic political environment in terms of democratic expression, geared not only to local issues but also to regional, national and sometimes international policies.

Abbreviations

AB: Actas da Câmara de Barcelos (Barcelos council minutes)

AJA: Actas da Junta de Aguiar (minutes of the parish council of Aguiar)
 AJL: Actas da Junta de Lindoso (minutes of the parish council of Lindoso)
 APU/CDU: Aliança Povo Unido/ Coligação Democrática Unida (United People's Alliance/ United Democratic Coalition)
 EDP: Electricidade de Portugal (Electricity of Portugal)
 IOL: Inventário Orfanológico (inventory of orphans, Lindoso)
 LCNC: Livro de Conciliações e não-Conciliações (book of conciliations and non-conciliations, Aguiar)
 LDA: Livro de Décimas (book of Tithes), Aguiar.
 LSA: Livro de Sisas (book of conveyance taxes), Aguiar
 MPL: Memórias Paroquiais de Lindoso (parish memories of Lindoso) in *Dicionário Geográfico*, Câmara de Viana, vol. XX, pp. 89, 665-72, Lisbon, Torre do Tombo
 PSD: Partido Social Democrata (Social Democratic Party)
 PS: Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)
 TB: Tribunal de Barcelos, Processos Judiciais (Barcelos Court, Judicial Processes)

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Notes

* Artículo de investigación.

- 1 Among other forms of retaliation, there was denouncement if one had not declared his wine for sale (manifesto do vinho), obtained a permit to own a dog, a lighter, a bicycle, a motorcycle or to rebuild a house or additions. It could cause the eviction of poor peasants.
- 2 During the dictatorial 'New State' regime, there was an increase in the dependencies of the parish councils and mostly of the regency who had to inform and denounce the deviant. For example, the chief of Lindoso wrote on 27 July 1971 that 'António P.G. is an incorrigible man, hasn't had fixed whereabouts for a long time and his location is unknown' (IOL P2/72 M5, 29 L18: 192).
- 3 Cf. AJL: 15 January 1911, 6 September 1912, and 6 April 1922; AB: 17 April 1941. Given the religious-political control under the 'New State' regime and despite the rural origin of several teachers and, eventually, their strategies of cultural revalorisation of the rural, these could hardly constitute an alternative, interfering, as a rule, as little as possible with the local powers.
- 4 For example, the reciprocal accusations and insults about the school building in 1959 and mainly the dispute between the Ferraz and the Milheiro families about the church restoration place is particularly worthy of being mentioned, since it was a parish with two churches. The Episcopal decision was influenced by the persuasive 'argument' of a 220,000 escudos (#1,097.36) gift by the Ferraz family and recognised by the council, then presided over by their opponent Milheiro (AJL: 15 November 1959). In addition to these internal vendettas between residents, a convergent rivalry would arise again whenever an intruder or a new contestant from a lower class gained a prominent position (AJL: 14 May 1967).
- 5 TB M572 L10: 37v, 1899-1903. In relation to these cases, it should be mentioned that, along with the testimony of some farmers, the labourers and artisans would also testify on their protectors' behalf. For instance, TB M770: 1873; TB M891: 9 April 1875; TB M588: 25 July 1890; TB M499: 6, 16, 1935, and M253: 1937; TB P634, M543, L10: 1948; TB P203, M512, L6: 205, 21 April 1938; TB P1039, M180, L2: 3, 11 April 1938; TB P16, M499, L6: 17, 28 October 1935; TB P387, M539: 19 April 1947; TB P51, L6: 107, 24 July 1962.
- 6 The recruitment techniques and the kind of witnesses the author of the complaint or the defendant tried to mobilise to testify for them are quite fascinating. Despite this clandestine effort to withdraw or simply discourage the prosecution witnesses by dissuading and seducing them with higher earnings, they would also select witnesses according to their economic means, age, or prestige.
- 7 For example, the pro-republican parish councils accused the pro-monarchic parish councils of 1890 to 1910 of not presenting receipts for expenses or earnings (AJL: 16 February 1913); later cases are AJL: 28 April 1963; AJL: 3 January 1964; and especially AJL: 15 January 1972).

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