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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TERRITORIAL IDENTITY AND GRASSROOTS ECONOMIC ACTIVISM The politicization of farmers' mobilizations in the French Basque Country

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ABSTRACT: The French Basque Country (FBC) represents an emblematic case of the politicization of local development through grassroots economic activism. These mobilizations are particularly obvious in the agricultural sector. Based on a qualitative research on small farmers' organizations and short food circuits, this article shows that Basque farmers' mobilizations constitute a case of a dual politicization of small-scale farming and territorial identity. This process has gone through two phases: the first period (1970-2000) was characterized by the politicization of local productive systems. Throughout the decade 2000-2010, a new mode of grassroots economic activism emerged, signalled by new alliances between producers and consumers, and by an increasing ideological pluralism. Two case studies illustrate these developments. The first relates to a case of *explicit politicization* with the controversy around the foundation in 2005 of an alternative Basque Chamber of Agriculture. The second case study is devoted to the development of short food circuits in the FBC, considered here as a case of *implicit politicization* of the encounter between productive and consumption circuits. Both cases illustrate the politicization of new economic social movements, and the constant overlapping of sectoral and territorial claims in the Basque territory.

KEYWORDS: French Basque Country, short food circuits, small farmers' movement, territorial identity, social economy

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1. Introduction.

Grassroots economic activism, as 'positive protests' (Andretta and Guidi 2014), represents one of the organizational and institutional responses which these protest movements direct towards the dominant capitalist model by occupying an alternative economic field. The experiments which form part of this field adopt objectives of general interest by means of organizational formulae which are by nature private but frequently based on cooperative, mutualist or associative governance. Less strident than occupations of public spaces, these experiments nonetheless constitute social mobilizations and ways of politicizing the economy. The French Basque Country (FBC)¹ offers an illustration of a process whereby the economy becomes politicized. Remarkable for a territory of such reduced size (290,000 inhabitants inhabiting 2967 km²), these economic mobilizations have found expression in sectors as diverse as fair trade, workers' cooperatives, ethical finance, short distribution channels and complementary currencies.

These mobilizations are particularly visible in small-scale farming, the sector on which this article will concentrate. This focus is justified for three reasons: (a) at the French scale, the Basque area, despite a continuous decline, is characterized by a remarkable persistence of small-scale peasant farming – 6000 professional farmers on 5000 farms –, with a strong attachment to the small family farm; (b) the institutional order of Basque agriculture is highly fragmented between a union, the *Fédération départementale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles* (FDSEA²) promoting high-intensity agriculture versus a movement promoting small-scale farming, the Union of the Farmers of the Basque Country (*Euskal Herriko laborarien batasuna*, ELB³), itself affiliated to the French *Confédération Paysanne*; (c) the evolution of farmers' mobilizations well illustrates the general movement from production-oriented activism to new alliances between producers and consumers. Significantly, a 2004 inspection report by the French Ministry of Agriculture highlighted the "striking" situation of the farming sector in the Basque Country: agricultural holdings which were twice smaller than the French average, a high number of young people setting up as farmers, a resistance to the productivity-based model and a strong interrelation between the farming model and Basque identity (Beth et Sourd 2004). To this resistance of the

¹ The French Basque Country comprises three of the seven historical Basque provinces: Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule. Since 1790 this territory has been administratively associated with Béarn, forming the Basses-Pyrénées department (today Pyrénées Atlantiques).

² Federation of Agricultural Trade Unions.

³ Union of Basque Country Farmers.

family-farm model should be added a series of organizational innovations conducting to generate alternative economic spaces on this territory.

What factors explain the vigour and relative success of small farmer mobilizations in this territory, and which help to mark it out as remarkable on the French scale? Our main claim is that the small farmers' movement has in the Basque Country succeeded in extending its cause beyond the agricultural sector by linking small-scale farming issues to wider questions, whether the aspiration to set up alternative economic spaces associated with environmental and consumer issues, or institutional recognition of the Basque territory. This publicizing of the issue has been used by the small farmers' movement to establish alliances beyond the sector with consumer and environmentalist movements, social economy activists, regionalists. These closer links have culminated in a specific politicization of the agricultural question, which has taken recently two main forms: one *explicit*, publicized case, illustrated by the controversy concerning the Basque Chamber of Agriculture, and one case of *implicit*, low-profile politicization, illustrated here by the development of short food supply chains. An analysis of these forms of politicization can be used to highlight the discursive links and parallels between these various mobilizations. On a theoretical level, we can thus proceed by associating the sociology of new economic social movements and an approach to the political work of defining the agricultural question as a public and territorial problem (Gilbert and Henry 2012).

A perspective of this sort is lacking for the French Basque country. Already sufficiently analyzed from the perspective of political mobilizations (Jacob 1994; Ahedo 2005), Basque mobilizations have been much less studied from the perspective of socio-economic experiments. With the exception of those rare studies which include peasant mobilizations in a cross-cutting approach to territorial mobilizations (Bray 2006; Bray and Keating 2013), activist accounts of the history of the peasant movement (Sistiague 1999; Lopepe and Rivière 2010), the reception of European policies (Welch-Devine and Murray 2011; Welch-Devine 2011) or the development of short distribution channels (Gomez and Itçaina 2014) there have been few works devoted to peasant mobilizations.

Our study is based on an interweaving of two qualitative rounds of interviews carried out by the authors. The first of these concerns the contemporary history of controversies over the territorial institutionalization of French Basque agriculture. Interviews were carried out with the General Secretary of the ELB union (October 2003, Gamarthe); a female farmer and ELB member (Itxassou, October 2003); the ELB's

official responsible for cow's milk (Ainhice-Mongelos, March 2010); the FDSEA-Basque Country union's official responsible for cow's milk (Urcuit, March 2010); two officials from the APLI (*Association des Producteurs de Lait Indépendants et en Colère*⁴) (Ainharp, March 2010); one official from a milk cooperative (Berraute, May 2010); the *Biharko Lurraren Elkartea*⁵ (BLE) association of organic farmers (Saint-Palais, February 2014); and the alternative Basque Chamber of Agriculture (*Euskal Herriko Laborantza Ganbara* EHLG, Ainhice-Mongelos, April 2013). We attended the appeal proceedings of 18 February 2010 against the Basque Chamber of Agriculture (Pau Appeals Court). We have also analyzed the magazine *Izar Lorea*, published by EHLG, since March 2005 as well as *Laborari*, the ELB trade union's weekly newspaper since 2003.

The second round of interviews looked more specifically at the development, since 2000, of short supply chains in the FBC, through a series of individual or collective semi-structured interviews carried out with consumer associations and producer associations: two co-chairwomen and the secretary of InterAMAPs (*Association pour le maintien de l'agriculture paysanne*, Association for the maintenance of small-scale farming) (Bayonne, February 2013); two of the founding members of the Bayonne Fair Trade Market (Mouguerre, March 2013); the chairman of *Bizi Ona*, a local Slow Food consortium (Anglet, March 2013); a chef and trainer from the departmental *Conseil Général* involved in the 'Eat Organic and Local, Regional Produce' initiative (Anglet, February 2013); a founding member of a consumer purchasing group (Hendaye, March 2013); the chairman and the coordinator of the Association of Basque Country Farm Producers (*Association des Producteurs Fermiers du Pays Basque*) (Saint-Palais, February 2013); the BLE coordinator (Saint-Palais, February 2013). These interviews were supplemented by participant observations during open days for the wider public: national 'Eat Organic and Local' under the aegis of the National Organic Agriculture Federation (*Fédération Nationale de l'Agriculture Biologique*, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, November 2012); the 2nd 'Eat Organic and Local, seals of approval and the local area' forum (Gotein-Libarrenx, September 2014) organised by the Pyrénées Atlantiques *Conseil Général*.

The article has a two-part structure. Section 1 clarifies the outlines of the approach taken towards analysing Basque agricultural mobilizations, and goes back to the roots of these mobilizations. The next section contrasts two distinct cases of the politicization of agricultural questions: one explicit, publicized case, that of the controversy concerning the Basque Chamber of Agriculture, and one case of implicit, low-profile

⁴ The Association of Independent and Angry Milk Producers.

⁵ Association for the Land of Tomorrow

politicization, concerning the involvement of the peasant movement in the development of short food supply chains. The conclusion reviews the lessons to be learned from the Basque case for an approach to socio-economic mobilizations which link sector-based and territorial issues.

2. The Basque peasant mobilization: the incremental politicization of a new economic social movement

This initial section sets out our theoretical approach and presents contextual data, both historical and social, on the Basque small farmers' movement. This dual theoretical and empirical framing will be used in the approach to the two case studies of politicization in section 2.

Peasant mobilizations as New Social Economic Movements

On a theoretical level, we hold that Basque small farmer mobilizations constitute a New Economic Social Movement (NESM), which in this geographical area has been the subject of a specific form of politicization. NESMs could be defined, following Gendron (2001), on the basis of the following criteria:

Today, fair trade, solidarity-based finance, ethical investment and the wider social economy are heralding a new generation of social movements, which we have agreed to call Economic Social Movements. Not content with entering into and transforming institutional political processes, these movements are taking ownership of a field, the economy, which previously was foreign to them, in order to make use of it and redefine it to fit their values, their ethics and their social transformation objectives. (Gendron 2001: 179; translated from the French).

In thus trespassing on the economic sphere, these social movements 'are offering an alternative to the traditional market, when they are not quite simply offering an alternative market' (Gendron 2006: 487; translated). Economic experiments, here, are part of wider political processes, or constitute the organizational framework of more widely-based social movements⁶. Small farmers' mobilizations provide a good illustration of these NESM phenomena in that they combine trade union-type protest

⁶ Studies of cooperatives have for example stressed that these enterprises might constitute forms of organization promoted and legitimized by social movements (Soule 2012, Arthur, Keenoy, Smith and al. 2004).

activities with support for economic experiments which aspire towards a local reorganization of the links between production and consumption. As such, the terms 'small farmer' and/or 'peasant' used by the movement refer to activist definitions of 'peasant' employed by agrarian movements, particularly Vía Campesina and its constituent organizations (Edelman 2013: 2), and are intended to emphasize that it offers an *alternative* to the productivist model and mechanisms for the political regulation of agriculture.

Conceiving of small farmers' movements as NESMs thus leads us to pay particular attention to three dimensions.

Firstly, the readjustments of economic ties brought about by these mobilizations *may* be a response to an aspiration towards creating alternative economic spaces, in the sense meant by geographers of 'diverse economies' (Leyshon and Lee 2003), but not necessarily. Peasant mobilizations may associate some very experimental, alternative economic approaches with more traditionally market or sector-based practices. In this regard, as we shall see with Basque small farmer mobilizations, one should nuance any view of these experiments as having systematically a capacity for social transformation. In this we follow Dixon (2011) who, analyzing the counter-responses to corporate-dominated food systems, shows that:

These alternatives are not necessarily anti-capitalist, and should be best conceived in Gibson-Graham's post-capitalist politics framework (Gibson-Graham 2006) and its language of diverse economies (...) Judgements as to whether diverse food economies offer transformative political possibilities lie in answering some fundamental questions about the accumulation and distribution of surplus value and the capacity for people and firms to be accountable to one another for their actions. (Dixon 2010, i20)

Secondly, seeing mobilizations of small farmers as NESMs leads us to emphasize the *articulations between scales of mobilization*, from the local to the global. This interpenetration of different scales is particularly marked for mobilizations of small farmers and is shown by the multiple positionings of organizations and leaders. Researchers have thus studied these intersections between local and transnational issues in transnational mobilizations such as Via Campesina (Thivet 2012). In the French context, studies of left-wing small farmers' groups have developed analyses focussing on the multiscale itineraries of trade unions and professional organisations (Hervieu and Purseigle 2013: 212-215; Lagrave 1990; Hervieu et al. 2010; Martin 2005), or stressed the links between local and transnational mobilizations in the case of the *Confédération paysanne* (Bruneau 2004). We follow this body of work in stressing, in the Basque case, the constant overlapping between local and transnational issues, and

the circulation of farmers' union elites between the local, national and transnational scales. It should be noted, in this respect, that two ELB members became General Secretary of the *Confédération paysanne*, between 1989-1992 and in 2014 respectively.

Thirdly, thinking of the Basque small farmers' movement as an NESM necessarily leads us to go more deeply into the specific form of politicization of the agricultural issue which finds its expression here. By 'politicization', we mean a process of re-labelling an economic issue as a cross-cutting political issue, in other words the act of: 're-labelling the most diverse social activities, a re-labelling which results from a practical agreement between social agents inclined, for many reasons, to transgress or challenge the differentiation between spaces of activity' (Lagroye 2003: 361) (translated from the French). For Jullien and Smith (2008: 21), politicization occurs when 'actors explicitly employ values either to transform the meaning of an issue or in order to transfer its treatment to another site of negotiation'. The actors within the Basque small farmers' movement - this is our central argument - have thus succeeded over the last 30 years in transforming their specific sector-based disputes into one issue affecting all actors within the territory.

For Basque small farmers, maintaining the number of active farmers, marketing their production and controlling agricultural sectors and prices constitute their major collective problems. Setting up a fabric of alternative organizations, with an alternative Chamber of Agriculture in the foreground, constitutes the initial response to these collective problems, which 'emerge whenever their definition is shared by an inter-organizational grouping of actors who can claim to be representative of their industry and/or their profession.' (Jullien and Smith 2008: 20). By mobilizing political actors, public institutions and civil society actors from outside the agricultural sector, the farmers' movement has succeeded in transforming its collective problem into a public one: '*Public problems* develop when the process of definition widens to include politicians and civil servants, who, at least in theory, are supposed to work for the public interest' (Ibid.). This publicization led to the 'de-confinement' (Gilbert and Henry 2012) of the farmers' problem outside its original environment:

The politicization of a problem does not refer to a political standpoint regarding a problem, but to the deconfinement of its treatment by those who are considered specialists or professionals in the matter, a deconfinement which may be produced by a process of publicization (with all the risks of loss of control or of disapproval which this implies), or by another type of process (legal proceedings, adoption by mobilisations in other spaces, etc.) (Gilbert and Henry 2012: 54) (translated from French).

Politicization of the farming issue also takes the form of an intersection with other social movements, as has been shown in agro-ecology (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). In the decade after 2000, an encounter took place, in the Basque Country as elsewhere in France and Europe, between small farmers' movement and movements working to politicize consumption, which Forno and Graziano (2014) have proposed describing as 'Sustainable Community Movements Organizations' (SCMOs):

SCMOs can be defined as social movement organisations that have the peculiarity of mobilising citizens primarily via their purchasing power and for which the main 'battlefield' is represented by the market where SCMO members are politically concerned consumers. (Forno and Graziano 2014: 142).

This 'new' politicization of the act of consumption which, *de facto*, reproduces the joint politicization of the production and consumption processes championed by nineteenth-century cooperative and mutualist movements (Forno and Graziano 2014: 150) has a strong presence in the latest generation of Basque small farmers' mobilizations.

But above all, in the Basque case, the publicization of the farming issue was carried out in close connection with territorial claims. This linking was effected through the longstanding and complex relationships existing between the small farmers' movement and the regionalist-nationalist movement (*abertzale*). Following on from work on the renewal of European regionalisms insisting on socio-economic mobilizations (Keating *et al.* 2003), the Basque case illustrates a perspective incorporating the study of links between regionalism, an (alternative) model of economic development, and territory-based culture. Instances of ideological proximity between the small farmers' movement and political *abertzalism* have recurred frequently: the demand for the institutionalization of the Basque territory, that for recognition of the Basque language, promotion of an alternative model of economic development, and involvement from 2010 onwards in the peace process. Several elected political actors, especially in Lower Navarre, have emerged recently from the small farmers' movement.

However, the small farmers' movement should in no way be considered a mere emanation on the economic 'front' of the *abertzale* political movement. Convergence around common values has not resulted in exactly identical claims or interests. Rather, mobilizations by small farmers, as social movements *and* interest groups simultaneously represent *category-based* groups representing exclusive interests (the interests of producers); *belief groups* where interests are defined by reference to universal values (small-scale farming and food sovereignty); and *territory-based* groups which represent interests in a specific territory (the demand for a specific institution for Basque

agriculture) (Hassenteufel 2008). These interests partly coincide with those of *abertzale* parties and political mobilizations, particularly as regards the demand for territorial institutionalization, without however becoming totally fused with them. According to one of the founders of the ELB:

It is difficult to dissociate the dimensions linked to ecology from those linked to *abertzalism* (...) Nevertheless, the ELB does not define itself as *abertzale*, But a union whose project is to organize within a territory called the Basque Country. A Basque Country which today exists in separate pieces and which lacks something at its head ('La lutte d'un paysan', *Sud-Ouest*, 21 December 2010) (Translated from French).

This proximity to the *abertzale* movement may also be suggested by the cross-border dimension of the small farmers' action, whether as close partnerships between the ELB and the Spanish Basque trade union EHNE (*Euskal herriko nekezarien elkarte*, Union of the Farmers of the Basque Country), itself a member of *Vía Campesina*, or as various operations intended to provide a structure for the farmers' movement on the cross-border scale. An illustration of this phenomenon is provided by the foundation in March 2014 of a cross-border association between organic farmers from the French Basque Country, the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarra (EHKOLEktiboa⁷). The aim of this association is to create a cross-border organic quality label, that would be a '*private, but collective*' (interview) brand. For the BLE, the French Basque association of organic farmers promoting the project, EHKOLEktiboa is clearly based on a shared approach to Basque territoriality:

The members are farmers. Farmers from the whole Basque Country. But our goal is not the Basque Country as a *herri* (people/country), it's not the Basque Country for the Basque Country. There is, however, a national vision. But our philosophy consists of saying that most people are positive about identifying themselves or adopting a quality mark that would cover the whole Basque Country. I identify myself. This territory has a cultural reality, and they all agree on this.⁸

The Basque territory, including its cross-border dimension, constitutes here a framework for collective action. This territorial framing has been capable of generating types of politicization specific to the Basque Country, even by detractors – the FDSEA in particular - of the peasant movement, accusing it of a partisan politicization and of fusing with the nationalist movement.

⁷ 'EHKOLEktiboa Laborariak agroekologiaren bidean': Collectif EHKO: peasants on the road to agroecology.

⁸ Personal interview, BLE, 2013, translated from Basque.

The genesis of activism and the merging of causes

How did small farmers' mobilizations succeed in removing their issues from the agricultural sector alone, and linking them to activism in favour of the institutionalization of the Basque territory? The 'problem' of small farmers was the subject of intense definitional struggles between different groups in order to 'take ownership of the problem' (Gilbert and Henry 2012: 39).

Contemporary mobilizations of small farmers have their origins in the conflicts which shook the Basque farming sector from the early 1970s. This period would see an unprecedented challenging of the institutional order which had until then structured the sector. This hegemonic model was characterized by one trade union, the Béarn and Basque Country FDSEA which monopolized the representation of the profession, by a productivist outlook and by its moral legitimation by the Catholic Church. This model began to be challenged from within at the end of the 1960s. Competing definitions of a peasant 'problem' emerged within Rural Catholic Action itself. A major crisis caused three critiques to come together: a religious critique of the Church, a professional critique of the hegemony of the productivist narrative, and a political critique of the indifference of conservative circles towards the Basque political situation. This de-compartmentalization of sector-based struggles reproduced a European tendency (Mathieu 2012: 190-195). In the 1970s, dissidents within Catholic Action became close to the French worker peasant movement (Martin 2005) and from that moment on worked to disseminate an alternative definition to that of the dominant professional model. Challenges were made to the elitarian networks, as well as their productivist orientation, the trade union monopoly and the neo-corporatist regulation of French agricultural policy (Muller 1984).

Territorial identity played a crucial role within this process. From the outset, the peasant movement had close links to the *abertzale* movement which was evolving at the start of the 1970s from a Christian Democrat autonomism towards a nationalitarian left-wing movement (Jacob 1994; Ahedo 2005) This ideological turning point had some effect in economic terms: doctrines of worker control spread, the Spanish Basque Mondragon cooperative became a model, and readings in terms of class struggles enabled peasants to leave behind their social and normative isolation.

At trade union level, benefiting from the recognition of plural agricultural trade unionism in 1981, the movement culminated in 1982 in the foundation of a new trade union in the Basque Country: the ELB. Focusing on the political and trades union struggle, ELB proclaimed that it would fight to uphold its alternative definition of the farmers' problem within the relevant institutional battlegrounds. This highly-publicized

action was supplemented by a form of structuring economic collective action, with a proliferation, since the 1970s, of initiatives concerning the organization of production (Box 1).

Box 1: The development of grassroots economic initiatives in the Basque farming sector

These initiatives would federate in 1991 within the *Arrapitz* (Renaissance) Federation, which brought together about a dozen bodies, including the *Idoki* farming produce charter, four production and sales cooperatives, the Espelette pepper association, the transhumant shepherds' association, the organic agriculture association BLE, the AFOG *Association pour la formation à la gestion* (Management Training Association), the GFAM *Groupement foncier agricole mutual 'Lurra'* (the Mutual Agricultural Land Grouping 'Land' for the purchase of land for agricultural use), the *Lur Hats* (breath of the land) association aiming to set up young farmers in business, and the *Accueil paysan* association for the development of rural gites, bodies which were founded between 1979 and 2003.

The campaigning function of the ELB trade union was thus supplemented by the silent construction of an alternative economic space. This position has been mirrored at the level of the *Confédération paysanne* (CP). While for some, the CP ought to remain just a trade union fighting to change the tools of agricultural policy, others opted for an approach combining the trade union struggle and a global project for an alternative economy. This second point of view, supported by the ELB, was approved by 57% of votes at the Extraordinary General Assembly of the CP on 14 January 2003. According to one ELB leader, who was Secretary-General of the CP between 1989 and 1992:

based on the Basque experiments, we used to say that we should not be the photocopy of a workers' trade union in a small farmers' environment, but be the upholders, inventors and promoters of another type of development (...). For some, being in favour of sustainable agriculture amounts to reformism. For others, if we focus solely on political demands and devote all our energies to them, on the day that we achieve a change in the political framework there will be no peasants or small farmers left here. And, in company with others, we came down in favour of the second position. But we have done so in a concrete way, which has given us some credibility. We have hedged our bets. When other trade unions within the CP look at the Basque Country, they see that we are very involved in local development, that we have activists very involved in sheeps' milk cheese, Espelette peppers, setting young people up in business, etc, but at the same time we are

engaged in a political struggle targeting cows' milk quotas, CAP [Common Agricultural Policy] reform, etc. We don't give up on the one in order to do the other.⁹

Small farmer activists were succeeding in opening up the agricultural question and integrating a first generation of NESMs founded on the basis of three action principles: (1) the politicization of *productive* processes via producer associations and cooperatives; (2) the construction of local development as a policy issue concerning the territory as a whole (3) recourse to para-institutional modes of action, via the commitment of activist and direct appeals to the population for funding.

This initial phase was notable for the marked interweaving of causes supported not only by Basque NESMs, but also cultural ones. This ELB activist, who became in 2014 the General Secretary of the *Confédération paysanne*, stresses this opening out:

I always explain to outsiders that the small farmers' movement is not an isolated movement. There are also the *ikastola* [Basque schools], community radio stations, culture. I find friends of my generation in farming as much as in politics.¹⁰

The re-centring of the small farmers' movement on the promotion of alternative economic spaces did not necessarily take place without some clashes, in particular as regards the dominant agro-industrial model. Moreover, grassroots economic mobilizations also produced cognitive dissonances with certain processes initiated by the public authorities. Here too, the use made of the territory was at the heart of discussions. The initiatives mentioned above were part of a strategy to promote local production by associating the territory's image with high-quality products, via controlled-origin brand names in particular. Dissonances arose when there was an attempt by public authorities to *institutionalize* this image of territorial quality. When in 2008 the Basque Country Development Council initiated a project to set up a Basque 'territorial brand', it intended to associate the agro-food industry, craft-based and cultural productions under the same label. Small farmers, having formed a collective group (*Kalitaldea* or 'quality group') took part in the discussions before withdrawing from a project which they perceived as having been taken over by the representatives of the agro-food industry. The definitional struggle thus essentially concerned the criteria required for a controlled-quality, territorial brand name. For *Kalitaldea*, the Basque 'territorial brand' would enable the inclusion of industrial productions meeting less prescriptive standards. Alliances, thus, which, in the name of the territory, may be struck between

⁹ Personal interview, Gamarthe, October 2003, translated from Basque.

¹⁰ 'Iparraldeak estimu handiegia die kanpoko aberatsei', *Argia*, 8 June 2014, p. 11, translated from Basque.

actors upholding different definitions of the farming 'problem' were effective but fragile.

3. Explicit and implicit politicizations

The sections which follow are intended to emphasize, on the basis of two recent and significant experiences, the way in which these intra- and extra-sectoral alliances have resulted in two politicization registers. The two cases enlisted here bear witness, in one case, to a highly-publicized politicization, and in the second case to an implicit and partially-confined politicization.

Explicit politicization: the controversy around EHLG

The first case study relates to the politicized controversy that surrounded the foundation in 2005 of an alternative Basque Chamber of Agriculture, one distinct from the official one (which regulates the departmental level). This case well illustrates the interpenetration between sectoral and territorial claims and their publicization.

Since its foundation, the Basque small farmers' movement developed consistently within a territory that was at that time in the throes of change. On the one hand, those silent forms of politicizations expressed by grassroots economic initiatives continued to develop. On the other hand, at trade union level, ELB was to consolidate its position among Basque farmers, especially in mountain and sheep-rearing areas, until it achieved a slight majority in the FBC at the consular elections for the departmental Chamber of Agriculture in 2001. The ELB achieved – in the Basque districts – 39% of votes in 1983, 41% in 1989, 47% in 1995 and 51,5% in 2001 . Armed with this legitimization, the union would now be able to move its struggle over definitions to institutional arenas.

The departmental Chamber of Agriculture was the first battleground of struggles to frame the problem of small farmers and legitimization/de-legitimization of the institutional order of farming. However, an initial institutional barrier reduced ELB's room for manoeuvre. The majority premium system of representation, whereby the winning slate is awarded additional seats, reduced the union's representation within the institution when seats came to be distributed. Challenging both the voting system and the lack of specific territorial representation for the Basque Country, in 2001, the two ELB elected representatives refused to take their seats in the new assembly, a position which they would maintain in 2007.

The union, and more broadly the small farmers' movement, took a similar tactical line towards the new institutions which appeared as part of the new territorial

governance for the FBC. Beyond the farming sector itself, the whole of the FBC was affected by the beginnings of a process of institutionalisations, starting at the end of the 1980s. With the backing of the state, which aimed above all at pacifying a territory at the time prone to political violence, a broadly-based consultation process was set up between elected representatives, civil society and public administrators. Development of the Basque territory was constructed as an inter-sector policy problem, but in a manner intended to be depoliticized and based on compromise (Ahedo 2005). Consensus-building culminated in a network of institutions (the Basque Country Development Council in 1994 for representation of civil society, the Council of Elected Representatives in 1995) or specialized bodies (as the Basque Cultural Institute in 1990 or the Local Public Land Body in 2006).

This new model of territorial governance, at that time a pioneering venture in terms of France as a whole, was also used to address the farming issue. At this time the small farmers' movement maintained a strategy of conditional participation. In autumn 2003, the ELB representative was one of the 14 members of the Development Council who temporarily resigned in order to protest against the lack of real competences invested in this body and the unresponsiveness of elected representatives. The State proposed, in view of the results achieved by ELB in the 2001 consular elections, to create a specific body for Basque agriculture, one distinct from the level of the department. ICAPB, the *Instance de Concertation Agricole du Pays basque* (Agricultural Consultation Body for the Basque Country) was thus created in November 2001. With an equal number of representatives of the State, the Council of Basque Country Elected Representatives, the trade unions ELB, Young Farmers and FDSEA, the ICAPB became the Basque equivalent of a Departmental Committee for Agricultural Guidance, responsible for decision-making as regards setting young farmers up in business, the amount of supporting funding, distribution of milk and meat quotas, and land use. Very quickly however, the initial cases highlighted tensions between partners and the ICAPB's lack of any authority to make decisions, the State insisting that all decisions should be subject to agreement by the department as a whole. On 14 October 2003, the ELB left the ICAPB. A similar tactic would be adopted by the union towards other institutional proposals, such as the Agricultural Utility Service mooted in 2002, proposed again by the State in 2004 and set up in spring 2005. Such a double strategy was also used in the land issue, a key element for the peasant movement. Two regulation systems were set up in parallel: an institutional system, around the Local Public Land Body, and an alternative system championed by the NESMs, especially by *Lurzaindia* which in 2013, succeeded GFAM *Lurra*.

Faced with the refusal of the administrative authorities and the FDSEA farmers' union in the name of the principle 'one department, one Chamber of Agriculture', ELB activists decided to set up an alternative organization, inspired by the social economy and peasant farming. In January 2005, the Chamber of Rural and Agricultural Development for the Basque Country (EHLG, *Euskal Herriko Laborantxa Ganbara*) was founded with an associative status. Considerable room for manoeuvre was left to associations of consumers and to environmentalists in the internal governance of EHLG and in its projects. EHLG became a means of coordinating many of the previously-mentioned (Box 1) local experiments. Following the CP (Bruneau 2004: 111-114), EHLG defines peasant agriculture as 'agriculture which enables large numbers of small farmers, distributed across the whole territory, to make a decent living from their profession by producing, on a human-sized farm holding, healthy food of good quality, without prejudice to the natural resources of tomorrow.' (Berhocoirigoin 2008: 8). EHLG thinks of itself as a locally-based service serving small farmers but open to other territorial actors. A reading of the EHLG newsletter (*Izar lorea*) between 2005 and 2010 shows intense activity by the association in the areas of training in agricultural policies, legal consultancy, technical experiments and cross-border relations. In 2010 the association calculated that it had intervened in one form or another on behalf of 1100 small farm holdings distributed across the French Basque Country.

In spite of administrative obstacles, the association set up partnerships with public or semi-public operators. This included a cross-border partnership with an agreement in 2007 between EHLG and *Itsasmendikoia*, a public rural development agency linked to the Spanish Basque Autonomous Government. EHLG also played a role in starting up projects, provided that they were linked to small farming and had a collective and territorial dimension. A large number of these projects chose to adopt an associative or cooperative status, especially multi-partner cooperative setups which associate public and private actors. Born initially from mistrust of public administrations, EHLG has nevertheless helped to legitimize some public policies when they appear to be in congruence with its mission, such as the Natura 2000 European policy, which was nevertheless received with reticence in the Basque Country (Welch-Devine 2011).

The foundation of EHLG could thus be interpreted as the culmination of a process of maturation on the part of the Basque small farmers' movement. At bottom, it is as though after three decades of mobilizations in favour of a specific institutionalization of Basque farming, the small farmers' movement, weary of public demonstrations and institutional battlegrounds, has created its own service organization and concentrated on its original function: services to farmers and the fostering of innovation. Through

EHLG, the movement means to base its legitimacy on its professional expertise, and no longer simply on its capacity to mobilize.

This aspiration towards confining the problem came up against a high level of publicization and politicization on the part of its opponents which began with EHLG's very first activities in January 2005. Besides the opposition by the FDSEA and the departmental Chamber of Agriculture, EHLG also met with a strong reaction on the part of the State. As early as January 1 2005, a week before the EHLG's office was opened, the departmental prefect wrote to both ELB representatives in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques Chamber of Agriculture, with copies to Basque Country mayors, warning of the risk of 'destabilization' of the departmental Chamber by EHLG, the more so if the body were to be run with funds from abroad. There followed five years of legal dispute (penal, fiscal and administrative). For the most part this concerned the proceedings instigated by the State against EHLG because of the risk of confusion with the official Chamber of Agriculture, against local authorities subsidizing or having signed contracts with EHLG; and against the right to tax reductions set against donations made to EHLG.

These disputes led to a series of legal episodes from which EHLG was to emerge broadly victorious. The resort to legal action would end up strengthening the connection between the farmers' campaign and other Basque territorial causes. A very broad coalition supporting EHLG was formed in the Basque Country, involving most *abertzale* and non *abertzale* elected representatives and political parties, civil society and cross-border social movements. Involved in this were actors advocating the territorial institutionalization of the Basque Country. The claim for a Basque Chamber of Agriculture had been included by the *Batera* civil society platform asking since 1999 for a Basque Country department, a fully-fledged university and joint official status for the Basque language. Moreover, legal proceedings were used by the small farmers' movement, paradoxically, to publicize *its* definition of the problem after a process of politicization initiated by the upholders of rival definitions. The justification registers mobilized during the appeal proceedings against EHLG on 18 February 2010 at the Pau Appeals Court are eloquent: while the defence centred its strategy on EHLG's service function, the plaintiffs (the State and the departmental Chamber of Agriculture) argued for the danger of a merger of an alternative farming project and the Basque nationalist movement (Itçaina 2011).

In the end, the controversy around EHLG was to constitute a 'test', in the sense proposed by Boltanski, for whom 'the test (*une épreuve*) is a claim, a demand or a challenge subjected to judgement by other persons or an institution, which entails an encounter with a certain amount of realism' (Boltanski 2005 : 1). The small farmers'

movement would emerge overall as the winner from this test, following the adoption of tactics alternating phases of confinement and of publicity for the problem.

Implicit politicization: short food circuits or the increase of alliances between producers and consumers

The second case, the promotion of short food circuits which results from the mobilization of producer and consumer organisations, shows that the politicization linked to agricultural issues took place in a more low-profile manner. Re-labelling took place via political consumerism, that is the capacity to display citizenship through daily consumption, a phenomenon which became more extensive in the decade following 2000, in the wake of anti-globalization mobilizations which appeared on the international scene at the end of the 1990s (Forno and Graziano, 2014).

In the Basque Country, the emergence of political consumerism encountered a movement of producers in search of new alliances and outlets. Short distributions channels, in fact, were at the heart of a new generation of NESMs which developed after 2005. Firstly, these movements, championed by associations and cooperatives, recall the first generation of NESMs in the 1970s, initiating processes which are essentially on the fringes of public policies. Secondly, these movements share a territorial framework based on the Basque Country, including its cross-border dimension. Thirdly, in contrast to the NESMs of the 1970s based on the politicization of *production* processes, the new generation of experiments is characterized by a joint politicization of production processes and *consumption* practices. New alliances between producers and consumers emerged, and consequently, new interactions between the urban coastal zone and the rural hinterland. This development was accompanied, on the political level, by ideological *rapprochements* between *abertzale*, left-wing and ecological social movements.

A series of initiatives testify to this movement, within and outside the farming sector: fair trade shops and networks emerged, local saving committees for entrepreneurial women and young entrepreneurs were established, short food circuits developed and, in 2012, a local social currency (*Eusko*) was created in order to support local consumption *and* the use of the Basque language in the economy. Some of these initiatives emerged as community-oriented cooperatives (SCIC, *société cooperative d'intérêt collectif*), a new status that emerged in France in 2002, associating service and good

providers, beneficiaries-consumers, and public authorities. These experiences, which included new concerns such as the environment and consumption, represented a shift from the initial utopias carried by the *abertzale* movement in the 1970-1980s: the aim was no longer to industrialize the French Basque hinterland on the Spanish Basque model. In the farming sector, this movement gave birth to smaller production cooperatives in the valleys of Soule and Aldudes, to a community-oriented cooperative of vegetable gardening (SCIC Garroa), to a cross-border association for agro-ecological farmers. Apart from ideological affinities, these orientations provided also to the producers an answer - along with rural tourism (Welch-Devine and Murray 2011) - to changes in markets and in agricultural policy.

As early as 2006, the first small farming exhibition was organized by the *Lurrama* (Mother Earth) association, an offshoot of EHLG, on the Basque coast, and met with great success. Producer associations, located inland, in order to find a wider audience and overturn the power relations in the definition of farming, met with consumers located on the urban coast. The meeting between the two poles ('peasant farmers' and consumer-actors) was thus expressed in a visible way not only during events intended to bring groups together (*Lurrama*, *Alternatiba*, Local Social Forums) but also, in parallel and in a more low-key way, in another sphere: the market.

Citizen-consumer movements would thus take up the calls for small-scale farming as a means of disseminating their own concerns. The dispute over agricultural issues thus spilled over into the public space, revealing divergences within the profession and conflicts which till then had been confined within specific spaces (Gilbert and Henry, 2012). Articulated around concepts of 'food sovereignty' and 'self-sufficiency in food', the question of finding land on which farmers can set up was gradually transformed, for the citizen-consumers, into one of a 'Mother Earth' for those inhabiting the territory.

The actors in the small farmers' movement thus discovered a way of problematizing the relationship with the land which was distinct from the trade union type of discourse centred on maintaining jobs within the territory. Thus, for this Association of Basque Country Farm Producers representative:

It's funny when I think of it now but it puts farming back at the centre of things as 'food-based agriculture'. And it made my eyes light up when I saw the Lurzaindia leaflet: this was the first time that anyone said that it's a project about keeping the land for

food. When up till now, in the internal discourse, it was about keeping the land so that small farmers could set up in business on it¹¹.

The de-sectoralization of the farming problem would thus entail its re-appropriation by a scattered group of movements. By bestowing on these concepts a meaning corresponding to their world view, organizations inserted their own demands within them, such that they were coordinated with other claims. Without any one cause prevailing over the others, three major general causes associated with short and local food circuits made their appearance: a challenge to the economic order, a political re-appropriation of the territory, and participation in the ecological balance. Two examples, the appearance of a Fair Trade marketplace and the entrance of AMAPs in the Basque Country, can be used to account for the linking of various different causes: international solidarity, alter-globalization and ecology to the specific issue of small farming in the Basque Country.

Bayonne's Fair Trade Market, the first of its type to be set up in France (in 2006), is the work of four associations and three small businesses which promote and market fair trade products, as well as, in two of these cases, local farm products. This project is an example of a shift in the meaning of the Fair Trade concept, which is becoming broader, extending solidarity between countries of the 'North' and those of the 'South' to fair trade in North/North exchanges (Robert-Demontrond, 2008). In that sense, a campaign initiated by the *Confédération paysanne*, *Minga* and *Breizh ha Reizh* in 2006 called for modification of Article 60 of the Law of 2 August 2005 in order to broaden the definition of Fair Trade. Despite the reservations which may be held regarding this association between short food circuits and fair trade (Le Velly, 2011), these new demands have in common a shift from issues concerning the exploitation of the 'South' by the 'North' to a cleavage within each world region. This fracture is based on an antagonism between on the one hand, consumption disconnected from territories and a mode of agricultural production which is intensive, destroys jobs and is harmful to the environment, and on the other hand re-localized consumption of 'family' agriculture (Deléage, 2005). Construction of 'dignity shared in common' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991) between producers in the world as a whole is no longer the province of traditional unionism - although, in the Basque case, this has contributed to a very great extent - but results from the consideration given to it by consumers. Two concepts of Fair Trade (perhaps even two generations of activists) have come together. Third World

¹¹ Personal interview, February 2013, translated from French.

ideology (Szczepanski-Huillery, 2005), mostly involving collective actors inspired by Marxist, self-management or Christian ideas and long present in activist circles, has come together with forms of consumption which have been labelled 'committed' (Balsiger 2009). In the Basque coastal zone, the recent and lightning success of the Ot-sokop initiative, aiming at creating a cooperative supermarket for organic products and based on consumers' volunteering, illustrates this trend.

Consumers' active participation in setting up short food circuits, arising from preoccupations about economic and financial disorders as well as concerns about health and the environment, linked to intensive agriculture, has led to a coming together of 'peasant agriculture' and 'agro-organic' or 'agro-ecological' modes of production (Deléage, 2012) – expressions instead of 'organic farming' now considered to have been warped by industrial practices (Caplat, 2005). The high level of media coverage given to AMAPs is a sign of this unprecedented alliance between producers and consumers. In the Basque Country, the first two AMAPs were created in 2005 in Bayonne, located on the coast, and Hasparren, situated inland. They were the result of the encounter between the Association of Basque Country Farm Producers, members of the Basque branch of the *Association pour la Taxes sur les Transactions financières et pour l'Action Citoyenne*¹² ATTAC Pays Basque) and *Colibris*. These three local organizations reflected the positions of *Via Campesina* on food sovereignty and alter-globalization, while adding a reference to spiritual ecology. The movement accelerated, with 29 AMAPs in the FBC in 2015, with an annual growth rate of 9,3%.

Consumers' involvement in AMAPs may be motivated by two complementary but distinct arguments, one of these being support for small farmers, while the other emphasizes the quality of their products:

(Interviewer): *what has led people to become interested in AMAPs?*

(Interviewee 1) Well, in my view there are two approaches: there are those fighting for the preservation of small-scale farming and who are on the spot: 'I choose to put in my money to support a farmer, money earmarked for a farmer', and then there are others who say to themselves 'we have this product quality which is plain to see and we just get going...After the direct earmarking for the farmer, it isn't ... I'm not saying that it's not a motivation for them, but what motivates them... (Interviewee 2): For many, this is to happen as a second stage.¹³

¹² Association for Taxes on Financial Transactions and Citizen Action.

¹³ Personal interview, inter-AMAP collective, February 2013, translated from French.

In the FBC, these new coalitions are thus based on the responsibility of the individual to deal with diffuse, ecological, social, and political problems through immediate commitment as consumers voiced through rhetoric of environmental and social urgency (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2009). The causes upheld by small farmers' organizations meet these two requirements, but starting from different premises. The individualist orientation of the approach taken by some committed consumers does not necessarily fit well with the long history of profoundly collective mobilizations on the part of Basque producers. In the same way, the representations of Basque territory and identity put forward by urban consumers do not provide a perfect match with those of producers from the Basque speaking areas. However, these differences in representation have not so far prevented alliances being formed and consolidated between producers and consumers.

4. Conclusion

This article has sought to identify the factors which explain the vigour of those mobilizations of small farmers which help make the Basque Country remarkable within France. We have stressed that the Basque small farmers' movement has succeeded in extending its cause beyond the agricultural sector by linking the category-based interests of small farmers to wider societal issues: the aspiration to set up alternative economic spaces, environmental issues, politicized consumption, and institutional recognition of the Basque territory. The first historical phase of this movement consisted of campaigns by small producers. These were intended, whether by union action or producer organizations, to jointly promote an alternative farm production model, together with the institutional recognition of the specificity of Basque farming. During the 2000s, a second generation of economic social movements emerged, which now politicized both production and consumption processes. This contemporary form of publicizing the farming issue has led to a dual politicization: an *explicit* politicization around the alternative Basque Chamber of Agriculture, where sector-based, territorial and identity issues come together; and an *implicit* politicization through short food circuits, which represent an alliance between producers and consumers who come together in the search for alternatives, if on the basis of premises with origins in different sets of values. Through the short circuits, the consumers' movement contributed to reinforce the environmental awareness within the peasant movement, without however altering the producers' willingness to control the entire production and distribution chains.

Three lessons can be drawn from this case study. Firstly, this evolution of small farmers' mobilizations locates the Basque case within a movement of NESMs and SCMOs which is far from being specific to this territory. The politicization of consumption has led in the Basque Country as elsewhere, to the development of SCMOs which, if we follow Forno and Graziano's typology (2014: 154) share an attitude of *alter-consumerism*, at a scale of action which is above all local (community-sustained agriculture, community food networks) but is articulated on a transnational scale by networks of activists. As Andretta and Guidi (2014) have shown in the case of Solidarity Purchase Groups in Tuscany, the territorial factor plays a part in differentiating SCMOs, which are more likely to be present in territories with a high degree of social capital and traditions of political commitment, characteristics which can also be found in the Basque case.

The specificity of the Basque case emerges from the intersection between the small farmers issue and the politicization of the territorial issue. If the Basque farmers' movement shares with other SCMOs a local answer to global crises related to food, finance and climate change (Forno and Graziano 2014: 154), it nevertheless articulates this answer to a political debate about the institutionalization of the Basque territory. This overlapping has reinforced the impact of the movement. As a result however, those opposing small farmers' mobilizations continually brandish the spectre of a fusion with Basque nationalism. Small farmers' mobilizations are also intended, through the creation of alternative economic spaces, to express implicit criticism of an *abertzale* movement thought to be too centred on institutional, cultural and partisan issues. Finally, and even if these issues are not directly interrelated, there can be no doubt that the end of political violence since 2010 has helped take the heat out of the question of the institutional future of the Basque territory and generate common thinking involving *abertzale*, *non-abertzale*, urban and rural actors about the development model to be desired for this territory. In this way the Basque case helps to refine the study of regionalist movements by showing how economic activism can help bring about changes in political positions.

Finally, the research set out here would need to be extended in particular by going more deeply into the question of the scales of action at which mobilizations by Basque small farmers take place. Far from being restricted to the classic 'think global, act local', Basque small farmers' mobilizations have been conducted to a great extent at the 'meso' scales of public regulation of agriculture. In particular, these last years have seen the strong involvement of Basque actors in mobilizations on the European scale, such as the 2009 milk strike. In the future, research should interweave analysis of scales of

mobilizations and scales of sector-based regulation, in order to achieve the fullest possible perspective on the recurrent politicizations of the 'peasant question'.

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