RESEARCH ON LAND OWNERSHIP AND OCCUPATION IN SPAIN

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Up to the 1970s, Spanish geographical studies dealt mainly with rural and regional issues. In this context, one of the basic subjects of research was the agrarian structure, especially land ownership and occupation. Ownership and types of land occupation belong to the nucleus of all social relations and constitute the seeds of many rural conflicts.

Spanish geographers have dealt intensively with contemporary empirical knowledge about agrarian structures, including the analysis of changes during both the eighteenth and nineteenth and centuries. There are three main topics from which the remaining issues derive and which form the fundamental axis of geographical studies: (a) the evolution and use of rural inheritances that, coming from the Ancien Règime, were still surviving up to early nineteenth century; (b) the constitution of new social groups, especially small landowners, who substituted the old landowning oligarchy; and (c) the current transformation of existing agrarian structures.

Firstly, in the context of a hierarchical society characteristic of the Ancien Règime, spanish geographers began with the study of such questions as: the forms of land occupation; the social, economic and landscape effects of both the eclesiastical and civil *Desamortización*; the forms of adaptation of nobility property to the new liberal-bourgeois society; and the outcome of the abolition of the aristocratic règime.

Secondly, the constitution of new social groups brought an important switch of land ownership never before known in Spain. In many cases, the changes enabled access to ownership of social groups unlike those which were privileged under the Ancien Règime, namely clergy and nobility. But the acquisition of agrarian ownership by the commoners *(el estado llano)* was not similar in all cases and places. This research leads to another fundamental subject, namely the concern to know in which cases and conditions the outcome was the appearance of a large number of small holdings - *minifundios* - and in which cases great holdings - *latifundios* - survived. The new

latifundios have new *latifundistas* (i.e. the agrarian bourgeoisie) or farmers who were often the previous tenants. They gained access to the ownership of the great old farms and farmed the land directly, as compared with the indirect farm management of the previous system (i.e. under owners and tenants).

These historical analyses are necessary to explain present agrarian structures, especially the continuing polarity between latifundios and minifundios. Twentieth century Spain, besides an evident diversity, contains two distributive models: a) situations where *minifundios* (small holdings) prevail in competition with some public *latifundios*; and b) situations where small holdings coexist with great holdings, the latter being the most important and in private hands.

Besides the smaller or greater size of land holdings, we can typify more clearly the agrarian enterprises using statistics from recent agrarian censuses. They shed a new light on surface size related to the economic size of holdings. Comparing both criteria - economy and surface - a rather different view can be obtained compared with the traditional one: the research clarifies the loss of importance of the land factor and the parallel growth of other factors, mainly capital and the agribusiness sector, as a way to define the size of a holding.

Although an increase in direct ownership and occupation has developed from the nineteenth century onwards, there is a clear relationship between past tenancy systems and the ownership forms created in every landscape. Here the ways used to transfer lands to farmers have determined either the appearance of *minifundios* or the perpetuation of past *latifundios*. Even so, the survival of indirect forms of exploitation - leasing or sharecropping - requires us to look for reasons for the dominance of one over the other, as well as its better or lesser adaptation to different geographic spaces and economic situations.