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The sociology of agricultural worlds: from a sociology of change to a sociology of coexistence

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Abstract – *This article aims at giving an overview about the four main collections of problems and studies that have structured over the last four decades what could be called the French school of rural sociology: from the rural exodus to the "rural renaissance"; the question of social change and innovation in agriculture; the working conditions, living conditions, professions in agriculture, and the alternative initiatives and paths away from productivism; politics and organisations in agriculture. In the last section, perspectives to understand splintering and coexistence of new forms of production organisation and agricultural trade in a context of globalisation are formulated.*

Keywords: *agricultural worlds, modernisation, globalisation*

JEL Classification : Q1, Q19

The tools established by rural sociologists to analyse and report on the modernisation of agricultural systems, the shift from peasant farmer to farmer, the massive rural exodus and the changes in rural societies—perfectly adapted for understanding the transformations that occurred in France during the second half of the twentieth century—are no longer suitable for understanding the new place of farmers in a globalised world (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2013; Bessière, Bruneau, Laferté, 2015).

Immersing oneself in sociology studies of agricultural worlds reveals the significance of the debate, latent or explicit, between proponents of the inevitable disappearance of peasant farmers through exodus or absorption, and proponents of their continuing existence through transformation or proletarianisation. For the founders of sociology until the 1940s and 50s, two main questions ran through the sociology of agricultural worlds. The first, initiated by Marx and developed by Kautsky and Lenin, involved the disappearance or otherwise of peasant farmers in capitalist societies (Marx, 1852; Kautsky, 1899). The second, with the studies by Durkheim, Tönnies and Weber at the end of the 19th century and, later, with the work of Halbwachs in the 1930s, addressed the characterisation of traditional rural societies.

From the beginning, the continuing existence, disappearance or dilution of peasantry became the subject of confrontations and controversy that

structured the field of rural sociology. Marx focused on the opposition between the landowner, the capitalist farmer and the farm labourer. Based on the opposition between these three figures, he outlined the form that he believed the development of capitalism would take in the countryside (Marx, 1852). Kautsky (1899), on the other hand, in his study *The Agrarian Question,* wrote that "Far from making a rapid exit from the rural scene, small farms continue to exist. And the advance of large farms is a slow one—sometimes even reversing entirely". He thus paved the way for discussion of the symbiosis between capitalist farms and small-scale commercial farms, launching, in a certain way, the highly topical question of the coexistence of multiple forms of social organisation in agriculture (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2013). This question was later discussed by economists and sociologists from Russia (Tchayanov, 1924), Romania (Stahl, 1969) and Poland (Tepicht, 1973). From this perspective, Marcel Jollivet and Claude Servolin endeavoured to demonstrate the dialectics of resistance of small-scale commercial production and its absorption by the capitalist production mode (Jollivet, 1972; Servolin, 1972).

In parallel, many authors devoted their studies to the communities and collectives in which they saw the constituent element of peasantry: the opposition between town and countryside. This notion was the focus of studies on rural collectives and supplied the theory of peasant societies (Tönnies, 1887; Durkheim, 1893; Weber, 1892; Halbwachs, 1937). Interestingly, for these classical authors, the desire to theorise the functioning of rural and agricultural environments was already part of a movement of international dimensions.

These two major debates merged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Four sociologists, Henri Lefebvre (1949, 1953), Pierre Bourdieu (1962, 1972), Edgar Morin (1967) and Henri Mendras (1953, 1959) made an extremely influential contribution to French sociological production. Each of them produced monographs of a village or valley as their first research study, and each of them emphasised the extent to which understanding these microsocieties offered the chance to begin to understand French society as a whole.

American sociologists also believed that in order to understand France, one had to understand its villages. It was for this reason that in 1950, Laurence Wylie produced his famous monograph of Roussillon, first published in English in 1957 under the title *Village in the Vaucluse* (translated into French in 1969). Sociologists contributed to analysing the mechanisms specific to the social life of these collectives and to their concurrence with as well as their resistance to exogenous changes that came from what Henri Mendras called *la société englobante* (the encompassing society).

Many of them applied themselves to deciphering "village culture's" manifest forms of resistance to change. The analysis of a cultural turning point accompanying the arrival in modernity of a world that until then had been separate is a characteristic shared by an entire generation of researchers.

One of the most notable things we are left with is that, for Mendras, "the community makes the peasant" (Mendras, 1976). These studies made clear

the need to understand the modernisation processes at work in order, in turn, to account for the ongoing deconstruction-reconstruction process within rural collectives. We thus moved from rural sociology to a sociology of farmers.

The earliest studies of what could be called the French school of rural sociology were, to our eyes, structured around four themes over the last four decades. Here we propose to give an overview of each of the four main collections of studies and then, in a fifth section, to formulate perspectives to understand splintering and coexistence of new forms of production organisation and agricultural trade in a context of globalisation.

From rural exodus to *renaissance*

In France, one of the central questions of the sociology of agricultural worlds was the theoretical status to give the peasant farmer in a society that was progressively less agricultural. A great many changes, both theoretical and methodological, marked out this field through the radical transformations that affected the favoured "subjects" in the initial phases. One of the consequences of these various changes was undoubtedly the opening up and disciplinary dialogues that have always featured in rural sociologists' studies. For this to happen, two major debates ran through this sociology, qualified as rural. The first concerned the definition of the village as a peasant society included in or separate from, depending on the case, global society in the midst of industrialisation. The second debate addressed the disappearance of peasant farmers and their substitution by farmers as producers duly trained in and acculturated to the new technical, scientific and economic rationalities (Alphandéry and Billaud, 2009; Hervieu and Purseigle, 2013; Laferté, 2014).

The agricultural and rural exodus was central to research in the 1950s and 60s. Mendras' additional theory examines this topic (Mendras, 1967a). Understanding the exodus emerged as the means to interpret the dual dynamic that crystallised the movement from countryside to city and the concomitant movement from agriculture to industry. Associated with a departure from agriculture, exodus is perceived as a trajectory towards a different world. The many trends attracted researchers' attention, from industrial integration to the requalification processes of former peasant farmers *via* professional mobility. The most fundamental contribution of these studies consists in underlining the extent to which the introduction of new production methods caused an upheaval in a plurisecular civilisation: the "end of peasants", in other words, the end of the state of peasant and peasant societies, marked the end of this civilisation (Mendras, 1967b). This civilisational change directly demographically translated as the massive reduction in the number of peasant farmers.

This was followed by a body of studies addressing the agricultural question on the theme of "the end". A well-argued and developed representation of the end of a type of society, an eradication or a disappearance emerged (Mendras, 1967b; Gervais, Servolin, Weil, 1965; Gervais, Jollivet, Tavernier, 1976).

This vision of the end of characterised social forms was not specific to rural sociology; during this period, the sociology of religions was heavily influenced and concerned by the process of secularisation. A short time later, the same could be said for studies devoted to the end of the wage system (Castel, 2009).

This approach went hand-in-hand with the hypothesis according to which social disparities would narrow. The emergence and predominance of the middle classes then became the paradigm of these modern societies in which beliefs and representations converged and were homogenised.

This homogenisation theory was applied to family farms. Admittedly, homogenisation is not continued existence or identical reproduction since the growing specialisation of production tools has been demonstrated. On the other hand, however, an important point emerged: whether extended or reduced to the couple, the family is central to work organisation in agriculture. It persists because it is beneficial for capitalism to maintain these efficient forms of workforce mobilisation. We are thus led to observe that the study of change and modernisation shows the family to be an invariable in the social organisation of agricultural work. Indeed, although the family structure is changing, reference to it remains constant (Rémy, 1990).

Along with family, "local" appears to be a second invariable, as demonstrated in Bernard Kayser's renowned book, *La Renaissance Rurale* (1990). Its content could be resumed as follows: the more countrysides change and are emptied of their substance, the more they are reborn and reinvented.

In light of this, at the end of the 20th century and with the reversal of the rural exodus, two conflicting schools of thought emerged. One considered that the "rural world" cannot, as such, be a topic liable to develop; the second emphasised, on the contrary, the irreducibility of this space. Kayser's book *La Renaissance Rurale* falls under this second perspective. Struck by a trip to the United States and his participation in the debates on the interpretation of the demographic growth of American rural areas, Kayser imported the conceptual framework established in the United States with the concept of "counter-urbanisation" and "rural *renaissance*" into the French debate on the transformations of rural municipalities. The convergence of the demographic dynamics in the countrysides of Europe's and America's industrial countries led Kayser to suggest his own notion of rural *renaissance*. With this term he meant to designate not only the significant demographic reversal but also a series of movements, all simultaneously ideological, social and cultural as well as being economic and political, to reinvest these areas that until then were being abandoned. More recently, this reversal of perspective has led researchers such as Philippe Perrier-Cornet to suggest the notion of "the publicisation of spaces", *i.e.* applying the notion of public assets to agricultural and rural areas (Janneaux, Perrier-Cornet, 2014) in order to understand the trend.

Social change and innovation

Agriculture's modernisation and the spread of technical progress have given rise to a great many studies. While Henri Mendras engaged in a broad survey in the Lower Pyrenées (Mendras, 1967b), Marcel Jollivet observed the transformations at work in the Combrailles (Jollivet, 1958). Attitudes to change are divided into two extremes: on the one hand we observe the resistance of a local society seeking to retain the cohesion of its own infrastructure and therefore opposing any signs of a movement liable to disrupt its balance; and on the other hand, a dialogue is established between the collective and the "encompassing" society, leading to participation and discussion resulting in transformations. Together, these studies brought out the opposition between a rising class championing change and a peasant class respecting tradition and frozen in impassivity. For the former, information and innovation enable them to reinforce or acquire a dominant social status thanks to alliances from outside village society. In contrast, in the self-sustaining system that characterised the second class, the entire system of social control contributes to dissuading the farmer to give in to the temptation of change.

Mendras highlights the extent to which, in these societies, innovation and the technician seeking to disseminate it are regarded as endangering the peasant farmer's self-esteem by asking him to "deny his former practices and empirical knowledge". Resistance to change thus becomes the way in which those concerned re-establish their self-esteem (Mendras, 1958). These results were confirmed by the additional surveys conducted by Maryvonne Bodiguel (1975) on adopting tractors, and by yet others carried out by the *Groupe de Sociologie Rurale* on the propagation of artificial insemination, the introduction of new varieties of wheat or the dissemination of the contract economy. All these studies have continually fed sociologists' reflections about the general question of the propagation of innovations, justifying the construction of an epidemiological paradigm establishing the rules of disseminating an idea, a technique or a mode.

Later, Jean-Pierre Darré, Roger Le Guen and Bruno Lémery (1989) showed that the adoption of a new technique introduced into the existing system is not merely an object of transfer and acquisition but also the issue at stake in a negotiation process. These negotiation processes operate within complex networks.

The contribution made by these studies is to show that while innovation does not exclusively derive from the local professional group, it can only, nonetheless, be disseminated if this group is its intermediary. The actor-network theory developed by researchers from the *Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation*, instigated by Bruno Latour (Latour, 1989) and Michel Callon (Callon, 1986), opened the way for studies showing the interdependence between innovation and its network.

More recently, Frédéric Goulet sought to understand the evolution of relationships between agronomic research and farmers' collectives with

regard to agricultural knowledge production. Examining the case of the dissemination and emergence of non-tillage techniques, the researcher brought to light "the structuring role of socio-technical controversy in reshaping professional collectives in agriculture by means, in particular, of a critique of the methods of scientific knowledge production" (Goulet, 2008). With Dominique Vinck (Goulet and Vinck, 2012), he went on to suggest a "contribution to a sociology of detachment" emphasising the efficacy of "innovation through withdrawal" that can replace innovation by means of addition, introduction, emergence or dissemination.

This new field of the sociology of agricultural innovations was also reflected in studies of the forms of contestation within the agricultural community of another "molecular, private, globalised" innovation regime that, according to Pierre-Benoit Joly, was established from the 1970s (Joly, 2011). An extension of this can be found in the more recent studies on consumer demands for traceability and new "consumerist/civic" regulations (Gaudillière and Joly, 2006). The study of new forms of protest, especially with regard to the issue of GMO agricultural productions (Boy, 2008; Bernard De Raymond, 2010) also shows the criticisms of these innovation regimes.

Working conditions, living conditions and professions

Agricultural working conditions have also given rise to numerous studies. Part-time work and the seasonal and temporary nature of certain agricultural activities are no longer only synonymous with precariousness or non-qualification. Seasonal jobs can also be highly technical and involve great responsibility. Although working conditions and income are disparate, choosing farming as a profession very often leads to the acquisition of know-how and life skills.

The question of work-related suffering can be added to this theme, which very soon was the subject of in-depth research in agricultural sociology. Michelle Salmona, the first to publish a study, carried out a survey of farmers' work-related suffering and its psychomotor and mental consequences (Salmona, 1986, 1994). More recently, Jocelyne Porcher looked at the pathologies linked to how livestock farmers managed series of animal deaths. According to Porcher, the avowed traumas lead to an "alteration of relations with oneself and with others" and a "deterioration of communication relationships" (Porcher, 2003a; 2003b). In 2009, Dominique Jacques-Jouvenot and Jean-Jacques Laplante developed analyses of *malaise* in agricultural work. They highlighted the fact that "from the point of view of health, social inequalities are coupled with geographical inequalities [. . .] and it is in industrial and isolated rural areas that we find the greatest number of violent deaths *per* inhabitant" (Jacques-Jouvenot and Laplante, 2009).

The causes and different forms of expression of farmers' social suffering, which have recently been the subject of publications, remain a field that

requires further investigation (Deffontaines, 2014; Jacques-Jouvenot, 2014; Droz *et al.*, 2014).

Heads of farms can also be on the payroll, diversify their sources of income and offer agricultural services to third parties. The categories defining the profession of farmer can be combinatorial in a way that is resolutely modern, with, for example, heads of farms able to take on the status of employee of the *société civile d'exploitation agricole* or farm company that accommodates them. Perhaps, more than any other profession, agriculture allows for an interlocking of professional categories and elected multiple affiliations within the enterprise (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2013).

As pointed out in the collection of studies edited by Béguin, Dedieu and Sabourin (2011), despite the diversity of social and professional statuses, the farming profession very often defines itself by the thin line between non-work living conditions and production activities. The mobilisation of the family and social networks, particularly for mutual assistance, continues to be a trait that characterises agricultural work.

After several research projects, the notion of farmer still remains an unwieldy category. Alain Desrosières and Laurent Thévenot stressed the methodological difficulties of its construction (Desrosières and Thévenot, 2000). In his studies on the "control of the title of farmer", Jacques Rémy analysed the conditions by which the statistical system had created the notion of *exploitation professionnelle* (professional operation). He thus demonstrated how this label was coined to designate those farms targeted by modernising agricultural policies. In an article entitled *Qui est agriculteur ?* (who is a farmer?) (1990), he explains how the emergence of the notion of "professional operation" in agricultural statistics has enabled a distinction to be made between "real farmers" and "false farmers", and to legitimise at the same time the support given to a certain type of agricultural development. Rémy comes to the conclusion that establishing the "professional operation" category acts "as an instrument of discrimination rather than an instrument to understand the agricultural community" (Rémy, 1990, p. 264-265).

The construction of farmers' professional identities remains linked to the existence of a specific package of institutional and professional measures that regulate access to the farming profession and agricultural development. The history of establishing set-up grant measures shows a major shift of approach regarding the question of generational renewal in farming: for a long time perceived in terms of the transmission of assets, access to the farming profession is now seen as an economic and professional issue.

Patrick Champagne strikingly observed that "access to the farming profession, when it occurs, has not ceased [...] to be a family affair, with economic logic still having to make a compromise with family logic. Despite the diversity of peasantry, there exists a characteristic that, even now, is shared by this category of the population in its entirety: its exceptionally high rate of family endo-reproduction [...] This family recruitment, both

high and persistent, remains a quality specific to the agricultural community" (Champagne, 2002, p. 204-205). Rémy emphasised that the standardisation measures for set-ups have implicitly caused the emergence of a new category that brings together so-called "nonstandard" set-ups, *i.e.* taking over or starting up farms without "young farmer" grants and without "subsidised, low-interest loans". Alongside these "nonstandard" set-ups, which Rémy defines as *sans-dot* (dowryless), another so-called atypical form of set-up is composed of *hors cadre familial* or non-family set-ups, constituted outside the above-mentioned filiations (Rémy, 1997). Studies of vineyards by Céline Bessière show that if the "agricultural vocation" dries up within the family, other recruiting grounds are appealed to in order to reinvent it and ensure that the profession remains a family affair (Bessière, 2003).

Recent studies of agricultural professions reinforce the idea that in addition to father-to-son inheritance are forms of splintering and restructuring the farm and land capital, which are a radical departure from the conventional mechanism of set-ups and inheritance in a family-farming context (Gasselin *et al.*, 2014). They show that farming enterprises are resolutely turned towards social and professional mobility: a mobility (more closely related to initiative than to constraint) that is linked as much to the arrival of people who previously exercised another, nonagricultural profession as to a growing number of early retirements. Entering into agriculture is no longer only a question of gender, age or filiation: notions of coaptation or adoption have become equally relevant.

Alongside the arrival of young people without farming backgrounds, a new trend has emerged over the last two decades—the adoption of the "Head of Farm" status by women working in agriculture. In France, more than a quarter of heads of farms are now women. Women have always been present on farms but in terms of legislation, they were so by delegation, proxy or "under marital supervision" (Rieu, 2005). As Annie Rieu and Sabrina Dahache have pointed out, this new configuration gives women individual autonomy independent of their partner and produces "a distinction between professional and domestic relationships that were previously very closely connected and based on gender hierarchy" (Rieu, Dahache, 2007, p. 46). Women's accession to the status of Head of Farm, like the development of work outside the farm, are convergent trends in that they confer to wives, in two different ways, an autonomy that puts an end to the "couple's profession" that was the emblem as much as the vehicle of the modernisation of family farms in the second half of the twentieth century (Cardon, 2004; Bessière *et al.,* 2008; Mundler and Laurent, 2003). Farming families have experienced transformations common to contemporary families from all social groups, but with the rhythms and specificities that remain peculiar to them: "the individualisation of [female] partners' professional activities, the greater fragility of conjugal ties and greater democracy within the couple lead to a certain rejection of highly differentiated gender-based models" (Bessière, Giraud, Renahy, 2008, p. 14; Giraud and Mougel, 2008).

The sociological observation of agricultural worlds reveals the establishment of an increasingly significant "overlap" between professions and statuses. In France, studies by Alice Barthez (1982), Philippe Lacombe (1990), Jacques Rémy (1987), Catherine Laurent *et al.* (1998), and, more recently, Hélène Tallon (2011), show that today, we now have family farming in which agricultural activity is only one component of a diversified income. The basic structure often consists of a "pluri-active" couple. The volume of agricultural activity can increase or decrease depending on seasons and situations, and this activity can be abandoned if it becomes less profitable for the family income. As recently demonstrated in studies by Hélène Tallon (2011), in certain circumstances, family pluriactivity depends on family networks that can enable farmers to contend with recession and the difficulty in earning a living from exclusively agricultural work, thus providing support for younger generations.

Taking into consideration alternative initiatives and paths

The criticisms of agribusiness systems from the 1980s onwards are evidence of a radical challenging of the social contract that connects farmers and the rest of society (Goodman and Watts, 1997; Marsden, 2000). These criticisms contributed to the emergence of studies on what Christian Deverre and Claire Lamine call "alternative agribusiness systems" (Deverre and Lamine, 2010).

These studies examine the range of "initiatives claiming 'new' connections between production and consumption, or between producers and consumers, that break away from the 'dominant' system". This broad definition includes the diverse forms of direct selling, producer-consumer associations and certain municipal or territorial procurement and distribution structures or administrations as well as quality and origin identification signs (*e.g.* PGI and organic labels). For Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier and Christophe Giraud, the emergence of these alternative systems is due to "consumers who, in search of authenticity for their food, find new forms of reassurance in local or close connections with agriculture and the rural" (Dubuisson-Quellier and Giraud, 2010, p. 121; Lamine, 2008). Another movement stems from the producers themselves who wish to recreate with consumers a contact that they currently esteem to have been confiscated by the sectors' upstream actors. At the same time, these producers hope to give new meaning to their profession, anchoring it in territorial and professional logics. "These two movements try to make the *rapprochement* of production and consumption one of the keys to redefining agriculture's place in society" (Dubuisson-Quellier and Giraud, 2010, p. 121).

In addition to the issue of consumer-producer alliances, with her study on producers' markets in Languedoc-Roussillon, Yuna Chiffoleau has shown the extent to which establishing short food supply chains has encouraged new forms of cooperation between producers that contribute to the recognition of expertise and skills (Chiffoleau, 2004; 2009).

Deverre and Lamine specify that "most alternative agribusiness systems, in whatever country, explicitly or implicitly consider organic farming as an

inescapable option for production systems". In this, they share Guthman's hypotheses on the reshaping of local food systems (Guthman, 2004).

Since the first surveys carried out in France in the 1980s highlighting the diversity of the group of organic farmers (Le Pape and Rémy, 1988; Barrès *et al.*, 1985), several studies on the hybridisation of agricultural practices show the continuities and discontinuities that exist between organic farming and the national agriculture to which they belong (Ansaloni and Fouilleux, 2006; Samak, 2013; Cardona *et al.*, 2014).

Examining organic farmers' trajectories and the market and regulatory institutionalisation of this sector, the sociologist Benoît Leroux notes that at the moment, organic farming stakeholders are less interested in the specific nature of this alternative production mode than in some of its results (health and safety, ethical, political, technical, *etc.*) (Leroux, 2011). Moreover, he points out that organic farming worlds are losing their specificity within the agricultural economy, especially with regard to industrial and commercial standardisation.

In a thesis on the production and marketing of organic beef in France, Guilhem Anzalone showed, for example, that "far from constituting hostile and hermitic worlds, as they are usually presented, the organic and conventional sectors interpenetrate and share elements in common" (Anzalone, 2012). By studying the case of organic beef farmers, he demonstrates the striking proximity of the categorisation of organic farmers described above and that suggested by Bruno Lémery regarding beef farmers in general (Lémery, 2003). This convergence shows that although organic farming presents itself as an alternative, it is nevertheless agriculture as a whole that is concerned by the challenging of its model. It should be added that better value-creation is one of the strong motivations for farmers in the process of converting to organic farming.

Based on a survey carried out in the Greater Paris region, Aurélie Cardona emphasised the role organic farming plays in the greening of agricultural practices as well as the place it occupies for nonagricultural stakeholders in their territorial demands (Cardona, 2014).

In their survey on the adoption of innovations to develop integrated crop protection, Compagnone, Lamine and Hellec (2011) observe that "farmers have to seek and arrange resources of diverse origins by making use of, among other things, the means offered to them by the various support structures and by "making do" with the constraints these structures impose upon them."

Therefore, in light of the splintering of practices and professional identities in agriculture, the analytical framework suggested by Bruno Lémery in an article entitled *Les agriculteurs dans la fabrique d'une nouvelle agriculture* (farmers in the fabrication of a new agriculture) seems particularly relevant. The author puts forward the hypothesis that the identity crisis that farmers are experiencing produces new conceptions of their professional world, "with the ambiguities and tensions that motivate them", and participates in "the

fabrication of the new agriculture of which they are invited to become part" (Lémery, 2003, p. 10).

Here we note that these observations and analyses of observations and interviews with livestock farmers have a general scope: they illustrate perfectly the logics of divergence and convergence at work in all production sectors. Every category of farmer develops, at the very heart of their profession, conceptions, practices and projects whose variety, increased by the growing segmentation of production sectors, creates tensions and contradictions within the profession that are a far cry from the united atmosphere (even if this was largely fictitious) of the great modernising years (Bernard de Raymond and Tétart, 2012). Nevertheless, whether they rely on society's new expectations and seek to appropriate them, or whether they are part of the dominant processes of standardisation, producers are all confronted with logics of normalisation, which they experience as a constraint (Joly, 2011).

Politics and Organisations

Farmers' active participation in political life, their capacity to invent or revamp instruments of professional representation and their trade-union engagements largely explain the special place they still occupy in French society (Hervieu *et al.*, 2010).

Despite the splintering of agricultural worlds, they remain above all a "world of organisations" whose activities spread out in various directions. For Roger Le Guen, these professional farming organisations "also participate though an intermediation role in agriculture's economic, social and political environment, which was for a long time structured by regulating and inward-looking politics [. . .]"(Le Guen, 2011).

There is an entire sociological body of work attesting to this social reality (Purseigle, 2010a), and very often it was through the combined use of concepts inherited from political science and history that sociology developed tools to understand the question of professional farming organisations. In addition to the favoured theoretical choices, they are distinguished by levels of analysis. Village monographs, which were numerous in the late 1950s and early 1960s, often analysed the place of professional frames of reference in the adoption of technical innovations. However, they were more concerned with producing a diagnosis of the state of rural collectives than with analysing the professional system. Above all, for sociologists, this involved understanding the *malaise* inherent in the establishment of an economy dominated by rapidly-expanding industry (Bodiguel, 1975; Mendras, 1958, 1967a; Papoz, 1960).

Studies using the department as a framework are rare. Initially essentially focusing on trade-union organisations (Alphandéry, Ariaux, Bitoun and Dupont, 1977-1978), they then examined the "departmental professional system" as a whole (Prod'homme, 1982). National approaches strove to concentrate on a single dimension of the professional space.

Following on from studies by Yves Tavernier (1969), foreign researchers tried to understand the particular role occupied by "majority" trade unionism, particularly that of the *Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles* (FNSEA – National Federation of Farmers' Unions) in the construction of public policy schemes. Speaking of neo-corporatism, John Keeler underlined the fact that the recognition of pluralism in French agricultural trade unionism by no means signifies equal treatment for organisations (Keeler, 1987). By observing three departments (Aisne, Corrèze and Landes), he emphasised the FNSEA's privileged access to the arenas of power and the difficulties encountered in asserting a minority trade unionism. This claim was shared by Adam D. Sheingate according to whom, during WTO international negotiations, the French public authorities, fearing political retaliation, actually consolidated the FNSEA's influence (Sheingate, 2001, p. 238). Nonetheless, other researchers have also been able to highlight the challenges of a majority agricultural trade unionism that simultaneously faces the conditionality of European public funding, globalisation, new controversies about the place of farmers in French society and the reshaping of the trade-union landscape (Roederer-Rynning, 2005).

As some studies confirm, from the 2000s onwards, this reshaping translates on an electoral level as a certain number of drawbacks during professional elections (Le Guen and Cordellier, 2009) showing that the FNSEA's positions could no longer necessarily be taken for granted (Esposito and Purseigle, 2008). More recently, using an ethnographic survey conducted in the Orne department, Alexandre Hobeika examined the way in which the FNSEA manages to maintain "internal cohesion" despite the plurality of the interests it brings together (Hobeika, 2013).

Expanding on studies by Rose-Marie Lagrave on *les gauches paysannes* (left-wing peasant farmers) (Lagrave, 1990), and basing his work on several surveys carried out in France, the sociologist Ivan Bruneau examined the trajectories of militants from the *Confédération Paysanne*, a left-wing trade union that calls for "a departure from the models promoted in the 1960s" (Bruneau, 2010, p. 223). This trade union organisation hoped to build partnerships with other rural actors (Purseigle, 2004) and to take part in agricultural development actions, as seen in the practices of the Basque wing of the *Confédération Paysanne* (Euskal Herriko Laborarien Batasuna) studied by Xabier Itçaina (Itçaina, 2008). Making the international question a "trade union issue", it participated in the creation of the *Via Campesina* (Bruneau, 2004) in the 1990s.

A discourse thus gradually developed defending peasant agricultural systems and presenting them as an alternative to productivist agricultural systems (Morena, 2011; Roullaud, 2013). As Estelle Deléage showed, this project was picked up and supported by other "alternative agricultural movements" such as the *Réseau Agriculture Durable* (sustainable farming network), originating from both the secular traditions of popular education and Catholic Action movements (Deléage, 2004, 2012).

The surge of anti-establishment trade unionism that could be qualified as conservative also caught the attention of some researchers. Studies of the *Coordination Rurale*'s repertoire of actions highlighted the reactivation of a symbolic and essentialist trade-union discourse (Purseigle, 2010b) showing "a rural messianism inherited from an intransigent and anti-modern Catholicism" (Hervieu, 1996, p. 46) with the peasant farmer being portrayed by some organisations as the link between humankind and nature, the guardian of God's work who should be preserved. These questions fall into the same category as those regarding the development of a discourse on *enracinement* (putting down roots) that Eric Doidy studied among livestock farmers in the Jura (Doidy, 2008).

It should be noted that the professional organisations created for a still-majority agricultural world focusing on strictly national issues were caught up in evolutions that led some of them to change their nature and become interest groups or lobbies or even financial groups (Pesche, 2000; Hrabanski, 2006; Pesche and Hrabanski, 2010). We are also seeing upstream and downstream industrial lobbies that are taking over agricultural issues for benefits that are mostly external to them. These same lobbies may or may not forge alliances with the agricultural world (Grossman and Saurugger, 2006).

New actors have appeared on the agricultural stage; consumer associations, environmental organisations and rights-defending NGOs have also taken over the agricultural question *via* the question of global food security and environmental or food safety issues, introducing a third element on national and world political stages (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2008; Bourblanc and Brives, 2009; Daniel, 2011; Thivet, 2012). This new configuration has shaken up and reshaped professional organisations' discourse and practices (Moyano and Garrido-Fernández, 2003). In this context, the question of the political and social representation of agricultural worlds by themselves has been turned upside down. Having championed the rise of the system of majority professional farming organisations, the single project (which the modernising project used to be) no longer structures and federates these worlds (Bruneau, 2013). In many countries and on a global scale, splintering has prevailed over unity. These upheavals are less a sign of disappearance, and to an even lesser extent of unification, than of the atomisation of agricultural producers' representation and modes of action (Mooney and Mojka, 1995; Moyano-Estrada, 2005; Halpin, 2005).

Faced with conflicts of interest, tensions even within sectors on the global market and competition between the national interests championed by countries, global and regional groups are finding it even more difficult to overhaul forms of agricultural representation because these groups remain profoundly marked by their members' national histories (Moyano-Estrada and Rueda-Catry, 2005).

A change of context leading to the formulation of new paradigms

While the framework of nation states proved to be relevant in comprehending the invention of the peasant farmer (Hervieu and Viard, 2001), agriculture's modernisations, rural exodus and the end of peasant farmers, a change of scale—or rather a recognition of the interconnectedness of scales—is now crucial to understanding the coexistence of multiple forms of organising production forces in agriculture. Following on from the recent propositions of sociologists of globalisation (Wagner, 2007; Sassen, 2009), the new ambition of the sociology of agricultural worlds is to return to their demographic evolutions in order better to define them. Undoubtedly, from this perspective, urban sociology has created a space capable of producing knowledge to understand the major transformations of our time (Le Galès, 2003). For sociologists in this field, including Henri Lefebvre, studying the urban means studying the major processes that occurred in the post-Second World War period. It is true that in agricultural and rural fields, invitations along these lines were formulated by Mendras and Tavernier. They recognised the bipolar nature of agricultural realities on a global scale: "on the one hand, we can claim the end of peasant farmers" and "on the other, we should be aware of the rise of this peasant tide, assess its dimensions and its vigour and attempt to predict its consequences, which will be decisive for the future of humankind and global balance" (Mendras and Tavernier, 1969). It is now clear that this appeal, which followed on from the one expressed in 1953 by Henri Lefebvre in his article "Perspectives on rural sociology", was not really heard in France, whereas on the other side of the Atlantic, Harriet Friedmann (1982), Frédéric Buttel (1996), Alessandro Bonnano *et al.* (2000) and Larry Busch and Carmen Bain (2004) addressed this question.

By returning to the founding debates as well as examining current research, we hope to pick out some research suggestions to understand the reshaping of agricultural worlds in the context of globalisation.

Identifying and characterising the development of financialisation

The classic analytical frameworks for agricultural production proposed by French sociologists for thirty years now need to be called into question with regard to the transformations of family farming and the emergence of agricultural systems that are barely or not at all based on the family and whose work itself is no longer necessarily a family affair.

We put forward the hypothesis that, under the influence of globalisation, financialisation and technological evolutions, an agriculture that we qualify at this stage as "firm agriculture" is developing new organisational forms.

These firm agricultural systems are distinguished by the following characteristics: atypical modes of governance and operational management

based on a multiplicity of decision-making spheres all with their own, specific aims, leading to a division of the agricultural production enterprise into units that function in "project mode"; a high level of financial and technological investment linked to a significant mobilisation of material and intangible resources of nonagricultural origin; a dynamic of institutional and organisational innovation, which goes with the invention of new modes of decision-making and management; the use of paid employees and/or delegating activities, which creates relatively unusual social relations; an optimisation of the *portfolio* of actions and profit maximisation, a growth strategy based on research and developing expertise (fiscal, agronomical or legal), which tends to distance it from formal organisational networks (professional agricultural organisations PAO); and the somewhat "nomadic" nature of the activity and the often weak relationship with the territory, which, in some cases, can go as far as what we have called, in other publications, an "a-territorial approach of agricultural activity" (Nguyen and Purseigle, 2012, p. 104; Hervieu and Purseigle, 2013, p. 247; Chouquer and Purseigle, 2013, p. 9).

Empirical observations show not only the arrival of new actors (investment funds, multinationals, cooperative groups, renowned families of *entrepreneurs*, *etc.*) but also the transformation of the role of former actors (states that buy agricultural land, farmers employed by the state or multinationals, farms that become agri-businesses, *etc.*).

The first configuration embodying the birth of "firm agriculture" is firm agriculture "by delegation". This form of organisation is based on measures for the integral delegation of agricultural work (from ploughing to harvesting) and the tasks associated with it (accounting, IT, tax management, *etc.*) to specialised service providers (contractors, stewardship companies). Farm operators who retain their status as farmers entrust all these tasks to subcontracting companies. These farmers therefore abandon their profession but keep their official status, which enables them to benefit, in particular, from CAP premiums and Single Farm Payments (SFP). Agricultural contractors take over not only the entire technical aspect but also the sale of the harvest for their own profit. Along with "classic" contracting companies, we also observe the rise of stewardship companies that, while not directly carrying out the work themselves, organise it on their client's behalf. As head-of-network and the sole interlocutor for clients, these companies can mobilise up to ten specialised contractor companies *per* farm. They can occasionally become shareholders in certain farms (Anzalone and Purseigle, 2014). The rise of service providers and subcontracting is one of the striking trends of the evolution of French agriculture (Hébrard, 2001). In France, the number of agricultural services *entrepreneurs* is growing (MSA, 2012) and one French farm out of every two calls upon one or several service providers for production.

In 1998, Yvette Harff and Hugues Lamarche gave an account of the motivations causing farmers to subcontract work on their farm to an *entrepreneur* (Harff and Lamarche, 1998).

Initially conceived to accompany the project to rationalise and develop family farms, the use of service providers can now mitigate uncertain and incomplete transmissions or inheritances (Anzalone and Purseigle, 2014).

As shown by recent studies, in addition to rationalising production tools, works and stewardship companies also constitute a very effective instrument to acquire land and production. This opens up opportunities to rent or buy land, sometimes to the point of circumventing the control exercised by the profession over land use and the development of agricultural structures (Sencébé, Pinton and Alphandéry, 2013). It is a transitional form towards even more complete forms of farmerless farming (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2011).

The second configuration is that of "financial" firm agriculture. This construction, due to economic actors established in raw materials markets and the agri-food industry, is emerging throughout the world, for example in Argentina (Albaladejo *et al.*, 2012; Guibert, 2013), Indonesia (Barral, 2012) and Brazil (Bülher and De Oliveira, 2013). In the current recession period, capital has been massively diverted to these forms of production (Anseeuw, Ducastel and Boche, 2012).[1] In France, the statistical analysis of individual data from the 2010 farming *census* shows that 4% of agricultural companies would come under a strict definition of agricultural production firms. "Classic" family farming with 2 manpower units (MPU) now only represents 20% to 30% of farms. Qualified by default as family farms, they may be run by a single person and hire employees or outsource some of the work (Legagneux *et al.*, 2014). Recent studies of French investors and farm operators show that the new forms of arrangements between land, capital and work increasingly involve a financial approach to investment in agriculture: this can be seen in the arrival of external capital in this sector of activity (Lepage, Nguyen, Purseigle, 2015). For farm operators, the arrival of this external capital in agriculture means a reduction of debt-related financial risk. For the agricultural sector as a whole, it contributes to reducing the risk of bankruptcy during financial crises. From the point of view of investors, it encourages an increased diversification of investments and returns on investments (Brake and Boehlje, 1985; Fiske *et al.*, 1986; Wang *et al.*, 2002). The financial form emerged during the turning point in the 2000s under the double blow of the freeing-up of agricultural land in former Eastern Bloc countries, and strong tensions in the raw agricultural materials market. Private equity funds, arbitrage funds, hedge funds, pension funds and mutual funds—all these investment funds see the agricultural sector as increasingly strategic. This form, which could be qualified as "purely financial" is different from agribusiness in that it is championed and developed by financial logics and operators. They do not necessarily target industrial integration but rather a capital investment opportunity in large-scale purchases or renting of

[1] The geopolitical upheaval in Eastern Europe explains the significant presence of this type of agriculture in Germany's new *Länders* as well as in Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania (Maurel, 2012; Grouiez, 2012).

agricultural land, the profitability of which rises with the rise in agricultural raw material prices. This form of firm agriculture may also make use of short-term financial operations by constituting agricultural fiduciary funds.

Lastly, the third configuration is that of "sovereignist" firm agriculture. This was deployed during the hunger riots in 2008, caused, in particular, by the rise in grain prices on the global market. The idea is to outsource the prime mission of a sovereign state—the security of food supplies for its citizens. This form of organising agricultural production either directly involves state funds invested in other countries or indirectly involves mixed funds supervised by firms that raise the flag of food patriotism (Puel, 2012; Blanc and Brun, 2013). The rise of this "sovereignist" firm agriculture may use bilateral agreements between states.

The financialisation of agriculture, along with the delocalisation of productions, is now an agricultural reality in France as it is in the rest of the world; movement of labour is increasing and the fluidity of capital transfers between this sector and others has never been as great. The paradigms of sedentarity, proximity, transmission, exodus and the circularity of time are undoubtedly no longer the best adapted to understand these realities. In addition to agriculture's industrialisation and mechanisation, two processes that absorbed most of the 20th century's innovations are generating new scientific and technological innovations that affect the management of life, whether plant or animal life. Biotechnologies, GMOs and the introduction of nanotechnologies are all symbols of the qualitative leap in innovation. This innovation affects not just production techniques and modes but also financial flows and the place of the banking sector in agricultural economies (Joly and Duclos, 1993; Joly, 2006; Bonneuil and Hochereau, 2008; Bonneuil and Thomas, 2009; Demeulenaere and Bonneuil, 2010). The scale of disqualification caused by this new international division of labour and agricultural production raises the question of a growing *anomie* among farming populations.

From firm agriculture to subsistence farming

In a great many societies, entire populations qualified as peasant populations for want of being able to qualify them differently, are rural populations and mostly poor, without production means but also without technical knowledge because of the rapid transformations of production *regimes*. These are "redundant" populations and are not considered. These populations, which account for almost all the poorest people on the planet, are populations without an established future but also without clear social regulation (Scott, 2009). None of the available models of economic, social and political integration corresponds to their situation, leaving these "peasant" populations in an unexplored no man's land. If, like Durkheim, we consider *anomie* to be one of the "pathological forms" of the social division of labour, in this case the origin of the absence of cooperation between different functions

(Durkheim, 1893 (republished 2007), Boudon *et al.*, 1989) caused by the insufficient relations between social roles, we can put forward the hypothesis that a growing proportion of agricultural populations in the North and the South is in a state of *anomie*.

This is especially true for agriculture's employees. Ignored for a long time, despite the ground-breaking studies by Françoise Langlois-Bourquelot (1962) and Jean-Pierre Berlan (1991), permanent and seasonal farm workers in France today are now the subject of surveys and studies that highlight the very precarious situation of these populations and their integration into international migration processes.

Frédéric Decosse's studies in the South of France, Andalusia and Morocco's Rif region drew attention to the health of seasonal labourers and the lack of health and accident cover in host countries. The researcher highlighted the super-imposition of a new international division of labour and a "new international division of the risks of farm work" (Décosse, 2008).[2]

Emerging from all these studies and surveys of foreign farm workers is the fact that temporary migration has been established as a rule and that, as a consequence, long-term settlement abroad is an exception (Mésini, 2009). From this perspective, it could be said that the desire of a majority of these seasonal labourers to define themselves primarily as landless peasants rather than employees is a way, by means of political mobilisation, to climb the first rung in regaining a social and professional status (Sabourin, 2007; Estevam, 2009; Bleil, 2011).

We consider that the specific characteristics of "impoverished farmers" and "proletarianised landless peasants" should be studied in more depth by means of this distinction. Although these two figures both fall under the category of "subsistence farming", and both, through their mobilisations, claim to be "peasants", their trajectories are very different.

Their social statuses do not fall under the same legal frameworks and their skills differ. However, the processes of impoverishment/elimination that affect the former and the logics of proletarianisation and expanding the pool of seasonal labour that supply the growing number of the latter, also originate in the growth of globalised agriculture. By rendering the poor and the proletarians invisible, these agricultural systems increasingly closely resemble "farmerless farming". The objective of a sociology of agricultural worlds should be to reconnect these categories in relation to each other in order to take into account an increasingly complex social reality. The "proletarianised

[2] Analysing the situation of Moroccan workers employed by market-gardeners in Almeria, Alain Morice and Bénédicte Michalon underlined the "injunction of invisibility given to seasonal workers from elsewhere" (Morice and Michalon, 2008, p. 10). Studies by Sébastien Chauvin on the labour shortage in California's agriculture because of the extreme precarity suffered by seasonal labourers also demonstrate the limitations of this deregulation (Chauvin, 2008).

landless peasants" category can signify at the same time the universal nature of this figure, its coherence with the increase of paid workers in agriculture and lastly, its function in a process of land concentration and the international division of labour and agricultural production (Hervieu and Purseigle, 2013). Family farmers can no longer be sure of finding in the family farm frame of reference the values and attitudes that enable them to achieve parity with other socio-professional categories. Faced with the range of agriculture's possible futures, they no longer know if the parity they seek can be measured by the yardstick of head of firm, artisan or trader. It could be said that this is *anomie* through "the indetermination of objectives to be reached" (Boudon *et al.*, 1989, p. 16). Moreover, dethroned as the *paterfamilias*, uncertain of his professional identity and shaken by the growing diversity of the profession, the head of the farm is now disorientated and destabilised by identities, including the most personal identities (Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005; Campbell *et al.*, 2006). Here we have *anomie* through uncertainty and even role reversal.

Conclusion

Despite their demographic eradication in some societies, peasant farmers have never been as numerous on the surface of this planet and above all have never been as diverse: homogenisation processes have proved unfounded. From this perspective, the paradigms of exodus and unity do not appear to be the best levers for comprehending the reshaping of agricultural worlds.

We are seeing the emergence of a triple coexistence for the agricultural issue: the coexistence of farmers and farming professions with other professional circles, the coexistence of the functions of agricultural production with the functions of residence and environmental production and the coexistence within the agricultural sphere of several forms of social organisation replacing the construction of a homogenous profession.

The 21st century is seeing the coexistence of highly-restructured forms of family farming with financialised and market farmerless farming, and redundant and landless farmers and peasants. We thus see emerging the coexistence of different modes of agricultural production that mutually reinforce their distance and differences rather than being homogenised and presenting a *continuum*. We therefore need to move away from a sociology of change to a sociology of coexistence.

With its persistence in the face of globalisation, family farming proves its resilient nature; the emergence of agricultural production firms could be perceived as an adaptation to this globalisation; and the scale of peasant and agricultural exclusion can be regarded as the result of the acceleration of agricultural production and trade's globalisation. The sociology of agricultural worlds must, therefore, grasp the differences of status and the growing discrepancies in farming, by including what only appears to be a paradox—the excluded populations.

The integration of agricultural worlds needs to be considered simultaneously with reference to a local space, a national framework that remains significant in the construction of public policies and, to an even greater extent, a regional scale (Europe, the Southern Cone, the Mediterranean, *etc.*) and a global scale. Here, again, the reshaping of modes of organising production and the relationship with markets should be understood in the connectedness of these different scales. Agriculture's integration in the globalisation of trade does not signify the negation of other scales, and can even strengthen them. It is now, therefore, the coexistence of modes of integration that need to be understood. An invitation to change paradigms does not, however, mean abandoning those that have been used as references until now. Instead, it involves connecting them to each other, given that it is undoubtedly in the overlapping of new paradigms to be constructed with old paradigms still at work, that the key to understanding an increasingly complex reality is to be found.

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