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Nadine Vivier (Ed.)

The Golden Age of State Enquiries: Rural Enquiries in the Nineteenth Century: From Fact Gathering to Political Instrument

Turnhout, Brepols, 2014, 291 páginas

During the 19th century a lot of governments and parliaments organised numerous enquiries concerning the demography and the wealth of the State. They evidently wanted to have more data to better inform their decisions and increase the power of the State and the quality of life of their citizens. Even if, in particular in the second half of the 19th century, the process of industrialisation assumed a relevant role in the most important European countries and in the USA, the life and production in the countryside continued to be crucial for governments and parliaments. It was important to know if peasants produced foodstuffs for all inhabitants of the country and, moreover, if it was possible to increase the harvest by the improvement of the production and productivity. International trade and the exploitation of the colonies could temporarily fill the production gap, but it was important to have a better understanding or both the foodstuffs that the countryside could produce and the perspectives about the production which were linked to the technological innovations and their adoption in the primary sector.

This explains why the perfect knowledge of the qualitative and quantitative data concerning the countryside was so important and why the rural enquiries were so

relevant and governments dedicated a lot of time and financial resources to carry out them. This also explains why the statistical methods to collect these data became so relevant. They were firstly discussed in international congresses and then used in the different countries.

The considerations indicated above clarify why some scholars decided to develop an international research project focusing on this particular topic in rural history and to produce such an interesting book. Edited by Nadine Vivier, this volume includes the analyses of rural enquiries and related discussions in several European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands and United Kingdom), the Ottoman Empire (the Balkan provinces and Anatolian ones), Mexico, and the Canadian province of Ontario (which belonged to English Empire during the analysed period). This obviously allows some very interesting comparisons and it makes possible to note both the relevance of cultural transfers during the 19th century and the preference concerning the French and British statistical methods, which were considered the two best models to help the construction and development of a modern, civilized and powerful State.

The book does not focus on the content of the rural enquiries, but it examines their origins and functioning, as well as the statistical methods that were used to answer the needs of the governments and parliaments in order to evaluate the ongoing transformations in the rural world. Furthermore, it presents the main reasons

pushing governments and parliaments to organise the enquiries and the methods which were followed to make the agricultural surveys. The volume thus illustrates “why” and “what for”, in the *Age of the monumental investigations* (as Nadine Vivier defines the 19th century), the governments and parliaments wanted to have a better knowledge of the social and economic conditions existing in the countryside. It also stresses the political and economic decisions related to the final results of the enquiries. As any State intervention in modern societies requires an important degree of knowledge, these State-sponsored enquiries gave to the public authorities the information they needed and, at least in theory, they allowed to decide the better policy to improve the quality of peasants’ life and work.

In this regard, the volume indicates for each State the type of enquiry: how the data were collected, the choice between the qualitative aspects and the quantitative ones, and the related discussions; and the different types of committee which were charged to prepare the questions for the enquiry, to collect the answers, to elaborate them and finally to publish the results (the latter were influenced by the members of committees and the people who answered the questions, as well as by the system and the care they respectively used to create and to fill the questionnaires). Only for Belgium and the German Empire there is not a real analysis because they are partially seen in the second chapter (written by Ute Schneider), which is dedicated to the discussions about the choice between qualita-

tive and quantitative enquiries and about the best survey procedures.

Three chapters study rural enquiries in the United Kingdom, concerning the Irish case (examined by Peter Gray), the English agricultural labourers (written by Nicola Verdon) and the conditions of the English agriculture during and immediately after the great agrarian crisis of the 1870s (by Robert M. Schwartz). All these analyses stress the progressive improvement of the information offered by the enquiries, illustrating the effects of the Irish famine on peasants' families in the 1840s, and of the negative economic trend of the primary sector during the last quarter of the 19th century.

Two chapters (by Nadine Vivier and Jonathan J. Liebowitz) show the French enquiries and their economic and political aims. They highlight the transfers of information and methods which influenced the European surveys. Even if it is not clearly addressed in this volume, there existed a European agrarian network which allowed to disseminate a European knowledge in agronomics and to ask for a common and efficient method to measure and evaluate the social and economic conditions of the countryside (Locatelli & Tedeschi, 2015).

For the other European countries, the analysis concerns only one rural enquiry even if authors indicate the previous surveys. Three chapters clearly show that enquiries aimed at finding a solution for the agrarian crisis. This is in particular evident in the Spanish case (explained by Juan Carmona and James Simpson) in which even the name of the enquiry pointed at the *cri-*

sis of agriculture and livestock, and in the Dutch case (described by Anton Schuurman) in which the public authorities reaffirmed their main role in the rural policy. In the Hungarian case (presented by András Vári) it is also possible to note some particular targets depending on the participants' attitudes and on their ability to underline their needs (*e.g.* those concerning the space reserved for the cattle-breeding, the level of railways tariffs for foodstuffs, the perspectives for winegrowers).

It was different the case of the *Inchiesta Jacini* in Italy (described in Giuliana Biagioli's chapter): this enquiry was carried out before the great agrarian crisis and so the collected data did not have the intended utility for the government because when the final results were published the economic conditions of the countryside had changed strongly. In the Danish case (described by Ingrid Henriksen), the enquiry's aim was to prepare a revision of the legislation in favour of landless workers, and it was followed by new laws based on its results.

The analyses of some non-European areas show the will of the State to affirm its presence in the international context, in particular in the cases of Mexico and Ontario (written by Alejandro Tortolero and Daniel Samson, respectively), or its attempt to start its modernisation, as we see in the case of the economic and administrative reforms of the Ottoman Empire (examined by Alp Yücel Kaya).

All the cases examined make clear that the results of the questionnaires strongly depended on how people responded to questions. These had to be clear and not

too numerous. Furthermore, they had to be addressed to the correct people. Finally, it was important to read and elaborate all answers. This obviously increased the cost of the survey but it also avoided to have a biased image of the countryside and, moreover, to avoid inappropriate interventions by public authorities based on wrong evaluations. A major problem was the underestimation of the real production of the countryside, because landowners feared an increase of taxes on their properties. At the same time, the questions and answers concerning the peasants' protests did not highlight that the latter were essentially related to the uneven distribution of incomes, which, during the agrarian crisis, were especially low.

It is also important to note that, for a good understanding of the book, some knowledge is needed about the complex agrarian historical conditions existing in the different countries, in particular during the second half of the 19th century, and the aims and attitudes of landowners, tenants and peasants in front of the agrarian crisis of the 1870s and 1880s.

The book presents some inevitable limits. The first one is strictly related to the editorial choice to show many different cases in very few pages, which makes not possible to examine each country in detail as we can see, for example, in Patriarca (1996).

A second limit, probably related to the same reasons, is the absence of information about rural enquiries concerning a single region. These enquiries were diffused in Europe during the 19th century and they had the same target of the national surveys.

Moreover, some of them were carried out before, so they could have been taken into account by the public authorities to organise the national enquiries, as some research projects have indicated (Marache & Vivier, 2013).

Considering that the volume was financed by EU funds (Cost, programme Progressore), a further limit is related to the lack of studies about central Europe (the German area and the Austrian part of the Habsburg Empire), and the Western part of the Russian Empire; but obviously it is not easy to find scholars for all the European countryside.

Even if a fussy reviewer can note some limits, *The Golden Age of State Enquiries* is a very good book and, especially for a scholar studying rural history, it is a great pleasure to read it.

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Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón

Contra el poder: Conflictos y movimientos sociales en la historia de España de la prehistoria al tiempo presente

Granada, Comares, 2015, 333 páginas

It's a daring author who would try to cover 10,000 years of social conflict in a mere 333 pages, but since the first 8,000 years or so are surveyed in a brief first chapter, after that things are a little bit less rushed. Inevitably, events narrated will be highly selective both in terms of which are highlighted and what is said of them; and explanations will stress some very broad, recurrent processes and some large categories. Across such a long time span, the actors in social conflicts will vary in many ways: they will vary in which social strata participate, in how they are organized, in what sorts of leaders they have, in what beliefs about present oppression and brighter futures they hold, in how they communicate and what sorts of information they have access to, in who their enemies are, in who their potential allies might be, and in what sorts of resources they possess. Are they united by religion, ethnicity, region, gender, political visions? Are they self-organized or organized by others?

Allies and enemies of popular movements make their appearance in this rich study, including systematizers of religious doctrines, landowners, urban merchant elites, agents of states, party leaders, and,

for the most recent years, democratically elected politicians, but the major protagonists in this work are those who rarely appear with individual names in textbooks (if they appear at all): those earning a living in good times and hungry in bad, and subject to the authority of powerful others—whose names we are more likely to know—who can impose rents, taxation, and conscription. And what Pérez Garzón vividly demonstrates is the extraordinary range and variety of their collective action that impedes, alters, or occasionally overturns the plans of the powerful, despite much effort to convince them that they are supposed to be obedient and the not uncommon deployment of violence against those not convinced.

Their movements vary in the broad ideas they develop, in their long term strategies and short term tactics. Movements of the past also vary enormously in the quantity and quality of the information they have left behind. We are not likely to ever know much about the ideas of those who fought for the first 8,000 of these 10,000 years. About the next 1500 or so we get to know more and more, and then a great deal more for the past half millennium.