

Fernando Collantes and Vicente Pinilla
*Peaceful surrender. The depopulation of rural Spain
in the twentieth century*
Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, 202 pages

This is a well-conceived, intelligent and intriguing book. It consists of four parts. The first part describes in three chapters the development of depopulation in Europe, in Spain and provides a general explanatory model for rural depopulation and modern economic growth. The second part is devoted to the actual explanation of the depopulation process in Spain. One chapter is devoted to the period before 1950, one to the period after 1950, followed by two thematic chapters: one on the specific character of the countryside and one on the role of rural policy. The third part describes the consequences of depopulation and discusses the rupture in this trend in most regions of Spain since the 1990s. The final part places the Spanish history in an European context. The book is concluded with an appendix on the data and a bibliography.

The development of Spanish rural depopulation in itself is straightforward enough. Until the 1950s the countryside was still growing. From the 1950s onwards there was a decline in the rural population due to out-migration that was outweighing rural natural growth and since the 1980s also due to negative natural growth and since the 1990s rural communities are increasing again thanks to in-migration.

To explain these development the authors make it very clear from the beginning that for them the countryside is not synonymous with agriculture although in 1950 still 75 per cent of total rural employment was in agriculture. This results in that they come forward with a different explanation for rural depopulation than James Simpson did in his *Spanish agriculture*. They refer to wages differences between town and countryside and the pull of industrialization that became stronger since the

1950s as he did. But they have two extra explanations: 1) the rural non-farm sector could not compete with the towns and cities for the redundant agricultural labourers; 2) modernity was a urban phenomenon which caused a rural penalty for access to the new consumer durables, education, health care and transport. This is why they have called their book *Peaceful surrender*. The rural population also wanted modernisation but was not able to realize it directly in the countryside. Since the 1990s access to these products has become less of a problem while other products that are in demand like space, clean air, housing, safe environment are provided better and cheaper in a rural setting than in real cities. So the rural penalty as they call it, is changing in a rural advantage.

They demonstrate that even when the rural population was still growing before 1950, the weaknesses of the rural economy and society became already apparent: agricultural productivity was low; the rural economy showed little diversification; and in most regions population densities were low and villages were small.

In making their argument the authors provide us with a lot of data, discussions and subplots. It begins, of course, with the question what is rural? Which they solve pragmatically by choosing for municipalities that have less than 10.000 inhabitants and do not cross this line during the 20th century. This last condition is important because in this way they are not overestimating rural depopulation by calling urbanisation depopulation. Next they divide the Spanish countryside in four parts: North, Mediterranean, South and Interior more or less according to regional agricultural (dis)similarities. However, the authors design a new spatial division that they believe is more relevant to the problem and what they call urban environments: large city provinces, mid-size city provinces and small city provinces. The large-city provinces stand out because they almost have no rural depopulation since the 1950s and do have a rural population increase since the 1990s. The small city provinces stand out because they have a very strong rural depopulation since the 1950s and here the trend did not reverse in the 1990s. I wonder why they did not make a fourth group from the municipalities that they threw out of their analysis: the groups of municipalities that were rural in 1900 but became urban in the twentieth century?

Another point that the authors make is that agrarian policy is not really to blame for what happened. They stress the relative continuity in agrarian policy from the Franco-regime to the post-Franco regime and emphasize that both lacked a real rural policy. The real change in policy came only with Spain's accession to the European Community. Their point is that the structural forces for what had happened could hardly have been changed by policy.

They conclude their book by comparing the Spanish case with England, France, Italy, Poland and Romania. However, they call it episodes of rural depopulation. So, they do not compare contemporary England with contemporary Spain, but England from the second half of the 19th century while at that time England experienced rural depopulation with Spain from 1850-1991 and with Poland 1970-2000. But in many other points the comparison between these episodes is awkward. The public sector in England is much smaller than that of Spain in the second half of the twentieth century; the communication and infrastructure is incomparable and so there are many other things – how does this comparison help their analysis? I would have preferred a comparison with Switzerland or Austria – also countries with large mountainous rural areas – in the second half of the twentieth century. I believe that such a comparison would have put a different light on their conclusion that an alternative policy would have made no difference.

I have one last remark – they discuss the role of gender and call it the gender penalty. They state: "Heading for the city was also the most effective way to get round the gender discriminations prevailing in the traditional rural society." (98) However, in this section they mostly discuss differences between men and women in the countryside while in my opinion relevant data would also have included the role and position of women in cities and towns on which they give only some general comments. This topic made me think why they do not discuss the liberating effect of migration in general for young people in the second half of the twentieth century? (They do mention the positive effect of migration in undermining the hierarchical relations in the countryside.)

In conclusion: this is a very commendable book. Its plea for a rural history against an agricultural history is very convincing. By organizing their data to urban environments, by making the distinction between agriculture and the non-farm rural sector, by forging the concept rural penalty they provide a stimulating explanation of Spain's rural population development.

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