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Jaume Franquesa

“Whether one calls them fascist, authoritarian populist or counterrevolutionary, there is no doubt that angry movements contemptuous of liberal democratic ideals and practices and espousing the use of force to resolve deep-seated social conflicts are on the rise globally” (Bello 2017: 1).

Pointing to the absence of authoritarian populism in Spain has become commonplace among both academic and popular media commentators. In these accounts, enthusiasm gets mixed with puzzlement, given the depth of the economic crisis and the extent of government- and EU-led austerity programs in the country. How are we to explain Spain’s alleged immunity to the political trends that Walden Bello (see also Scoones et al. 2017) describes in the quote above? In this article I defend a straightforward answer to this riddle: authoritarian populism has been kept at bay by a series of popular democratic (or as I prefer to call them: “republican”) movements that have offered a potentially emancipatory response to the disenfranchisement and dispossession experienced by large sectors of the Spanish population.

Yet these movements have had a poor penetration in the Spanish countryside, a troubling circumstance that reflects a growing divide between city and country and the political isolation of the latter. Thus, if my argument that the republican movements have stopped the emergence of authoritarian populism contains some truth, we could well hypothesize that the poor penetration of the former in rural Spain converts the inhabitants of this part of the country into a potential social base for the latter. This hypothesis gains strength once we observe that the economic crisis has exacerbated dispossession (impoverishment, land concentration) and disenfranchisement (feelings of abandonment, erosion of self-esteem) in rural Spain. I thus suggest that the specter of reaction haunts the countryside, but I also argue that this specter coexists with republican possibilities.

This paper is divided into four parts. In the first one, I examine the current Spanish conjuncture. In the second one, I explore the effects of crisis and austerity in the Spanish countryside. In the third part I move to Southern Catalonia, a region where I have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork since 2010 (see Franquesa 2018). I examine how in that region a broad movement—popularly known as the “Southern revolt”—against land (and water and green) grabbing was able to reveal, and combat, the uneven ecological foundations of an unfair, territorially and class-inflected structure of accumulation and political domination. Although the Southern revolt peaked in the first years of this century, its echoes are still noticeable today in a region that has politically moved to the left since the turn of the century. Southern Catalonia and the Southern revolt thus offer a telling example of how feelings of abandonment in the countryside can be given a popular democratic expression.

Finally, I conclude this paper by examining the role that the idiom of dignity played both in the Southern revolt and in the current, broader republican movements. I argue that whereas this idiom offers an opportunity to bridge the existing political divide between country and city, connecting urban and rural experience and consciousness, it can also become a mobilizing rhetoric for authoritarian populism. Both republican and reactionary specters can hide behind, and eventually thrive through, the demand for dignity.

The Spanish exception

While authoritarian populism is not new in Europe, it has been gaining momentum and extension in the recent context of economic crisis and austerity policies. And yet, as a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* argues, “one country seems immune to it all: Spain” (Encarnación 2017). The title of this piece is indeed revealing: “The Spanish exception.”

Narratives about Spain’s exceptionality within Europe are not new (see, for instance, Swyngedouw 2015). During the best part of the 19th and 20th centuries these narratives—epitomized in a famous mantra: “Europe ends in the Pyrenees”—pointed towards some essential deficiency: Spain’s marginal position within Europe, its incapacity to modernize its productive base, the country’s archaic and oppressive political structure, and so on. The Francoist regime was able to ambivalently mobilize this idea for its own interests. In the 1950s the government coined the slogan *Spain is “different”* (the scare quotes only dropped in the 1960s) to promote tourism to the country and project a friendly image of the regime (Pack 2006). Not a mere marketing tool, the slogan also had a clear political purpose: displacing Spain’s political anomaly—a military dictatorship in Western Europe—into a benign exoticism—a peculiar nation with archaic traditions, natural beauty and rough but good-hearted locals.

In the following decades, the situation changed quite radically: Spain became a “normal” European country, a liberal democracy firmly inserted within the European Union and the world economy. Yet in the 1980s, right at the time that Spain joined the European Union, the specter of the far right made a comeback to the heart of Europe (Wacquant 1993; Stolcke 1995), now under the guise of what Stuart Hall called “authoritarian populism” (Hall 1985). Since then, authoritarian populism has kept extending and growing, especially since 2008, being, in Don Kalb’s words, “the traumatic expression of material and cultural experiences of dispossession and disenfranchisement” (2011: 1; see also Holmes 2010). Yet Spain, once again, seems to be “different.”

In half a century Spain’s alleged exceptionality underwent a complete reversal. Once a coded reference to the survival of pre-war fascism, it now identifies Spain’s imperviousness to far-right temptations and, presumably, the health of the country’s democratic values and institutions. Yet it may be advisable to retain the calculated ambivalence of the old Francoist slogan as a cautionary tale: the “Spanish difference” should be neither overstated nor taken for granted.

We should start by disentangling the meanings of Spain’s exceptionality. Actually, when political commentators highlight Spain’s exceptional relation to the spread of far-right extremism they refer to two very different ideas that are only partially connected. Most often, political scientists (e.g. Arzheimer 2009) underscore the electoral weakness, and consequent parliamentary irrelevance, of far-right parties since the 1980s. True and important as this is, this parliamentary irrelevance needs to be qualified with two major, interrelated caveats. First, the recent memory of the Francoist dictatorship has acted as an obstacle for the emergence of openly authoritarian parties and movements. But, second, authoritarianism and xenophobic discourses are defining characteristics of the ruling Partido Popular, a party founded by Francoist cadres that has historically served as a refuge for a variety of far-right factions and ideologies (Casals 2011).

On other occasions, Spain’s alleged exceptionalism is interrogated in terms that are more relevant to the subject of this paper. Take, for instance, Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser, who observe that even if “in contemporary Spain there is a real demand for populist radical right parties ... the Great Recession has not improved the electoral odds of the populist radical right as such but rather facilitated the emergence of leftist populist forces” (2015: 21). These two political scientists, thus, wonder why the current context of crisis and austerity, translating into unparalleled levels of joblessness and disenfranchisement among large sectors of the middle and working classes, has not given place to the emergence of far-right populism in the country. Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser explain this supposed anomaly away by pointing to a series of institutional factors, fundamentally, the electoral system and the existence of regional party systems. While concurring with these observations, I would actually suggest that the emergence of what the authors call “left populism” is not a concomitant circumstance

or a byproduct of an anomalous process, but rather its main explanation: authoritarian populism has not unfolded because the emergence of a popular democratic response to austerity has kept it at bay. However, as the authors point out, the possibility of a reaction has remained latent all throughout. To better situate this risk I suggest we take a detour through the *longue durée* of Spanish politics.

Longue durée: The dialectic between revolution and counterrevolution

A look at Spain's political history during the 19th and 20th centuries reveals a cyclical regularity. Periods of decentralization, economic reform and extension of democratic rights intersperse amid a general panorama of elite dirigisme, clientelism and authoritarianism. If the first represent moments of political openness and class fluidity, the later represent political closure and class consolidation. For the sake of brevity, I will call the former periods "republican" and the latter "authoritarian". Although admittedly reductionist, this bipartite scheme will allow us to visualize the dialectic between revolution and counterrevolution that articulates Spain's political trajectory. For this, we will also have to follow Bello's suggestion (Bello 2017) and adopt a broad definition of revolution that includes historical processes of radical, democratic reform able to empower broad sectors of the popular urban and rural classes.

The republican interludes, glorified by the Spanish Left, are brief: the *Sexenio democrático* (or "six democratic years", 1868-1874), the Second Republic (1931-1939) and the *Transición* (the period, roughly 1973-1982, covering the latter years of the dictatorship up until the consolidation of a democratic regime). Authoritarian periods, such as the *Restauración* (1874-1923) and Franco's dictatorship (1938-1975), usually extend for three to four decades

All republican periods have been politically turbulent and unstable, features that sometimes extend to the preceding years (for example, 1919-1931). The turbulence and instability that characterizes these periods express both the political and class fluidity that made them possible and the counterrevolutionary tendencies that strove to cancel the promise of change that republican periods contained. Indeed, in the origin of each authoritarian period we can find some counterrevolutionary foundational act or set of events justified in the need to eliminate the risk of social revolution and aimed at controlling the state apparatuses and restoring the *statu quo ante* in order to reestablish class power, defend the economic interests of the elites and discipline the working classes. The result is a new "authoritarian" period, generally resistant to change and quite stable, which tends to get eroded over time as the accumulated changes in the country's political economy realign its class structure. As Bello (2017) suggests, the politically volatile middle classes tend to be the decisive social sector making both revolution and counterrevolution possible.

Certainly, there are big differences within each category. Yet it is important to consider that the memory of the preceding period within each group tends to have an important role in the following one. This is especially obvious with the "republican" periods. Each republican period remains in the memory of the left as an unfulfilled agenda and a repository of political possibilities—what Ernst Bloch (1991) would call an "uncompleted past"—that reemerges in the subsequent republican period (Izquierdo Martín and Sánchez León 2010). Thus for instance, as Pomés (2000) has shown, the memory of the First Republic (1873-74), which had briefly granted ownership rights to sharecroppers, crucially informed the demands of land reform and ownership of *Unió de Rabassaires*, the largest organization in the Catalan countryside during the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, *Unió de Pagesos*, the main Catalan agrarian union that emerged during the *Transición*, explicitly adopted the symbols and rhetoric of its antecessor.

The current conjuncture

In the light of the scheme that I just proposed, how should we characterize the contemporary constitutionalist democratic period, known as *Regime of 78* (in reference to the passing of the current constitution in 1978)? At least in part for the sake of clarity, I propose that we classify it as authoritarian. This may seem controversial: not only because it is problematic to class it together with

a military dictatorship, the Regime of 78 has created levels of political freedom, administrative decentralization and social protection that are quite unprecedented in Spanish history. Nonetheless, other elements would back my classification. Thus, the current regime emerged by closing the political openness of the *Transición* through a series of *transactions* between elites (epitomized in the 1977 *Pactos de la Moncloa*) oriented to fence off popular democratic reforms and demands, preserve the economic *statu quo* and bury the memory of the Civil War (Naredo 2001). More importantly, it must be noted that since the late 1990s there has been a slowing down in the rhythm of democratic conquests, and in some cases a clear rollback, while economic inequality modestly increased in parallel to the creation of a financialized economy that allowed for consolidation of class power.

The Regime of 78 has thus grown progressively less democratic and more authoritarian, and these authoritarian tendencies have accelerated in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. To the dismantling of welfare provisions and the attacks on workers rights, we must add, among others, the increased protagonism in the political process of the judicial system, the curtailment of protest and freedom of expression (epitomized in the *Ley Mordaza*), and the attempts to recentralize the administrative apparatus. While joblessness and precariousness augmented at an unprecedented rhythm, the Spanish government and EU institutions implemented an austerity program that socialized corporate debt, with banks and electricity companies (the traditional stalwarts of political-cum-economic power in the country) being the main beneficiaries.

Two movements pushing for a republican opening have combated the regime's authoritarian tendencies in the aftermath of the crisis. I am referring to the anti-austerity movement and Catalan *sobiranisme* (the movement demanding a Catalan independence vote). The foundational event of the former was what is known as the *indignados* uprising: the peaceful, semi-spontaneous gathering of a mostly young, middle-class crowd in the main urban squares of the country in May 15th, 2011 (Franquesa 2016). This event triggered a very notable cycle of protest, giving rise or strengthening a series of anti-austerity organizations (such as the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*) and political parties. The afterlives of the *indignados*—most notably Podemos and the electoral coalitions now ruling in most Spanish major cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Coruña, Cádiz, etc.)—achieved a tremendous capacity of social mobilization and a high electoral support, crucially influencing the country's political climate between 2011 and 2016. Although the immediate geographical reach of Catalan *sobiranisme* is far more restricted, its capacity to call into question the existing institutional arrangement and its impact over Spain's political life may have been greater. Indeed, in Catalonia, the pillars of the Regime of 78 (such as a stable, imperfectly bipartisan, party system; sacralization of the crown and the constitution; and the triumphalist narrative of the *Transición* as a foundational myth) have been shattered in less than a decade.

The uneasy relationship that both movements maintain with each other is clear evidence of their differences, which fall outside the scope of this paper. Yet despite their differences, the two are popular democratic, non-authoritarian movements that promote a democratic extension of civic empowerment (Pastor 2017). The two are also characteristically “republican”: they seek to undermine (and in many cases overcome) the Regime of 78, they are anti-monarchical, and they seek historical precedent in earlier republican periods. On the other hand, as is usually the case with movements possessing a broad social base, they both have important contradictions: the (waning) dominance of conservative nationalism within *sobiranisme* and Podemos' abjuring of the left-right political axis may be the two best examples (Charnock et al. 2011). These contradictions are not unrelated to the mild demos-phobic attitudes of both movements: their desire to play the political game within the institutional sphere has translated into a certain distrust towards, and desire to control, the popular ferment on which their force is based (Antentas 2017a and 2017b).

Since 2011, these two movements have been the main popular forces in the streets of Spain, and their activities have largely determined the country's political agenda during this period. In parallel, the imperfect bipartisan system upon which the Regime of 78 was constructed has been seriously undermined. For these reasons, it seems adequate to characterize the period between 2011 and 2016 as

one of emergent republicanism or, at least, as one in which the possibility of a democratic opening gained strength.

The end of the “exception”?

In 2016 and 2017 the republican opening has stalled, giving rise to a complex situation. The current balance of forces is quickly shifting in unpredictable ways, making it extremely difficult to foresee how will the political situation evolve in the following years. Thus, although there are signs of the weakening of the movements that represented the possibility of a democratic opening, the government and the forces of order do not seem to have the strength to stabilize the political situation either.

On the one hand, in recent months the two republican movements have encountered serious obstacles: Podemos’ inability to widen its electoral support became clear in 2016, and in 2017 the Catalan roadmap to independence collapsed, revealing the movement’s strategic shortcomings. The horizons of change that they projected seem to be closing, and this may likely translate into a new defensive phase and, perhaps, in an erosion of their popular support. In Catalonia, it may support a right, nationalist shift within *sobiranisme*.

On the other hand, the growth of Podemos and what is often described as the “Catalan challenge” have provided the justification for the growth of the government’s authoritarianism, which has taken shape in a context in which the division of powers has eroded, almost all big media outlets have closed ranks with the regime, and the main economic powers have heralded a visceral opposition and disdain to the two movements. Josep Maria Antentas (2017b) has labeled the government’s strategy *offensive resistentialism*. It is resistentialist because it is aimed at avoiding the possibility that the current context of political fluidity gives rise to a democratic, republican opening. It is “offensive” because it is not merely reactive, it is also reactionary: it does not seek to preserve the *statu quo* but to roll back the extension of democratic freedoms.

Nonetheless, it is far-fetched to believe that the forces of order, with the government at the forefront, will be able to create a new stable framework. A “passive revolution”—able to incorporate into the mainstream political process the urban middle classes that provide the backbone of the two republican movements—would require some sort of federalist reform and/or a new period of sustained economic growth. Both possibilities are unlikely. The relative weakness of the government and allied forces may thus push them to extend their offensive beyond the institutional sphere. Offensive resistentialism could then morph into a Spanish brand of authoritarian populism pushing for counterrevolution. Some recent developments—such as the increased public presence and symbolic virulence of Spanish nationalism and the quick rise of Ciudadanos, a pro-market, neoliberal party with a coded xenophobic discourse—have made clear that this is a real possibility.

In my view, it is too early to say whether the years 2016 and 2017 signaled the closure of the republican opening and the triumph of reaction, or whether they should simply be seen as an impasse marked by the resistance of a sclerotic regime. In large part, this will depend, in the first place, on the ability of the republican movements to rejuvenate, extend and strengthen their base, and to coordinate strategic alliances. In the second place, on whether the forces of reaction, feeling increasingly threatened by the popular democratic impetus, will be willing and able to promote the emergence of forms of authoritarian populism. The Spanish countryside may have quite to say in how these possibilities unfold.

The countryside

If, as I suggested, the period 2011-2016 contained the germ of a new republican period, it would also be the case that it introduced an absolute historical novelty with respect to its republican predecessors: the countryside has been little more than a non-presence in the recent political cycle.

The anti-austerity movement is overwhelmingly urban: its rhetoric and style, its symbols, its agenda, they all are quintessentially urban. Catalan *sobiranisme* is less univocal, and it certainly has a strong support in the Catalan countryside, but rural issues play a minimal part in its agenda and the political battle seems to be focused on widening the social base in urban Catalonia. The *Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajadores*, allied with the left sectors of both movements, is the one very notable exception to the countryside's political invisibility. This invisibility is further nurtured by media descriptions of the effects of the crisis, which tend to focus on urban contexts. Both crisis and austerity and the response to it are presented as having an urban face. It is not difficult to detect behind this urban bias the hardwired, implicit assumption that rural dwellers are conservative (with a small c) and poorly organized (the infamous "sack of potatoes"), and that change, therefore, can only come from the metropolitan areas.

But the negative stereotypes go in both directions, as an ethnographic anecdote may help illustrate. In May 2011, when the revolt of the *indignados* started, I was doing fieldwork in Southern Catalonia. As soon as I heard about the main square in Barcelona being occupied I took the train and went there, spending a couple of days in the house of a good friend of mine, a sociologist and feminist activist. At my return to Fatarella, the village where I lived, I went to see my neighbor, a man in his forties with deep socialist convictions with whom I built a strong friendship. He was tired, after working a double shift (in the fields and in a factory), and watching the news on the TV. The *indignados* were all over the place, and quite excitedly I told my neighbor that I was there, in the squares, just a few hours earlier. He didn't share my excitement: "I don't know, I mean, it is good that people move, for sure, but I see this movement, all these middle class kids, and, I don't know... I see it all too urbanite."

The political divide between country and city is very problematic. On the one hand, it imposes limits on the reach of emancipatory politics. On the other hand, it tends to conceal the worsening of life conditions in rural Spain and its potential political effects. This worsening of life conditions is especially evident in three processes that I will now examine: depopulation, land concentration and impoverishment. Let's briefly see them.

Depopulation, land concentration and impoverishment

The Spanish countryside suffered an abrupt process of rural exodus between 1955 and 1975. Generations of scholars (e.g. Sevilla Guzmán 1979; Contreras 1991; Etxezarreta 2006) have noted how this process of depopulation left a durable imprint in the consciousness of rural dwellers, generating widespread feelings of abandonment and hopelessness in the Spanish countryside. Although depopulation slowed down from the 1980s onwards, it did not stop, and rural Spain keeps losing population and getting older, especially in the northern half of the peninsula. A recent report (Recaño 2017) suggests that close to 2,000 municipalities (about 20% of the total) are in risk of disappearance. Furthermore, a series of TV programs and books (for instance, del Molino 2015; for a critique, see Moyano Estrada 2017) have popularized the idea of rural Spain as "Empty Spain." Emptiness qua irrelevance is replacing the old stigma of ignorance and backwardness, further distancing the urban dweller from the quotidian reality of the countryside. The exaggerated and somewhat romanticized emptiness of rural Spain can also work as a useful blinder to processes of land concentration and dispossession.

The Spanish countryside has experienced a remarkable process of land concentration, which has also affected most of Europe (Franco et al. 2013). Actually, van der Ploeg et al. (2015) argue that land concentration should be understood as one of the faces that land grabbing has taken in Europe. Like depopulation, the process of land concentration in Spain predates the crisis and is regionally uneven. According to Eurostat¹, between 2000 and 2010 the number of agricultural holdings decreased by 23%, whereas the agricultural area decreased by 9% (regionally, the most moderate decreases took place in in Catalonia, respectively 9% and 0.5%). Holdings of less than 5 hectares were especially

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agricultural_census_in_Spain#Main_statistical_findings, accessed on 15 December 2017.

affected by this reduction, whereas those above 100 hectares grew in number, translating into an 18% increase in the average size of holdings. During the same period, the amount of agricultural land in the hands of corporations increased by more than 20%, reaching 11% of the country's total (Soler and Fernandez 2015, 81). These transformations would apparently seem to confirm modernization theory-informed visions of agrarian differentiation, but, on its own, this explanation is far from convincing (van der Ploeg 2017). First, because the fact of the matter is that most Spanish agricultural holdings are family operations. Second, and more importantly, because modernization theory fails to take into account the role that mechanisms of extra-economic coercion (state and EU policies, financialization, real estate pressure, etc.) have played in land concentration processes

In this respect, it is crucial to highlight that the data that I have been discussing cover an interval (2000-2010) that largely coincides with what I have elsewhere (Franquesa 2017) called the Second Miracle: the bubble-led cycle of economic growth that Spain experienced between 1995 and 2007 (López and Rodríguez 2011; Fernández Durán 2006). The real estate and construction frenzy of the Miracle had a strong impact over agricultural land, leading to the privatization of public and communal lands, and to urban and infrastructural encroachment. This translated into land artificialization, the re-ordering of land use and speculation processes that provoked drastic land price increases. Thus, between 1995 and 2008, the average price of agricultural land more than doubled—from 5,200 to 11,010 euros per hectare (Soler and Fernández 2015, 88-93). The fact that these increases were especially strong in coastal and peri-metropolitan regions is clear evidence that they were the consequence of a pattern of capital accumulation based on ground rent valorization. These high prices often become an insurmountable barrier for young and new farmers wishing to make a living from agriculture. It thus seems fair to argue that the Second Miracle worked as a “land grab,” understanding the term as “mainstream shorthand denoting the corporate scramble for land and water” (Hall et al. 2015, 474). This is especially useful if, as Franco et al. (2013) argue, we adopt a definition of land grabbing that loosens the emphasis on ownership to place it on the capture of *control* over resources and the re-ordering of land uses. I will return to this point in my discussion on Southern Catalonia.

But if the Miracle eroded farmers' control over their environment—and consequently over their reproductive strategies (Scoones 2015)—it is fair to say that the impact of the ensuing crisis over their livelihoods was even deeper. Current urban-rural income differentials are massive. Indeed, it is not rare that the income of rural dwellers is less than half the one enjoyed by the inhabitants of the respective provincial capital (Sánchez 2017). This situation is in large part the result of the uneven effects of the Miracle and the crisis over rural and urban territories. The crisis has impoverished rural Spain both in relative and in absolute terms. If we take the case of Southern Catalonia, we will observe that average income per person went down from 17,700 euros in 2008 to 13,500 in 2014, which is incidentally the same number as in 2002. But whereas in 2002 that figure was slightly superior to the Catalan average, in 2014 it represented just 82% of it.² Thus, if in the 1990s the average individual income in Catalan agrarian counties was slightly above that of Barcelona's postindustrial, working-class neighborhoods, nowadays it is clearly below.

This impoverishment is especially troublesome for smallholders and, by extension, for the regions where family agriculture, often practiced on a part-time basis, is more prominent. Indeed, although I do not possess data for the whole of Spain, my fieldwork in Southern Catalonia suggests that the overall decrease of income is not primarily caused by a reduction of agrarian income. Rather, it results from the loss of industrial and state jobs and from the erosion of state provisioning brought about by economic crisis and austerity. The crisis has thus undermined the complementary sources of income that are critical for the reproduction of smallholding agriculture (Arnalte-Alegre and Ortiz-Miranda 2013). Additionally, it threatens to undermine the complex bundle of relationships between households through which land is cultivated, as well as the forms of subjectivity on which those relationships depend (Moragues-Faus 2014). Southern Catalans use several expressions to describe

² Data from Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, www.idescat.cat, accessed on 23 December 2017. See also Franquesa (2018).

these forms of subjectivity, among which the most common is “self-esteem.” The term encompasses a broad range of ideas: believing in your product and investing on it, maintaining affective relations with your land, your neighbors and the broader territory, develop initiatives (such as rural tourism) that create new revenue opportunities, translate to your children the desire to stay and make a living in the area, and so on.

Slow dispossession and angry people

Altogether, the transformations I have just described—depopulation, land concentration, and impoverishment—can be seen as forming a process of *slow* dispossession. My use of the adjective “slow”—borrowed from Nixon (2013)—aims to indicate its unspectacular, gradual of everyday character, which also helps explain the inattention that it receives in the broader public debate. It is fairly uncontroversial to presume that this dispossession has nurtured already existing feelings of abandonment and hopelessness in the Spanish countryside, especially among the social classes most firmly connected to smallholding agriculture.

I suggest that these objective and subjective conditions constitute a fertile hummus for the emergence of authoritarian populism. But it is necessary to underscore that, o this date, this has not happened: disenfranchisement has not turned into anger. However, it is worth noting that a keen observer such as Fernando Fernández, has recently spoken of the risk of Le Pen-ization in the Spanish countryside:

A year and a half ago, an agrarian organizer told me that he was worried because his bases reacted to their problems in increasingly more conservative ways, and because he found it increasingly difficult to introduce broader issues and debates. ... Since then I have observed a worrying political trend among certain sectors of the rural world who, feeling belittled and attacked, react by closing towards their own principles and evolve towards positions that have nothing to do with the defense of the rural world. ... More and more frequently I hear loaded conversations in the bar, the market and the fiestas that suddenly move from defending hunting and the need to control the fauna into a ferocious attack against environmental organizations and a defense of Spain and its traditions. I am worried to see Francoist flags in demonstrations demanding irrigation ... Where has the effort of the last decades in favor of food sovereignty and a lively, open, fraternal rural world gone? (2017: 27).

Fernández fears that we may be witnessing an authoritarian populist movement *in statu nascendi*. This movement, he observes, understands itself as reacting against abstract enemies, most notably “environmentalists” and “the urban society”, posited as the antagonists of the rural dwellers and their interests. Fernández offers a double explanation for the emergence of this movement. First, the Left’s inability to engage with the plight of the rural world and its unwillingness to understand the agrarian economy and, especially, family farming. This would open the way for the emergence of a Le pen-style populism that would find its social base among pensionists, rural workers, and small and middle farmers, rather than among large landowners and the agroindustry, more favorable to the *statu quo* and supportive of so-called market liberalization. The second key explanation has to do with the activity of a series of right-wing rural organizations, loosely connected with the Partido Popular. These organizations have recently undertaken an effort to organize rural discontent, creating a movement called “In defense of the rural world and its traditions” that puts the emphasis on identity questions and posits urban environmentalists as its nemesis.

Whether this will give place to some sort of full-fledged form of authoritarian populism in rural Spain is uncertain. By his own admission, Fernández’s reflections are preliminary, more the result of anecdotal experience than systematic analysis. Also, given the regionally fragmented character of Spanish politics, it is also probable that Fernández’s fears may especially apply only to certain areas of the Spanish geography. But all this notwithstanding, Fernández is an insightful analyst of Spain’s rural reality, and his observations are in consonance with the argument that I have been developing so far. That is to say, that the poor penetration of contemporary republican movements in the countryside opens a real opportunity for the emergence of authoritarian populism.

Southern Catalonia: a permanent revolt against all sorts of grabs

The poor penetration of anti-austerity movements in the countryside does not only signal a limit in these movements' capacity to expand their social base and geographical reach. As importantly, it undermines their capacity to analyze the Spanish reality and, by extension, to propose emancipatory projects. Most notably, it posits a limit to their understanding of the town-country (and center-periphery) relationship that underpins the existing structures of accumulation and domination. This, in turn, becomes a burden for introducing ecological questions in the emancipatory agenda (Asara 2015). Indeed, as a certain heterodox, and quite diffuse, Marxist tradition—represented by authors such as Antonio Gramsci (1957), Raymond Williams (1973) and Henri Lefebvre (1978)—has argued, I firmly believe that any successful emancipatory project must not only understand, but aim to supersede, the division between country and city that has been, and continues to be central, to the reproduction of capital and state.

Therefore, I want to be clear: I am not arguing for the Left's need to “conquer” the countryside; any expansion of the republican agenda into the countryside has to be built upon a history of rural struggle. In this section I briefly discuss one such a struggle in Southern Catalonia; it came to be known as the Southern Revolt, and it unfolded in the first years of the century. The case is not presented as a model, but I believe that it can teach us some lessons. Most notably it informs us about the need to develop an ecologically informed understanding of the role that the country-city division plays in the social division of labor and value, and to connect it with the lived experience and the political tradition of peoples who are differentially situated within that asymmetric space (Collins 2017; Hornborg 2011; De Angelis 2005).

A new productive function

From the mid 1950s through the 1970s, the Spanish economy experienced a rapid transformation, often called the Spanish Miracle (1955-1973). A radical increase of foreign direct investment coupled with a government-led process of large-scale industrialization transformed the country's productive structure and led to rapid processes of proletarianization and urbanization. In that context, the main economic function of rural Spain, including Southern Catalonia, was to provide workers for the nascent industry.

The result was a massive process of rural exodus that had contradictory effects in Southern Catalonia. The emigration of poor peasants to the urban, manufacturing poles left large landlords without sharecroppers, leading the former to divest from agriculture (generally, selling their land and moving their rentier activities to the provincial capitals). Thus, paradoxically, the context of agrarian crisis coexisted with a process of land distribution, with a relative reinforcement of middle farmers. Yet whereas this process created new formally independent middle farmers (Narotzky 1997: 190-223), the quick deterioration of the terms of trade coupled with the increased demand of inputs (fundamentally, machinery) translated into an increased squeeze for those peasants (Bernstein 2010).

As Southern Catalonia was losing its population, and thus becoming a region “with no productive function” (Smith 2011) in modern Spain, it became targeted for a new economic specialization: providing water and energy to urban Spain. Government and private electricity companies put their eyes on the region, first projecting a series of dams and hydroelectric stations, and later (in the 1970s and 1980s) as many as seven nuclear power plants. Southern Catalans resisted this process from the outset (Garcia 1997). Thanks to this resistance they were able to force the withdrawal of several projects, including two dams and three nuclear plants. The peak of this struggle took place in the late 1970s, in the context of the *Transición*, largely becoming the face of the pro-democracy struggle in Southern Catalonia. Opposition to these projects was especially strong among those social sectors depending on agriculture and, to a lesser extent, fishing. The recently created agrarian unions playing a decisive role in this struggle.

Southern Catalan land (and water) became useful for capital and state's interests at the same time that the region's labor was deemed redundant. As Tania Li (2010) argues, the most likely outcome of this situation is the expulsion of labor. However, in the case at hand the threat of direct expulsion is relatively small, and limited to the flooding caused by the dams. Nonetheless, the movements that resisted these projects, from agrarian organizations to the antinuclear movement, but also some sectors of the church, articulated their opposition as a defense of the local means of livelihood. It thus corresponded with what Joan Martínez Alier's (2003) calls "environmentalism of the poor", a defense of the local environment understood as a means of livelihood. Initiated in the 1970s, this struggle has continued to this day.

The country's pantry and sink

Resistance against extraction in Southern Catalonia experienced a strong rebirth at the turn of the century as a result of the coincidence in time of a series of infrastructural projects. Indeed, on February 4, 2001, the streets of Móra, the small commercial capital of the three northern counties of Southern Catalonia—Priorat, Ribera, and Terra Alta—hosted the largest demonstration that has ever taken place in the region. In front of 25,000 peaceful demonstrators, a simple banner read: "Stop aggressions to the territory." It was signed "The Platforms," a term that, in Spain, identifies local civil organizations convened to oppose a specific localized development and operating through an assembly-based, nonhierarchical structure. The four self-identified "Southern Platforms" that organized the Móra demonstration formed in the previous two years in response to three kinds of infrastructure projects. The Platforms of Terra Alta and Priorat opposed the proposal of the Catalan government that positioned the two counties at the center of wind farm development. The Platform of Ribera opposed several projected waste and energy facilities, most notably Enron's plan to build a natural gas combined-cycle power plant in Móra. And the Southern Catalan section of the state-wide Platform in Defense of the Ebro (PDE) opposed the National Hydrological Plan (PHN, in its Spanish acronym), a public plan of hydraulic infrastructures that hinged on the transfer of water from the Ebro River to Barcelona and the Spanish Levant (Valencia and Murcia).

The Móra demonstration is widely seen as the inaugural for an unprecedented cycle of mobilization, popularly known as the Southern Revolt. As I noted in the introduction, this revolt triggered a reconfiguration of the political balance of forces within the region, which has kept shifting to the left to this day. In contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, agrarian organizations played a secondary role in the opposition movement. Whereas during the *Transición* the conflict was framed as one of traditional (farming, fishing) Vs Modern economy (power plants), this time around the conflict emerged between two development models. The platforms defended a development model based on endogenous resources, where the farming base of household economies would be strengthened by adding distinction to local production (mostly, high-scale wine) and complementary activities (fundamentally, tourism). As activists insisted, this project of endogenous economic development wanted to combat hopelessness and relied on "generating self-esteem." The advocates of the infrastructural projects, in contrast, largely agreed with the government's view of the area as a lagging-behind region that could only develop by hosting ever-new energy projects that would pay taxes and rents (and a few jobs) to the local economy.

It should also be emphasized that the platforms developed a fairly sophisticated understanding of the broader political economic dynamics that converted their region into a site of extraction. An activist of the PDE, the largest and most powerful of the Southern platforms, once described what united the different platforms, and thence the spirit of the revolt, in the following terms: "We are sister struggles, we all fight against a development model that makes us peripheral: a pantry for water and energy, and a waste dump for what the country does not want." Furthermore, although the platforms emerged as a reaction to a series of projects, they were able to go beyond a merely defensive attitude. This is most obvious in their advocating for what they called a New Culture of Water and a New Culture of Energy. With these proposals, the platforms made clear that they were not NIMBY organizations.

The New Culture of Water presented itself as a new socioenvironmental paradigm for water management, calling for conservation and the democratization of water politics in front of the traditional top-down approach that saw water as a bulk resource to be managed through large-scale infrastructure (Arrojo 2006). Importantly, the activists of the PHN dispelled the idea that the conflicts around water—or “water wars”, as the media used to describe them—were conflicts between regions or between the country and the city. This was not a struggle for water between, say, Southern Catalan and Murcian peasants, or between rural Southern Catalans and Barcelona’s working classes. Against the government’s argument, which depicted Southern Catalans as selfish citizens depriving their fellow countrymen of water, the PDE took pains to emphasize that the water sent to Barcelona and the Spanish Levant would not serve urban dwellers and small farmers, but would instead benefit a select few in the thriving real estate and tourist sectors, as well as a non-sustainable agroindustry requiring cheap water and cheap migrant labor.

Similarly, the New Culture of Energy emphasized the need to decouple economic development from energy use, demanded the closing down of nuclear plants, and proposed a distributed energy system where smaller power plants closer to the point of consumption would progressively substitute large power plants owned by the traditional utilities. In this sense, they criticized the way renewable energy was being developed (top-down planning and corporate ownership), suggesting that it worked as a form of “green grabbing”: land grabbing in the name of the environment (Fairhead et al. 2012). This is illustrated with the recurrent complaint that Southern Catalan landowners wage against wind farm developers: “They have become the (new) landlords.” This critical approach contrasted with the full-fledged support that environmentalist organizations gave to the development of renewables, regardless of its characteristics. The gap between mainstream environmentalism and the movement’s own environmentalism of the poor mapped onto the country-city division.

Against the Second Miracle and its ecological regime

The Southern Revolt had its maximum strength between 2000 and 2004, the peak years of the Second Miracle, a period of high rates of economic growth roughly spanning between 1995 and 2008. Indeed, the Southern Revolt was the largest of a series of conflicts against infrastructural projects (airports, golf courses, waste dumps, seaside resorts, etc.) that mushroomed in Spain, with a very strong presence in Catalonia. Local activists, though their platforms tended to operate independently, identified their struggles as part and parcel of a nationwide “movement in defense of the territory” (Alfama et al. 2007).

The so-called “movement in defense of the territory” emerged as a response to the patterns of development of the Second Miracle. The movement may in fact be read, using Polanyian language (Polanyi 2001), as a countermovement, an unplanned social defense against a structure of accumulation based upon a frenetic use and abuse of space and nature. The housing bubble, the ecological degradation of the seaside, the dramatic underuse of new, large-scale infrastructures such as airports, power plants, and high-speed trains—as well as the corruption that accompanied these projects—are all part of the present-day consequences, a damning testament to the Second Miracle’s effects on Spain’s environment. So is the ongoing crisis and the austerity measures that the government and the EU imposed on the Spanish citizenry in order to facilitate debt repayment.

As the epicenter of this movement, the Southern Revolt made clear that the Second Miracle was a deeply ecological process. Jason Moore’s (2015) concept of “ecological regime” will help me make my point. He defines the term as: “those relatively durable patterns of governance, technological innovations, class structures, and organizational forms that have sustained and propelled successive phases of world accumulation” (2015: 158). The notion of ecological regime, then, refers to durable sets of relations organizing the metabolism—that is to say, the material exchanges between humans and the environment—of any given political-economic order. These relationships are not external but a central constitutive element of that order.

The key element of the Second Miracle was the spatial expansion of the frontier of ground rent valorization, allowing for the inflation of real estate assets, the overgrowth of the construction sector, and fabulous financial profits for banking and related sectors—as well as an unprecedented escalation of private and corporate indebtedness. All the big winners of the Second Miracle—banks, electric utilities, construction companies, and the real estate sector—engaged in a construction binge, funded by cheap credit and focused on residential units and large-scale infrastructure. Whereas traditional central areas (big cities, the seaside) became central to this activity, the Second Miracle pushed the frontier into peri-urban areas and the entirety of the Mediterranean coast. New areas of ground rent valorization sustained a form of rent extraction crucial to the reproduction of the dominant structures of accumulation. The “rest” of the country was *iterated* as a periphery.

The expansion of this frontier, combined with the increasing metabolic demands of an economic system highly reliant on increasing flows of energy and water, put added pressure to peripheries such as Southern Catalonia. The Southern Revolt was a struggle against using the area as tap and sink for that wasteful metabolism, and in so doing it revealed the contradictions and socioenvironmental injustice on which it was based.

If I emphasize this point is to note a counterintuitive temporal *décalage*. As I argued earlier, the rural world has been a ghostly presence in the republican movements that tried to break with the status quo in the 2011-16 period, providing a popular democratic response to austerity and its attendant authoritarianism. Yet the rural world was absolutely central in the critique of the cycle of accumulation that preceded and provoked the crisis. Also important, movements born in the rural world were especially good at disclosing the authoritarian tendencies of the Partido Popular and, by extension, the party system that gave stability to the Regime of 78. These authoritarian tendencies were very clear in the government’s defense of the PHN. But the PDE made sure that no one forgot that it was the social-democratic PSOE (the other main political party) that had first conceived the PHN. Something similar can be said about *Nunca Mais*, the movement that emerged in Galicia after the Prestige’s oil spill.

The lack of coordination between these different movements speaks volumes about the fragile bridges that link the political life of country and city in contemporary Spain. However, it is also a powerful reminder that the Spanish rural society is not necessarily passive nor conservative, or at least not any more than its urban counterpart.

Dignity

I argued that the Southern Revolt teaches an important lesson to contemporary republican movements: the urgency to develop an ecologically informed understanding of the city-country division. At least two more lessons can be added. First, the need to couple the critique of austerity with an equally ruthless critique of the economic bonanza that preceded it, understanding its “slow” dispossessing effects. Second, the importance of grasping and mobilizing for political purposes emergent “structures of feeling” (Williams 1973). In the case of the Southern Revolt, this is illustrated in how political and economic grievances and opportunities were connected to feelings of abandonment and the quest for self-esteem. In this concluding section I will further elaborate on these ideas by discussing the role that the notion of dignity played both in the Southern Revolt and in the more recent republican movements.

Dignity in Southern Catalonia

After 2004, the Southern Revolt lost steam. But it did not disappear, mainly because infrastructural projects treating the area as “pantry and sink” kept popping up. Thus for instance, in 2007 a group of Southern Catalan organizations opposing a new series of energy projects (more wind farms, a nuclear waste storage facility, and a natural gas submarine deposit) issued a manifesto: “Until recently, we put up with everything like submissive subjects. ... But since 2000, with the struggle against Enron and

PHN, we gained our dignity and learned to organize and make ourselves respected. Never again resignation... We are not submissive subjects anymore, we are citizens who have learnt how to struggle and we will struggle for our future.”³

This quote captures the political spirit of the Southern Revolt and, more generally, of the long Southern Catalan struggle against all forms of authoritarianism and land grabbing. Crucially, it underscores that this struggle has created politically active subjects, and it does so by contrasting dignity and resignation. Indignation draws on, reinforces and gives political character to self-esteem, thus combatting a fatalistic passivity. Daniel Bensaïd expressed it thus: “We still have the irreducible force of indignation, which is the exact contrary of resignation. Even when one ignores the justice of what is just, there is still the dignity of indignation and unconditional rejection of injustice. Indignation is a beginning. A way of rising up and getting going” (2001: 106).

During the last decades, dignity has been the main idiom through which Southern Catalans have opposed their marginalization and the conversion of their land into tap and sink of the accumulation process. Indeed, dignity should be understood as the central element of a local “theoretical framework”—to use Susana Narotzky’s (2016) expression—aiming to explain but also to disrupt the value relations that both sustain and result from a particular political economic structure. This structure allows for the extraction of profits from the area, producing its inhabitants and their possessions, most notably land, into what Vinay Gidwani (2012) calls “waste”: what the law of value needs to devalorize (in the full sense of the term) in order to produce economic value.

This demand for dignity takes two different, although often overlapping, forms. First, it emerges as indignation, a fiery reaction against passively accepting the denial of one’s own dignity, and being indignant is often opposed to being subjected. In this respect, dignity is the contrary of resignation and deference, as well as a refusal “to conceive of oneself as someone else”. The second form emerges as an assertion of dignity, understood here as worth. It claims the value of Southern Catalans and their possessions, especially of their land, and of the region as a whole. Indignation, thus, emerges as an attempt to reproduce a resistant subjectivity that is intimately intertwined with a political project that predates the modernization process, an *uncompleted past* (Bloch 1991) of making autonomous peasant livelihoods and of being citizens who fully participate in the political process. The demand of dignity is an attempt to preserve—but also to construct and perform—certain possessions, a struggle against dispossession: being able to make a living and stay put, preserving the value of land, maintaining local networks of solidarity, preserving some control over the labor process and household reproduction.

Beyond its explicit political uses, the notion of dignity is rarely used in Southern Catalonia. But there is a glaring exception: Southern Catalans often emphasize the dignity of being a *pagès*. This Catalan word—cousin of the French *paysan*—means peasant or farmer (although not entrepreneurial farmers, who would prefer the expression “agrarian businessman” [*empresari agrari*]). Yet I should point that in Southern Catalonia the term is applied to anyone who feels an attachment with the agrarian economy, anyone who wishes to make a living in the land. The idea of dignity, thus, is crucially connected with, and actually emerges from, the struggle for survival, whether it takes an explicit political form or it simply asserts a local, class-inflected identity.

Dignity beyond Southern Catalonia

Southern Catalans are not the only ones to use the idiom of dignity. Thus for instance, in 2003 the Galician *Nunca Más* movement, mentioned above, made famous its *Manifesto da Dignidade*, the Dignity Manifesto. More recently, the claim for dignity has been a powerful undercurrent of popular democratic struggles. The anti-austerity movement emerged as indignation (the *indignados* movement), and around it emerged ongoing initiatives such as the Dignity Marches, organized by a coalition of unions and left organizations to demand “bread, roof, and work”. In 2015, Pablo Iglesias, the leader of Podemos, argued in a political rally: “We are the only reasonable possibility to recover

³ See www.plataformaterraalta.com/manifest%20mani%20tortosa.htm

our dignity.”⁴ On October 2nd, 2017, in the aftermath of the police’s repression of the vote for Catalan self-determination, the cover of the Catalan newspaper *Ara* had just two words: “Shame and Dignity” (*Vergonya i Dignitat*). A few days later, Xavier Domènech, a leader of the Comuns (the main Catalan afterlife of the *indignados* movement) tweeted: “October 1st was the dignity of a plural and diverse people that affirmed itself in the face of repression.” Still some weeks later, the radical philosopher Santiago López Petit reminisced about the referendum in these terms: “the audacity to transgress all together, the collective force of a country that no one can represent and the joy of resisting... will never be forgotten. Dignity and coherence cannot be negotiated.”⁵ The examples could be multiplied.

During the first decade of the century, the idiom of dignity was central to the political discourse of movements—such as the Southern Revolt and the Galician *Nunca Más*—that felt mistreated and abandoned, largely left out from the body politic. After 2011, the idiom traveled from the rural periphery to the city squares, a move that reflected that a growing section of the urban working- and middle-classes felt left behind. Crisis and austerity curtailed their middle-class aspirations and threatened to expulse them from the mechanisms of hegemony and to render them “people with no productive function.” We can extract at least two conclusions from this sequence of events. First, that the idiom of dignity can be a powerful mobilizer assembling people with different life experiences, bridging the political divide between country and city. Second, that the current anti-austerity popular democratic movement has much to learn from the political experience of rural Spain.

The limits and openness of dignity

But we should not fool ourselves. The demand for dignity and the experience of indignation are not patrimony of the Left. As several authors have noted (for example, Riley 2013), the force of the demand for dignity is its disruptive capacity, its ability to call into question the existing liberal order. Yet that disruptive capacity can be mobilized in a popular democratic direction or in an authoritarian populist one.

This latter possibility can be appreciated in a political rally that the movement “In defense of the rural world and its traditions” (the movement that Fernando Fernández identified as containing the seed of a rural authoritarian populism) organized in September of 2017 in Córdoba. In this rally, attended by 40,000 people, the organizers gave a speech complaining about nature preservation laws and the animals-rights movement, and arguing that they were causing “unease and indignation” in the rural world. And they continued by saying: “Today a new alliance is born, a new way of fighting for the rural world and its traditions. And, with it, the rural world inaugurates a new way of fighting for its dignity and its interests.”⁶ This quote makes clear that the ferment for an authoritarian populism with a rural base speaking in the language of dignity is in place. If the mostly urban-based, popular democratic movements that have set the political agenda in recent years do not increase their effort to reach the countryside, this ferment will grow.

It thus seems fair to say that in order to be hegemonic, any popular/populist movement must come to embody a fight for dignity. Yet dignity is a largely empty concept, which simply asserts the presence and value of a group that feels disenfranchised. Whether this morally loaded concept takes a republican or a reactionary direction almost fully depends on the contents that it is given and the social groups that articulate it and are summoned by it. This may help explain the historical political volatility of many parts of rural Spain. Southern Catalonia, an area where moderate, liberal political currents have never been strong, offers a good example. In the mid to late nineteenth century it was one of the epicenters of Carlism, a reactionary, deeply authoritarian political movement whose motto

⁴ <http://www.europapress.es/murcia/noticia-iglesias-orguloso-ser-hijo-15m-somos-unica-posibilidad-razonable-recuperar-dignidad-20150515232627.html>

⁵ http://www.eldiario.es/interferencias/Catalunya-laboratorio-politico_6_719238078.html

⁶ <http://www.cordobahoy.es/album/la-ciudad/mundo-rural-existe-demuestra-calle/20170930171959033628.html>

was “God, Fatherland, King.” Then, in the early twentieth century, the region became a hotbed of cooperativist initiatives, socialist ideas and anarchist experiences, all pushing for land reform and democratization (Sánchez Cervelló 2001). Although they did not use this language, it can be said in fairness that both movements, reactionary and republican, embodied a demand for dignity, but they gave a very different content to this demand, while articulating very different class interests around it.

If republican movements are to make inroads in the countryside, they have to connect the feelings of indignation with a broader analysis—oriented to a more equal and fraternal future—of the political economic dynamics that are at the base of those feelings. This is what makes dignity republican. Otherwise rural dwellers are likely to find their self-esteem through an exclusionary notion of dignity underpinning a reactionary program. Easier said than done, of course. Yet I would argue that this is what the Southern Revolt did. It made the connection between a contemporary fight and a long trajectory of peasant struggle for autonomy; it linked personal experience with a critical reading of Spain’s political economy and ecological regime; it connected the struggle with a search for economic alternatives and a project of radical democratic empowerment. And the effects are still noticeable. And yet, as I suggested earlier, the spirit of the Southern Revolt is growing weaker. The crisis is making Southern Catalan livelihoods more and more fragile, and with this solidarity gets strained, self-esteem weakens, and the energy to reproduce a resistant subjectivity feels increasingly Quixotic. And with all these, the specter of reaction grows stronger.

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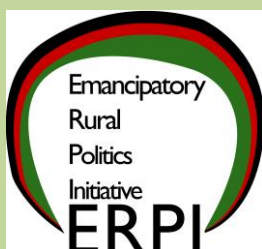
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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