Back to the countryside (1940s-1950s). Rethinking rural space through Lefebvre's urban sociology. This paper aims to rediscover Henri Lefebvre's unknown contribution to the debate on the rural question during the last century and establish a connection with his most renowned urban studies. The Anglophone debate in rural sociology has yet to discuss this topic, and there is only partial systematic discussion on Lefebvre's rural studies. This article's originality lies in its discussion and reconstruction of Lefebvre's contribution to the debate on the rural question in France. It supports the thesis that understanding Lefebvre's intellectual period of reflection on rural space (1940s-1950s) is crucial to comprehending subsequent studies on the urban and the production of space. Consequently, I emphasize the significance of revisiting Lefebvre's earliest rural studies as a starting point for understanding his urban reflections. This article aims to explain how urban studies are a vital progression that emerges from the social inquiries conducted in rural studies. The radical transformation of nature and the peasant universe brought about by capitalism will lead Lefebvre to delve into the epochal problem of the urban question.
KEYWORDS: Henri Lefebvre; rural sociology; ground rent; Marxism; land policies.

Regresso ao campo (1940-1950). Repensar o espaço rural através da sociologia urbana de Lefebvre. O objetivo deste artigo é redescobrir a contribuição desconhecida de Henri Lefebvre para o debate sobre a questão rural no século passado e estabelecer uma ligação com os seus estudos urbanos mais célebres. O debate anglófono em sociologia rural ainda não abordou este tema, havendo apenas uma discussão sistemática parcial sobre os estudos rurais de Lefebvre. A originalidade deste artigo reside na discussão e reconstrução da contribuição de Lefebvre para o debate sobre a questão rural em França. Defende a tese de que a compreensão do período intelectual de reflexão de Lefebvre sobre o espaço rural (décadas de 1940-1950) é crucial para a compreensão dos seus estudos subsequentes sobre o espaço urbano e a produção do espaço. Consequentemente, sublinho a importância de revisitar os primeiros estudos rurais de Lefebvre como ponto de partida para compreender as suas reflexões urbanas. Este artigo tem como objetivo explicar a forma como os estudos urbanos são uma progressão vital que emerge das investigações sociais conduzidas em estudos rurais. A transformação radical da natureza e do universo camponês provocada pelo capitalismo levará Lefebvre a aprofundar o problema da época da questão urbana.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Henri Lefebvre; sociologia rural; renda fundiária; marxismo; políticas fundiárias.

https://doi.org/10.31447/34292 | e34292

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Back to the countryside (1940s-1950s). Rethinking rural space through Lefebvre's urban sociology

INTRODUCTION

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) is undeniably one of the most distinctive interpreters of the rural world, particularly when compared to his contemporaneous theorists. As highlighted by Elden and Morton (2022, p. xxxv), "much of Lefebvre's work remains untranslated and therefore awaits discovery". This article aims to contribute to the rediscovery and discussion of Lefebvre's rural studies. During the same period, Edgar Morin observed the decline of everyday life in the peasant community of Plodémet (1967). However, Lefebvre went beyond this by reflecting on the capitalist process of urbanization in the countryside since the 1940s. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to unearth the author's contribution to the urban question debate and to establish a connection with his renowned work on urban studies. Only a limited number of studies (Elden, 2004, pp. 127-140; Stanek, 2011, pp. 5-17) systematically engage with Lefebvre's rural studies. Consequently, this article's originality lies in its discussion and reconstruction of Lefebvre's contribution to the rural question debate in France. It supports the thesis that a comprehensive understanding of subsequent studies on the urban and the production of space necessitates an appreciation of Lefebvre's reflection on rural space during that time.

Lefebvre's interest in the rural world emerged during World War II, more precisely during his political and armed militancy as a member of the anti-fascism French resistance: in fact, since 1941, he was an active participant in the partisan network of the city of Marseille. However, in 1943, Vichy's army forced him to seek shelter in the Pyrenees, near Tarbes, with his first wife and both sons. This also happened following some personal conflicts with one of the partisan leaders who had been accused by Lefebvre's wife of having molested her (Hess, 1988, pp. 110-113; Merrifield, 2006, pp. 3-4; Elden, 2004, p. 4).

In the Spanish-French borderlands, Lefebvre found his home in the French Pyrenees. It was here that he embarked on the collection of historical documentation on rural sociology, which would become the foundation for his doctoral studies. The resistance thus allowed him to have direct contact with the peasant population, and he found himself in a privileged position that enabled him to conduct a study that was typical of participant observation. During this time, Lefebvre became friends with Georges Henri Rivière, the curator of the Art and Tradition Museum of Paris, who – apart from revealing himself as a great anti-Nazi spy – invited Lefebvre to undertake a study on the rural history of the French countryside in the surroundings of Tarbes. In the course of these years, the author alternated partisan militancy with research: in 1944, he moved to the Spanish border so that he could help lead the resistance. What he had learned during his military service was now useful from a strategic point of view: one of his partisan leaders was a close friend he had met at the time of compulsory enlistment in the army. Together they organized an entire resistance cell that was all over the French Pyrenees until the end of World War II (Hess, 1988, pp. 114-116).

For the moment, it should suffice to point out how the political theory of social space – which Lefebvre would outline accurately during the sixties – already achieved its full expression in his studies in the forties. These studies and his interest surfaced while Lefebvre was escaping from Vichy's fascist police, having taken shelter in a barn in the French Pyrenees. There, as his only reading options, he had access to the county's agricultural archives (Costes, 2009, p. 5).

FROM COUNTRYSIDE TO THEORY: HENRI LEFEBVRE'S EARLY RURAL SOCIOLOGY STUDIES

Lefebvre's earliest rural sociology studies date back to the forties, more precisely from 1943 to 1946, a period in which he devoted himself to an ethnographical enquiry about the Pyrenees – his home region. This came about thanks to the commission he had been assigned by the *Musée national des art et traditions populaires* of Paris founded in 1937 with the thrust of the "Popular Front" where Rivière – the museum manager – had planned a broadened survey concerning the French rural communities that had not yet undergone subjugated by wild urbanization (Ganas, 2005; Hess, 1988, p. 169). Here, Lefebvre shared ethnographical studies with the young Albert Soboul (Trebitsch, 1991, pp. XXIV-XXV; Stanek, 2011, p. 5). The latter afterwards became one of the most renowned historians of the French Revolution.

Furthermore, the research was requested to make illegitimate nationalist and identity prejudice that surrounded transalpine cultural roots, mainly caused by the fascist manipulation in 1930s France (Stanek, 2011, p. 5). This inquiry about the Pyrenees would be later concluded in 1954 as a theme of his doctorate dissertation defended at the Sorbonne under Georges Gurvitch's guidance.[1] In 1947, Gurvitch invited Lefebvre (Hess, 1988, p. 165; Stanek, 2011, p. 9) to work at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) where he would conduct his work at the recently created Centre d'études sociologiques (CES) until 1961 (Trebitsch, 2002, pp. XII-XIV), when he assigned Henri Mendras (1993) to be head of the rural studies research group (Stanek, 2011, p. 18; Alphandéry and Sencébé, 2009). During this period, Lefebvre collaborated with Mendras on their shared interests in the field. However, the secondary bibliography tends to emphasize Mendras' prominence, neglecting to recognize Lefebvre's contributions (Simon, 2022, p. 118).

1 As correctly noted by Elden and Morton in their foreword (2022, p. XII): "In 1954 he submitted his two doctoral theses to the Sorbonne – a primary thesis on peasant communities in the Pyrenees and a secondary thesis that was a detailed study of one valley, its people, geography, and history. The first, principal thesis was only published in 2014; the second as the book *La vallée de Campan* in 1963. The theses were supervised by Georges Gurvitch, as his initial supervisor Maurice Halbwachs had died in the Buchenwald concentration camp. At the CNRS, Lefebvre deepened his analysis of peasant communities and social classes, and began work on sociological and political-economic issues". He wrote two doctoral theses, which are: Henri Lefebvre, *Les communautés paysannes pyrénéennes* (Bagnères-de-Bigorre: Société Ramond/ /Cercle Historique de l' Arribiére, 2014), published posthumously. Henri Lefebvre, *La vallée de Campan: Étude de sociologie rurale*, 2nd ed. (Paris: PUF, 1990 [1963]). It is worth noting that there is a dispute regarding Gurvitch's role as the director of Lefebvre's doctoral work, as presented by Dylan Simon (2022). Simon's archival research reveals that Gurvitch participated in Lefebvre's doctoral committee and engaged in extensive discussions with him. However, the actual dissertation directors listed on the document records are André Cholley and Georges Davy. This discrepancy arises from the unfortunate circumstances of Maurice Halbwachs, the initial professor Lefebvre sought assistance from for his doctoral thesis, being killed in a concentration camp. Despite Simon's meticulous archival work, the core point remains unchanged: Gurvitch had a significant influence on Lefebvre, guiding and assisting him in his studies and academic career. Emphasizing Lefebvre's relationship with Gurvitch in his early studies in rural sociology is crucial. Furthermore, according to Simon's conclusions, Lefebvre's involvement in the establishment of a new study center indicates that he was not a "peripheral" author, but that he participated in the institutionalization of sociology, and had the opportunity to contribute to the founding of new institutions. However, it may be a stretch to claim that Lefebvre was not "peripheral" to academic power, considering his relative obscurity compared to other currents of Marxist thought, such as structuralism or existentialism, which gained greater fame in the second half of the twentieth century. Lefebvre remains a relatively "peripheral" and lesser-known author, overshadowed by other prominent intellectual movements.

First of all, it should be pointed out that between the sixties and the seventies, a process of politicization of the urban question within the social sciences took place. This occurred simultaneously with their institutionalization as an academic discipline, triggered by the new rural sociological studies: these problematized the radical changes operated by capitalism in the countryside. For instance, Busquet (2007, p. 99) defines such a "weaning" from urban sociology by rural studies as a radicalization, from the sociological point of view, by means of his new readings of Marx's works. The roots of both processes, or rather, both the process of politicization and that of institutionalization of the discipline that was born in the *humus* of rural studies dated back to 1951, when the *Centre d'études sociologiques* of the Paris CNRS delegated to the sociologist Friedmann the task of organizing a permanent seminar entitled *Villes et Campagnes* (Friedmann, 1953).

This seminar aimed to study the decay of the peasant world and the growing urbanization derived from the rebuilding of the transalpine country after World War II could be enacted (Raymond, 1988, pp. 63-73). Lefebvre, his future fellow in Nanterre Touraine, and the anthropologist Chombart de Lauwe (1996) would also take part in these seminars (Costes, 2009, pp. 19-24). Furthermore, they witnessed a broadened interdisciplinary participation due to the presence of historians such as Braudel and Georges Lefebvre; and also of geographers, economists, ethnologists, demographers, and psychologists (Busquet, 2007, p. 101). The initial steps of this discipline are still confusing. As Lefebvre pointed out, their preferred perspective is one characterized by nostalgic traits concerning the rural world and one that uses a certain type of Marxism defined by prejudice against the urban world (Lefebvre, 1986). In fact, the relationships between city and rural space are highlighted by mass movements of peasants, by internal migrations across the French mainland, comparing the rural civilization to the urban one (Busquet, 2007, pp. 103--105). Thereby, French urban sociology immediately comes to light as an interdisciplinary academic domain, emerging from the resources derived from various contributions and perspectives.

Another contributing factor that would sanction a clear recognition of the discipline by the French academy will be the Convention of Royaumont in 1968, entitled *Urbanisme et sociologie* (Fondation Royaumont pour le progrès des sciences de l'homme, 1970). This convention aimed to reunite all the theoreticians of the city and the urban in France: on the one hand, to allow the dialogue with public institutions, and on the other hand, to assess the initial years of this teaching (Busquet, 2007, pp. 123-124). Lefebvre's influence was already vast; one has only to consider the fact that various of his students were present, such as Hubert Tonka, Henri Raymond, and Nicole Haumont. Finally,

among the participants at the 1968 conference, Manuel Castells stood out for questioning the basis of the discipline and arguing that the urban sociology institution was a product that derived exclusively from the interests of the academy and the French state (Castells, 1968; 1969). It is not possible here to elaborate further on the clash between Castells and Lefebvre. However, in order to understand the fact that urban sociology mostly arose from research on the changes in the rural world, suffice it to say that for young Castells, the emerging urban and spatial perspectives were regarded as an ideological label of the dominating class: he did not deny the urbanization process and the resulting changes, but believed that assigning a primacy to such a point of view was an unwise choice for those who instead aimed at studying the social consequences of the capitalist universe from the Marxist perspective.

The so called "urban question" that arose with the advent of capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century was identifiable in the imprint of the dominant ideology, while – conversely – it did not derive from the dominance of the development of the productive forces of the capital and of the exploitation they exerted. In conclusion, Castells (1979), as a fine apprentice of the structuralist Althusser, was convinced that Lefebvre had urbanized Marxism instead of using Marx to understand the structure of the entire society.

Recently, Castells has partly criticized his own thinking: in fact, during an interview he declared that his derogatory statements regarding the Lefebvrian concept of "urban revolution" were wrong and had been overly influenced by an orthodox reading of Marxism, and he recognized, therefore, the worth of Lefebvre's insight in expanding the Marxist heritage towards the new urban borders of the capitalist accumulation (Pflieger, 2006, p. 71). However, Castells is still convinced that he is right from the moment he still perseveres in reading Lefebvre's contribution as a piece of the "cultural perspective" of the urban analysis, equivalent to that of the Chicago School. For Castells, this means denying an autonomous status to urban studies and not pursuing the Marxist method, which could trace the disparities of power and the asymmetric relationships of class (Pflieger, 2006, p. 72).

Despite Lefebvre always dismissing Castells' critiques, there is no actual trace of response from his side regarding the Spanish sociologist in his entire writings. Apart from that, there is a strong animosity that arises in Castells' words against the French sociologist, who is accused of bragging that he had been Castells' *maître à penser*, and who stubbornly went on ignoring Castells' contribution (Pflieger, 2006, p. 72).

Putting aside the controversies between both authors, I believe it is useful to point out three elements. The first being that urban sociology is a child of rural studies, not only for Lefebvre, as we have been able to assess in the

conferences organized in the fifties and sixties, but also for the entire French debate. The second is Castells' insistence on not fully placing Lefebvre in the *pantheon* of the Marxist debate. The third is that Castells' partial retraction does not explicitly refer to the preliminary error against the domain of urban sociology studies.

The amendment is declared mainly concerning the critique of Lefebvrian works on the urban from 1968 to 1972, but Castells completely removed his original refusal of the urban sociology expressed in his paper dated 1968 entitled *Y'a t'il une sociologie urbaine?*, to the point that there is no sign of any posthumous comments in that regard. In fact, Castells took part in that debate, remaining a faithful structuralist pupil of Touraine (and, through Poulantzas, of Althusser), working between the sociology of labor and the sociology of social movements. What is most striking is his outstanding contradiction in persisting in not considering Lefebvre as an innovator of Marx's heritage and reducing his contribution to a culturalist point of view on the urban. Castells himself initially had uncritically adhered to the Althusserian orthodox vision, unable to conceive the innovation conveyed to the studies on the city. Contrary to Castells, I hereby state my belief that Lefebvre is an original innovator of Marx and Engels' legacy. Such an innovative contribution will therefore be proved through the studies on rural sociology, authentic fertile *humus* for the following urban studies by the author.

THE BIRTH OF A NOTION: EXPLORING THE RURAL COMMUNITY

Coming across rural sociology was to shape young Lefebvre. On the one hand, it strengthened in him the notion that Marxist theory is to be used as a reference to interpret reality in its concrete evolution – therefore, in this instance, the ethnographic technique is paramount; on the other hand, it brought home to him that Marx's legacy itself must seek its lifeblood in everyday life, and that it should be proved and demonstrated in its actual escalating out of the capitalist dynamics of exploitation. We find the most valuable confirmation in the essays that were published between 1949 and 1969 in various journals (to be more precise, his interest in the rural world, in terms of bibliographic production, ended in 1956) that were collected by Mario Gaviria in *Du Rural à l'Urbain* (Lefebvre, 1970/2001a) to which the author only added a preface.[2]

2 In this article, I primarily rely on the English edition of Lefebvre's texts whenever possible. However, it should be noted that the English edition does not always align perfectly with the original French edition. Therefore, at times, I refer to the French texts for analysis. →

In this text, Lefebvre explicitly states the need to shift his field of analysis from philosophy to sociology, always pointing out his radical refusal of specialism and differentiation between domains.

In the initial section to the chapter titled "Problems of rural sociology: the peasant community and its historical-sociological problems" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 17-36), originally published in the journal *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* in 1949 and later included in the collection *Du Rural à l'Urbain* in 1970, Lefebvre presents the perspective from which he situates his research within the discourse surrounding the rural question. He argues that in order to engage with rural sociology effectively, one must not abandon the historical perspective. His intolerance regarding the boundaries between domains is a stance typical of Lefebvre: "sociological theory can and must cooperate with history, with political economy, to reveal the general law of the process without omitting contingent or aberrant forms, and without neglecting the extreme complexity of the facts" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 31).

The analysis of the rural world starts in the 18th century, which is when the way of life of the countryside itself underwent a spiraling mutation by means of the first industrial tools and consequently became the object of study by physiocrats. The peasant community becomes the object of study by physiocrats whose sole aim is to understand how to establish a capitalist valuation of its "non-contemporaneity" in a world that conversely is more and more interested in the great market.

Effectively, the physiocrats advocated for a specific economic valuation of agricultural wealth, viewing it as the sole source of the economic surplus of a society. Consequently, they believed that industry only had a redistributive effect on this wealth. In short, their interest was to unleash the economic potential of agriculture, aiming to maximize land productivity. As written by Lefebvre, this "rightward trend" is followed instead by a "leftward trend" devoid of any instrumental vision (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 20-21; 2003 [1970], p. 6).

Secondly, the aim is to emphasize the historical-genealogical origin of the rural community since ancient times so that a precise definition of it can then be inferred. Lefebvre uses Durkheim's classical categories, the concepts

Specifically, I analyze Lefebvre's texts as collected in the original French edition edited by Mario Gaviria. I do not consider the texts added in the English edition edited by Elden and Morton, although their edition merits recognition for including additional texts by Lefebvre on the rural question. However, they do not include translations of the remaining texts on the urban question found in *Du rural à l'urbain*, thereby missing out on Gaviria's original intention. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the editor's extensive understanding of the motivations that drove Lefebvre to study the urban question following his engagement with the rural question.

of "mechanical solidarity" and "organic solidarity," with the intention of providing a cross-section of the internal economy of the rural world based on the forms of ownership relationships (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 23-24).[3] He traverses transalpine agrarian history and registers two directives that are capable of introducing a new way of life, a rudimental draft of the present-day individualism of ownership: the first pertains to the legal status of private property that causes the dissolution of ancient forms of rural communities in France; the second includes the birth and development of capitalism.

Nevertheless, Lefebvre's assessment does not highlight the contradictions within the rural community, for instance the patriarchal structure, and he maintains that the most radical change regarding the ancient peasant French community has been triggered by the market economy and by the state's repressive action (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 32). Massive capitalist urbanization thus passes through the "Caudine Forks" of privatizing expropriation, by the separation of man from the land through a spatial reorganization that progressively warns the rural (peasant) community status, and that is characterized by being

> a social group organized according to historically determined modalities, a group of families tied to the land. These elementary groups, on the one hand, possess the collective or undivided assets of the community and, on the other, various "private" assets, in variable but always historically determined proportions. They are connected through their collective occupations and appoint-as long as the community retains a life of its own-leaders who are assigned to direct tasks of a general interest to the community. [Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 28]

Lefebvre's genealogy of historical sociology is therefore applied to the rural community in order to highlight the progressive loss of autonomy and the novel dissolution that was decreed with the advent of urbanization; he writes: "Nearly all our villages today, with the exception of recent trends, are communities in the process of dissolution" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 34). Because of this definition, we understand how Lefebvre defines the rural milieu and its inherent social dynamics, setting a notion on which he will afterwards reflect "against the simplistic evolutionism" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 29). In other words, he distances himself from those who linearly read history, by means of an alleged evolution of the progressive historical development that moves

3 However, later, the author asserts his full acceptance of Durkheim but he does not recognize the "obligation-sanction" device that determines organic solidarity, preferring instead to define that social relationship under the form of discipline since it pertains to the natural unfolding of events that are not collective obligations (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 27).

forward, replacing and eliminating previous forms of life. As a theoretical clarification of the notion, the rural community is a concept that generates a common denominator in various phases of history and many other ways of production. It is as if the author were telling us that, to find a rural universe, one should look at the concrete presence of this concept as decoded in this way.

THE EVOLUTION OF SHARECROPPING: LEFEBVRE'S SECOND CONCEPT

The subsequent essay, titled "Social classes in rural areas: Tuscany and the 'Mezzadria Classica'" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 37-58), was originally published in the journal *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* in 1951 and subsequently included in the collection *Du Rural à l'Urbain* in 1970. This essay focuses on the examination of the sharecropping system known as "mezzadria classica" through a case study specifically centered on Tuscany. Lefebvre chooses that region of Central Italy because he perceives a crystallization of the sharecropping form across the span of many centuries, mainly due to the market revolution that occurred with the geographic explorations after 1492. As is widely known, after Christopher Columbus, markets spread to other Atlantic shores, the Mediterranean Sea lost its strategic function, and, consequently, Tuscany suddenly became more marginal as a region. This led to a lack of evolution in the agrarian structure for many centuries, as opposed to other territories. For this reason, Tuscany was, in the fifties, a privileged observatory to study the sharecropping system within the wider context of sociological rural studies.

The sharecrop farmer was thus a perpetual and hereditary concessionaire of the land management, and therefore he had a personal interest in increasing its productivity; however, most of the harvest and parcels of his private life lay under strict control of the landowner, who represented the urban aristocracy and the tight supremacy of the great landownership (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 37-42). As written by Lefebvre: "the domination of rural landowners is greater around the large cities (in the Florentine countryside, the concentration is as great as it is in Sicily) and increases rapidly as we move from north to south. Tuscany represents the transition between northern Italy ('modernized' by its market and industrial economy, by capitalism and the bourgeoisie) and a semi-medieval south" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 42). The author undertakes a precise analysis of the social stratification of class and how inter-relationships evolved between less favored rural groups and landowners after the introduction of the Republic legislation.

The research in the field denotes his great agility in travelling around the rural communities of the Tuscan countryside. From this research, a curious cartography emerges: the peasant committees – that succeeded in creating an alliance between farmhands and sharecrop farmers – are under social and economic oppression by hand of the landowner class due to the opposition of the latter in enforcing the new laws which are more aware of the union conditions of laborers. The power of landownership is established as subversive and is characterized by nostalgia for the lost past. Conversely, farmhands and sharecrop farmers led the political struggle to enforce the majorly democratic new regulations.

Lefebvre highlights forms of struggle such as the "strike in reverse" that was taking place in the unfarmed countryside where, effectively, there was a specific intention among the landowners to allow some lands to be abandoned and to create continual unemployment. The committees instead tried to demonstrate the possibility of full employment; they demanded autonomy in their private life choices, for instance, that the landowner should not impose his opinion and meddle with their children's marriages. There was also a will to subvert the "patriarchy" of the landownership *latifundium* in both personal and public spheres.

In addition, we also found out how for the landownership rulers in the fifties, it was scandalous that the eight-hour-a-day labor limit should be abided by and that they should have to give up piecework pay. Secondly, Lefebvre points out the peasants' committees' determination in attaining a freer social system that could also comprise direct self-management of the lands since the ruling and landowner class played a majorly parasitic role. It is paramount to underline here how sharecropping contains a subordination device that would also characterize Lefebvre's following reflections: the rural aristocracy in Tuscany was an urban subject that ruled, exploited, and squeezed the surrounding countryside with no will to innovate on the labor, union, and environmental plan.

MOVING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK: THE "PROGRESSIVE-REGRESSIVE" METHOD IN RURAL SOCIOLOGY

As per the French edition (Lefebvre, 2001a [1970]), the second-to-last chapter of the first section, specifically selected by Gaviria and focused on the rural question, is titled "Perspectives on rural sociology" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 59-76). This chapter was originally published in the journal *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* in 1953. It serves as a continuation of the reflections

presented in the first essay from 1949. The author expressed the following: "The time has come to provide an overview of this branch of sociology by presenting – and submitting for discussion – a proposal for a manual or treatise on the subject" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 59). His intent was thus to offer a general theoretical picture in which "rural sociology" could operate and attain dignity in research terms. Lefebvre held no interest in creating yet another academic discipline. Instead, he would rather outline parts of social life that had been neglected, areas of life over which no one has ever reflected in a precise way, and that he could confer dignity on such an investigation, he drafted some general lines of research on the sociological debate of his time.[4]

This is the Lefebvre statement on Marx's works and how we need to rework it: "In order to understand the modern world, it is necessary not only to retain some of Marx's essential concepts but also to add new ones: the everyday, the urban, social time and space, the tendency toward a state-oriented mode of production" (Lefebvre, 1988, p. 77).

Above all, the author – who is against the interpretative categories of Marc Bloch, a theorist of the "agrarian regime" and "agrarian civilization", and of the current of geographical possibilism by Paul Vidal De La Blanche, a theorist of the "lifestyle" – postulates a new method that intersects two layers of complexity (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 64).

The first is defined as "horizontal complexity," and it refers to the essential differences that characterize different agrarian regimes in the same historical period. The example evoked by the author has to do with the capitalism that was introduced in the countryside areas of the United States versus the transoceanic agrarian collectivism of the Soviet Union. For the rural overseas universe, Lefebvre has no hesitation in also referring to the literary and novelistic material of Erskine Caldwell and John Steinbeck (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 60). Both the Soviet model and the American way of production are brought together in an attempt to mechanize farming work with technology so that

4 For accuracy's sake I must add that *Perspectives de la sociologie rurale* is the famed article that was recaptured by Sartre, in which the existentialist philosopher praises the "progressive--regressive" method set by Lefebvre. However, Lefebvre refutes the authorship and traces back the creation of this heuristic tool to Karl Marx's introduction of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857/1986, p. 42). Lefebvre argues with Sartre to detach himself from the existentialist current and to emphasize how, from his point of view, there cannot be existentialist Marxism. Sartre's praise is appreciated; however, there is no doubt that Lefebvre is a proficient interpreter of Marx and there is equally no doubt that the "progressive-regressive" method is a useful intuition to update Marx's historical method as opposed to Marxist historicism. That method is theorized here for analysis of the peasant world, but it would be also recaptured for the examination of the urban reality (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 12-14).

land productivity increases as much as possible; however, they differ in terms of social structure (liberal capitalism versus a capitalism that is mediated by the state's strong collectivizing role). In the intermediate layer between these two antithetic poles, Lefebvre places other types of agricultural production, such as the Italian cooperative model in Emilia-Romagna, the French model of CUMA (*Coopératives pour l'Utilisation en Commun de Matériel Agricole* studied by Chombart de Lauwe), and that of the "popular democracy" of Chinese origin.

The second alludes to "vertical complexity" to understand the phenomenon derived from the coexistence of rural organizations and structures that vary in age and level of development but that still succeed in living in the same period of time, despite the fact that some forms are completely outweighed by others. As an example, Lefebvre mentions the nomadic economies of Northern Africa that coexist simultaneously with more modern production technologies of European colonialism.

In this instance, we propose the hypothesis of a meeting point between the concept of "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" by Bloch (1991) and Lefebvre's "vertical complexity". It seems to me that both authors focus on the way history provides copious occasions of a "past" that lives in some forms of the "present". This refers to a co-presence of alterities accumulated over time and historical space. Another example that we can mention on Lefebvre's trail is that of big capitalist industrial technologies that coexist with the attempt to hold on to traditions of agricultural work that survived over centuries as these traditions were more sensitive to nature's needs – this way of life being what the indigenous Latin-American world strongly believes in (Proyecto de Tecnologías Campesinas, 1988).

The "horizontal complexity" and the "vertical complexity" point to the need – concerning rural sociology – of holding together the geographical and social-historical dimension of human processes in the same constellation of significance by use of a precise genealogy of many other economic-cultural structures. Thus, it is from both these axes of research that Lefebvre creates the so-called "progressive-regressive method" that is comprised of three different "moments": the descriptive moment, the analytic-regressive moment, and finally, the historical-genetic moment (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 69). The first characterizes sociological research in its ability to observe the phenomenon of study by collecting data in the field, keeping in mind the theoretical concepts already acquired (classical sociological research); the second step alludes to the understanding of historical reality, to the ability of placing it in time and space according to its own peculiarities; and finally, the third moment pertains to the understanding of the genesis that, within a general diagnostic

constellation, succeeds in re-building the evolution, analogies and differences within a comparative frame, so that by use of hypothesis the phenomenon under enquiry can be explained and justified.

To summarize: the triad "description-dating-explanation" is the methodological perimeter that Lefebvre assigns to rural sociology: research that should highlight the features of the rural world, identifying in it the connections with the various ways of production and degrees of development that follow one another in history. The main goal is to identify the ultimate reason that is inherent to the concept of the world conveyed by the capitalist project.

By making use of the three levels of analysis, sociological research (rural or not) must highlight the actual characteristics of communities, identifying the connections they might have with the changes that were introduced by the valuation of the capitalist way of production, evaluating the technical and technological transformations according to the models of society.

Lefebvre applies this method to all his research: in fact, in order to study the city and urbanization, he returns to the countryside, to the origin of the research object. Re-weaving the conceptual historical-political cords means focusing on the changes the territory has undergone and then analyzing the object of study in the present with a clear idea of its evolutionary frame. The so-called "rural question" is a fundamental tile of the larger mosaic that is characterized by urbanization and industrialization.

THE INTERSECTION OF LAND AND POWER: LEFEBVRE'S THEORY OF GROUND RENT

On the occasion of the International Congress of Sociology that took place in Amsterdam in August 1956, Lefebvre presented a report entitled *The Theory of Ground Rent and Rural Sociology* (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 105-114). He started his speech by saying:

> In the domain of rural sociology, even slight acquaintance with the facts destroys commonly held opinion. In terms of time, agriculture came before industry; in terms of space, even today, an ocean of agricultural production surrounds some continents and some small islands of urban life and industrial production. Hence we imagine, in general, that rural life and agricultural structure are simpler than the "modern" life of cities and factories. But in fact, rural sociology has to deal with extremely complicated realities, especially as it is shaken by contradictory movements. [Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 105]

Against any simplification and trivialization of rural topics, Lefebvre started his plea in defense of a research field to which he wished to provide

solid, critical, and demystifying methodological foundations. The compass that guided our brave sociologist was the application of facts and his ability to hold proper interpretative grids.

The foundation he relied on was ground rent theory, the perspective from which he read the historical-social evolution of the peasant world (Lefebvre, 2016a [1972], pp. 134-143). Considering the situation of the French countryside in the fifties, Lefebvre focused his reflection on the various capabilities of generating profit in the agricultural world; to differentiate the phenomena he referred to Lenin (1960a [1899]; 1960b [1901]; 1960c [1896-1899]; 1964 [1915]), who identified three questions by integrating the reflections enclosed in the third book of *Capital* (Marx, 1998, pp. 608-800, chapters 37-47): the profit obtained from the estate, the profit derived from exploitation and finally the profit conveyed by the capacity of capitalist valuation (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], pp. 108-110). In fact, in the regime of mature capitalism, the typical private appropriation of the large land property form (in other words, simple landownership) defined by Marx (1998 [1894], pp. 734-758; book III, chapter 45) as "absolute rent" ceases its domination.

Conversely, more unprecedented forms of valuation detached from the soil's ownership are always being developed. The example presented by Lefebvre (2022 [1970], pp. 107-109) was a new typology that was spreading throughout France (and mostly Northern and Eastern Italy) in the fifties, in other words, the so-called "large capitalist farmer" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 110). In that period, thus, the practice of renting small and medium unfarmed parcels of land to certain people was spreading. On one side, small and average owners had no interest in farming the land or really taking care of it, and on the other side, there were the actual entrepreneurs who undertook the task of tenants of the land.

To understand this, we can probably compare it to a sort of "agency" in which small and average owners rely on obtaining profit from land that they have no wish to farm. These lands were then assigned to tenant farmers so that they would be farmed through the installation of strongly industrialized agricultural techniques, defined by the author as genuine "wheat factories" that succeeded in largely outweighing "the proportion of the property" by intensifying "the proportion of exploitation" (Lefebvre, 2022 [1970], p. 111). This means that the wealthier large landowners with more land possessions than the other owners were not able to attain the high levels of profit with their properties obtained instead by the tenant farmers who, even with smaller portions of land, thanks to the intensive exploitation of the soil's capacities and manual labor, accumulated huge profits. What were the social and spatial consequences of this market practice? What led to the introduction of the tenant

farmer in the French countryside? Lefebvre tells of depopulated rural communities that disappeared and were incorporated in the farmable land; he tells of the replacement of the former peasant population by a working class of underpaid migrant farmhands who live in lamentable conditions; of the creation of a "new elite" behind the farmhands that undertake more specialized tasks in the agricultural work mechanization sector. The expansion of this new market created a new professional figure who makes a living out of this revenue: the tenant farmer.

ASYMMETRICAL INTERDEPENDENCE: URBAN AND RURAL RELATIONSHIPS

As I have argued elsewhere (Biagi, 2020, p. 222), modern capitalist development in the 20th century gradually blurred the boundaries between the "rural" and "urban" through the process of urbanization occurring worldwide. Lefebvre was facing the French countryside of the second half of the last century in a particular way, a countryside that was becoming increasingly more urbanized, becoming the "slave" of the metropolis. During this time, the countryside was experiencing a simultaneous process of urbanization and becoming increasingly subjected to the influence of the city. The appropriation of resources from rural areas played a crucial role in fueling urban growth. This concept is well illustrated by the metabolic rift theory put forth by Foster (1999). In other words, the obesity of the city's urbanization is what caused the anorectic weight loss of the rural space, increasingly exploited and capitalistically valued by the interests of capitalists (Lefebvre, 2001b [1967], pp. 204-205; 1996 [1968], pp. 118-121). More striking is the fact that the asymmetrical city-countryside relationship is substantially featured for being shaped by the power of capitalism, which is able to create development exclusively aiming at profit. The daily life of French peasants in the Pyrenees serves as a testament to this phenomenon:

> in France, in the Pyrenees, just a stone's throw from dams and powerful ultra-modern hydro-electric installations, there are many hamlets, thousands of houses where peasants live almost as "primitive" […]. They have no electric light either. Elsewhere, more or less everywhere, in town and country alike, electric light illuminates the peeling plaster of slums and the sordid walls of hovels. Although even in Paris there are still houses and flats without modern lighting. [Lefebvre, 1991 (1958), p. 230]

Such a phenomenon was indeed the formation of the so-called "urban fabric". Indeed, the dialectics between industrialization and urbanization play a

crucial role in giving rise to a distinct form of ruralization. This new ruralization emerges as a consequence of the depopulation of rural areas and the transformation of peripheral regions surrounding urban centers. Together with Lefebvre, we maintain that such a process is a new type of ruralization, since this dynamic emerges following the abandonment of the peasant world, of rural communities, hamlets and villages in favor of the congestion of the outskirts of the cities where the workforce is compelled to live according to the dynamics imposed by the capitalist system (Lefebvre, 2001c [1967], p. 231). This new kind of ruralization in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century is characterized as a synonym for misery, poverty, and a survival economy, outside and far away from the circuits of consumption. However, such a massive abdication of peasant life produced mainly two novel techniques of capitalization of the unfarmed space. The first pertains to the industrialization of agriculture, which was the fact that copious land plots became soil to be farmed with new technological tools and new farmhand labor.

The countryside became the main resource to be exploited to face new markets and the need for food in the metropolis, and, adding to this, the city took possession of the countryside to drain it as much as possible. The type of cultivation is redefined by markets, from the moment the world market destroys the French and all the European peasants due to farming exploitation in the colonies and numerous southern countries.

Small farmers abandoned the countryside, preferring to search for another occupation in the city, particularly because they could not compete with the exploitation of resources in other parts of the globe.

The mass production of the industrial model was moved to the farming space, and this dynamic triggered similar effects in the internal and external productive relationships of a country such as France (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968], p. 71). For accuracy's sake, I should add that the escape from the countryside is a phenomenon that also characterized the southern countries that passively underwent an exodus that led to the lodging form of the *bidonville*, on the outskirts of the few dominating metropolitan centers.

The rationalized and industrial organization of the urban spaces, despite its attempts to absorb former peasant inhabitants into farmhand labor, often falls short, leading to the continuous displacement and marginalization of socially disadvantaged groups: "To sum up, a worldwide crisis in agriculture and traditional peasant life accompanies, underlies and aggravates a worldwide crisis of the traditional city. This is a change on a planetary scale" (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968], p. 126). The second device of capitalist valuation of the ancient peasant world was tourism in the countryside and the shift from a lifestyle that belonged to the past into folklore (Lefebvre, 2001b [1967], p. 205). A sort of

profanation of the countryside, enacted by the metropolitan universe that was seeking ways to escape its intrinsic boundaries, took place.

The processes of capitalist valuation of the countryside that have been examined so far demonstrate how the extension of the urban, in other words, the diffusion of the "urban fabric," detrimental to the rigid dichotomy between rural world and urban world, is a novel "original accumulation" that was propelled by industrialization but that in our time has acquired full autonomy on its own.

As is widely known, Lefebvre's historical sociology is clearly indebted to Marx and Engels' intellectual heritage. The studies on the genesis and the development of the bond between city and countryside carry on the insights included in *The German Ideology*, in which the evolution between both worlds is analyzed concerning the shift from feudalism to the genuinely capitalist modern world (Marx and Engels, 1976a [1846], pp. 32-36, 64-65).

For both authors, the mercantile city is the crucial reading key that announces the bourgeois age as a social, cultural, and economic model. It is precisely the organization of the mercantile city that will trigger the beginning of the dominion over the countryside through two devices: on the one hand, the capitalist valuation of the farming space; on the other hand, the possibility of changing the countryside dwellers into an affluent source of manpower that implies low costs to the urban economy. Lefebvre is very clear on this instance: "for Marx, the dissolution of the feudal mode of production and the transition to capitalism was attributed to and associated with a subject: the city" (Lefebvre, 2016b [1972], p. 60). In *The Communist Manifesto*, both authors are even more blunt:

> The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois. [Marx and Engels, 1976b (1848), p. 488]

Both authors highlight the frame of social relationships of class between the rural and urban world: the urbanization process of large masses comprises the uprooting from their original social space (the countryside) and the resulting massive capitalist urbanization of the peripheral rings of the industrial metropolis (the city). In this regard, Engels (1990 [1894], p. 486) can assert that the small peasant landowner is a future proletarian. So, with Lefebvre and following the footpath that was also partially paved by both Marx and Engels,

it is possible to state that the birth and development of capitalism clearly coincides with the estrangement between rural inhabitants and the land in the agricultural world and their subsequent relocation to the outskirts of the urbs.

CONCLUSION

Finally, as the reader may have understood, I have demonstrated how it is necessary to rediscover Lefebvre's unknown contribution to the debate on the rural question during the last century, establishing a connection with his most renowned urban studies. The Anglophone debate in rural sociology has yet to discuss this topic, and there is only partial systematic discussion on Lefebvre's rural studies, solely propelled by the significant English translation by Elden and Morton (2016; 2022), who have penned an extensive introduction (Elden and Morton, 2022), the only text – apart from this article – that endeavors to delve into Lefebvre's rural studies, thereby not confining his international renown solely to urban issues.

The originality of this article lies in its discussion and reconstruction of Lefebvre's contribution to the debate on rural issues in France. As argued, it supports the thesis that understanding Lefebvre's period of intellectual reflection on rural space (i. e., the 1940s and 1950s of the 20th century) is crucial for knowing his subsequent studies on the urban and the production of space. Consequently, I want to emphasize the importance of revisiting Lefebvre's earlier rural studies as a starting point for understanding his urban reflections comprehensively. This article aims to explain how urban studies have a vital progression, emerging from social investigations conducted in the rural field. The radical transformation of the nature and peasant universe brought about by capitalism has indeed led the French author to delve into the epochal transformations of the urban question.

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Received on 15-01-2024. Accepted for publication on 08-10-2024.

BIAGI, F. (2025), "Back to the countryside (1940s-1950s). Rethinking rural space through Lefebvre's urban sociology". *Análise Social*, 256, LX (3.º), e34292. https://doi.org/10.31447/34292.

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