



## 'The unclaimed latifundium': the configuration of the Spanish fishing sector under Francoist autarky, 1939–1951



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### ABSTRACT

Autarkic ideology and economic policies were central features of the interwar period in Europe. Despite autarky's connection to geographical concepts such as space, resources and population, its historical impact has been relatively little explored in the literature. In this article, we first present how the concept of 'autarky' conflates two etymological meanings: self-sufficiency and authoritarianism. We then explore this duality, using archival sources, by examining the social and economic policies applied to the fishing sector in Francoist Spain between 1939 and 1951. On the one hand, we examine the repression and transformation of the fishers' social world. On the other, we study the impact of public policies on the marine fishing fleet, underlining the importance of the militaristic guidelines that shaped the reforms. We argue that these autarkic reforms have had long-term consequences that are still visible today. They represented a rupture for the associative environment of fishers and shaped the future characteristics of the fleet, as well as its pattern of geographical expansion.

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Spain will go back to search for its glory and wealth by the sea routes

*Fundamento de la Nueva España, 1937.*<sup>1</sup>

In 1945, the Fascist-backed comic *Flechas y Pelayos* included a drawing of a cod fish with a brief inscription saying: 'If fish had no enemies, cod alone would be enough to fill all the space in the seas'.<sup>2</sup> Such popular (but also scientific) images of over-optimistic abundance are commonplace in a range of periods and places.<sup>3</sup> However, in the Spain that emerged from Franco's crushing victory in the Civil War (1936–1939), they achieved a special significance.

The post-Civil War period in Spain was plagued by hunger and deprivation. Diplomatic reports and travellers' statements refer to

undernourishment and deaths from starvation.<sup>4</sup> Studies on historical nutrition and agrarian metabolism describe a decrease in Spanish agricultural production and meat consumption, and highlight the colossal disaster that these post-war years represented for the population.<sup>5</sup> During these years of hunger, the Spanish minister José Luis Arrese allegedly told Franco that dolphin meat sandwiches and fish-flour bread were a feasible solution for starvation.<sup>6</sup> Behind the minister's odd statement there was a sense of uneasiness with the pervasive hunger that overwhelmed the country. But there was something else, something central to the economic approach of the period: the aspiration of using available national resources to the maximum extent in the name of

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<sup>1</sup> Our translation. See Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las J.O.N.S., *Fundamento de la Nueva España*, Bilbao, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> *Flechas y Pelayos*, 330 (1st April 1945) 13.

<sup>3</sup> M. Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World*, New York, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> C. Barciela, El fracaso de la política agraria del primer franquismo, in: C. Barciela (Ed.), *Autarquía y Mercado Negro: el Fracaso Económico del Primer Franquismo, 1939–1959*, Barcelona, 2003, 55–93; M. A. del Arco Blanco, Morir de hambre. Autarquía, escasez y enfermedad en la España del primer franquismo, *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 5 (2006) 241–258.

<sup>5</sup> M. González de Molina, D. Soto, J. Infante and E. Aguilera, ¿Una o varias transiciones? Nuevos datos sobre el consumo alimentario en España (1900–2008), XIV Congreso de Historia Agraria, Badajoz, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> R. Garriga, *Franco–Serrano Súñer, un Drama Político*, Barcelona, 1986, 116; H. Saña, *El Franquismo sin Mitos: Conversaciones con Serrano Súñer*, Barcelona, 1982, 146–147.

self-sufficiency. This was the main premise of the autarkic policies followed by Francoism since the Civil War.

Under the circumstances of agricultural collapse and widespread hunger, fishing seemed to offer an inexhaustible source of food. In contrast to the agricultural crisis and the decreased availability of meat, evidence points to an increase of fish captures and consumption during the post-war years.<sup>7</sup> In some regions, fish made up for the lack of land animal protein, contributing much-needed fat, fat-soluble vitamins and phosphorus to the daily diet of Spanish people.<sup>8</sup> However, applying the idea of 'national' resources to fishing was problematic. In the 1940s, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) had not yet been established, meaning that the seas – outside the narrow perimeter of territorial waters – were unowned.<sup>9</sup> Increasing fishing captures was mostly a matter of developing bigger and more powerful fleets that could expand all over the world if necessary. The open seas remained, in the words of a Francoist official, an 'unclaimed latifundium'.<sup>10</sup>

In what follows, we use archival sources and scholarship from the history of science and technology to explore the main characteristics and consequences of the autarkic fishing policies in Spain in the period 1939–1951. Following the approach of historians of science Tiago Saraiva and Norton Wise, we understand the word 'autarky' as the conflation of meanings between the ideas of self-sufficiency (autarky, from Greek *autarkeia*) and self-rule (autarchy, from Greek *autarchia*).<sup>11</sup> These authors have argued that the intimate relation between these two concepts is a characteristic feature of Fascist regimes. On this basis, we intertwine the study of import-substitution policies and other measures towards economic self-sufficiency (autarky) with a focus on the top-down, militaristic and socially repressive dimension of these policies (autarchy).<sup>12</sup> We argue that Francoist autarkic policies for the fisheries sector had far-reaching social and environmental effects, and that an analysis of these policies may help explain some of the present characteristics of the Spanish fishing fleet, including its overcapacity in some segments or the low level of union activities in small-scale fisheries.

Our research is relevant to historical geography and environmental history for several reasons. First, discussions of historical conceptions of autarky reveal the relations of societies with their environments and the natural resources they consume. As David Harvey put it, and Erik Swyngedouw exemplified with the Spanish case in his recent book on water, all political-economic projects are ecological projects, and vice-versa.<sup>13</sup> The case of Spanish autarky and its relation to fisheries governance was no exception. Examining historical cases of national attempts at self-sufficiency in different areas of the economy and society can bring insights into

the political configurations established and the geographical scales involved to achieve those goals. Moreover, while nowadays self-reliance and autonomy are usually associated with bottom-up environmental discourses from the left, several historical examples show how similar principles were applied by right-wing dictatorships in a top-down manner.

Second, the importance of feeding national populations in times of scarcity such as the Second World War is now receiving significant attention.<sup>14</sup> The role of fishing, however, has been less researched than the equivalent roles of agriculture or livestock. By exploring the Spanish case, we aim to show the importance of fishing captures for feeding the population in periods of scarcity, in a way comparable to the work of Ole Sparenberg for Nazi Germany and William Tsutsui for Japan.<sup>15</sup> Here the seas were still perceived as inexhaustible sources of food, and therefore conceived as spaces where it was possible to 'reap without sowing' or 'harvest fruits without planting seeds'.<sup>16</sup> Nazi discourses of the seas as the 'last remaining colony' resonate with Francoist visions of maritime routes as part of the lost Spanish Empire to be regained. Last but not least, Franco's dictatorship and the case of the Portuguese Estado Novo under Salazar also show significant similarities.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, marine historical research has called for more data and research on historical fisheries.<sup>18</sup> With this in mind, our research is relevant to understanding how Spain became one of the world's major fishing countries during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> While the importance of Spanish fisheries can be traced to the ancient past, modern geographical expansion of the Spanish fishing fleet tends to be explained in relation to the policies adopted during the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> We argue that some of its current characteristics can be better understood by looking at the evolution of Spanish fisheries policies during the period 1939–1951.

We have chosen our period of study as the years of major Fascist influence in Franco's regime, and subsequent commitment to autarkic economic guidelines. Francoism was born as a result of a military coup and then three years of civil war when Franco received substantial support from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

<sup>7</sup> On fish consumption, see S. Piquero and E. López, *El consumo de pescado en España. Siglos XVIII–XX. Una primera aproximación*, communication at XI Congreso de Historia Agraria, Aguilar de Campoo, 2005. On fish captures, see A. Carreras and X. Tafunell (Coords), *Estadísticas Históricas de España, Siglos XIX–XX*, Bilbao, 2005, 352–356.

<sup>8</sup> M.I. del Cura and R. Huertas, *Alimentación y Enfermedad en Tiempos de Hambre. España 1937–1947*, Madrid, 2007, 80, 134.

<sup>9</sup> Before the establishment of EEZs, each country claimed different ranges for territorial waters, usually less than six nautical miles. On the historical emergence of property in the sea, see L. Campling and E. Havice, *The problem of property in industrial fisheries*, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41 (2014) 707–727.

<sup>10</sup> J. Lledó, *La Pesca Nacional*, Madrid, 1943, 14–15.

<sup>11</sup> T. Saraiva and M.N. Wise, *Autarky/autarchy: genetics, food production, and the building of fascism*, *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 40 (2010) 419–428. The conflation of meanings happens both in the English and Spanish languages.

<sup>12</sup> Throughout the article we use 'autarky' to refer to the dual concept. 'Autarchy' is used only when we explicitly intend to emphasise its socio-political and repressive dimension.

<sup>13</sup> D. Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Cambridge, 1996, 182; E. Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power: Contested Hydro-Modernities in Twentieth-Century Spain*, Cambridge, 2015, 7, 36.

<sup>14</sup> L. Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food*, New York, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> O. Sparenberg, *Limits to growth in the expansion of 1930s German fishery*, *Studia Atlantica* 13 (2009) 139–151; O. Sparenberg, *Perception and use of marine biological resources under national socialist autarky policy*, in: F. Uekötter, U. Lübken (Eds), *Managing the Unknown*, New York, 2014, 91–121; W.M. Tsutsui, *The pelagic empire: reconsidering Japanese expansion*, in: I.J. Miller, J. Adeney, B.L. Walker (Eds), *Japan at Nature's Edge*, Honolulu, 2013, 21–37.

<sup>16</sup> On Germany, see Sparenberg, *Perception and use*, 94–95. On Spain, see Lledó, *La Pesca Nacional*, 14–15. On Italy, see almost the same expression in M. Armiero, *L'Italia di Padron 'Ntoni. Pescatori, legislatori e burocrati tra XIX e XX secolo*, in: P. Frasciani (Ed.), *A vela e a Vapore*, Roma, 2001, 179.

<sup>17</sup> I. Amorim and E. López, *The fisheries of the Iberian Peninsula in modern times*, in: D. Starkey, H. Heidebrink (Eds), *A History of the North Atlantic Fisheries: Volume 2*, Bremen, 2012, 254–276.

<sup>18</sup> D. Pauly, *Anecdotes and the shifting baseline syndrome of fisheries*, *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 10 (1995) 430. See also K. Schwerdtner, P. Holm, L. Blight, M. Coll, A. Macdiarmid et al., *The future of the oceans past: towards a global marine historical research initiative*, *PLoS ONE* 9:7 (2014).

<sup>19</sup> Immediately before our period of study, the major fishing countries of the world were Japan, USA, Korea, USSR and Norway. See D. Sahrhage and J. Lundbeck, *A History of Fishing*, Berlin, 1992, 167. For statistical data on the Spanish fleet and landings, see Carreras and Tafunell (Coords), *Estadísticas Históricas de España*, 352–356. For statistical information about the present-day fleet size, economic situation and captures, see the Spanish Ministry website: <http://www.magrama.gob.es/es/estadistica/temas/estadisticas-pesqueras/pesca-maritima/default.aspx>. Last accessed 25th August 2015.

<sup>20</sup> P. Andrade, *El proceso de expansión de las pesquerías españolas*, *Información Comercial Española* 478 (1973) 83–94.

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