

# ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY OF THE MODERN *LATIFUNDIUM*

## Economic institutions and social change in Southern Portugal, 17th-19th centuries

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### Introduction

The regional identity of the Alentejo has since at least the early 17<sup>th</sup> century been associated with *latifundium*, a concept with classical detrimental connotations (*latifundia Italiam perdidere*) (Faria, 1980: 110; Santos, 1992): a problematic region, depicted by its asymmetries in property, population scarcity and waste of resources (Drain, 1980a, 1980b). Évora is the largest city in the Alentejo, commanding a large municipal territory in the heart of the province. It was the regulating market for Alentejo wheat, while its closeness to Lisbon and ecological conditions made the region an important cattle-raising centre for the capital. Around it several municipalities can be aggregated in a sub-region with some character and internal complementarities (Silbert 1978: 439-42). It shares many traits of the large landed property system in southern Spain (Artola, Bernal and Contreras, 1978, *inter alia*), and a regional study in economic geography describes 20<sup>th</sup> century Northern Alentejo and Spanish Extremadura as variations of a common agrarian structure, though refusing the connotations of *latifundium* (Balabanian, 1980).

There is no doubt as to the relevance of the agrarian structure in the Alentejo for the shaping of contemporary Portuguese society. The forms of social and political domination and the influence of organized interest groups; the political projects targeting it; the social movements and institutional changes aimed at agrarian reform: they all left their marks in economic development, in State intervention in the economy, in the social bases of regimes and regime change. That is why António Barreto (1986) made the agrarian reform a vantage point in order to discuss the relationship between the State and civil society in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods following April 1974.

As it existed up to 1960's, *latifundium* may be defined as a large agricultural and cattle-raising agricultural unit, made of one or (typically) several large farms (*herdades*) managed together as an economic unit, regionally termed *lavoura*.<sup>1</sup> *Given the large size and concentration of landholding, we can define this agrarian structure as a farming oligopoly.*

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1 Henrique de Barros set the threshold for large *lavouras* at between 200 and 300 hectares in this region, not without noticing that the farming units with surfaces of and above 1000 hectares held almost half of the surface of the municipal territory of Évora (Barros and Cascais, 1960: 4; Barros *et al.*, 1934: 234). In the district of Évora in 1968, the 39 *lavouras* with surfaces over 1500 hectares averaged 6,6 discrete land blocks each (Freitas, Almeida and Cabral, 1976: 91), which would mostly be *herdades*.

The *latifundium* economy articulated two different sets of production relations. The dominant was capitalist. The output was mostly directed to the market, aiming at maximizing profit. The large farmer (*lavrador*) held the capital and generally part or the whole of the land. A large part of the production factors was acquired in the market, especially labour, but also some capital goods, industrial fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides, etc. The dominant production relation was wage-labour, which included a relatively small nucleus of fixed farmhands and a vast majority of seasonal hired labour. Wages were kept low by the availability of a vast agricultural working class with no employment alternatives. To some extent, prices of factors (especially labour) and output (namely cereals) were conditioned by political and social domination in the local social structure, and by the influence of the large landowners and farmers at the political centre.

The secondary component was rent. Plots of less productive land or being cleaned anew after long fallow periods were let on precarious sharecropping contracts to small farmers (*seareiros*). These took over all farming costs, owned their working capital and tilled the land for one cereal crop using mostly their own households' workforce and occasionally a few hired hands. Rent added to the profit of the capitalist component to make up the total net income of the *lavoura*. This rent component was also structurally dependent on the lack of job alternatives and the peasants' willingness to accept a low return for household workforce and for working capital to make a living, in alternative or complementary to wage labour, and to acquire or keep a small farmer status.

The overabundance of workforce was explained by poor overall levels of economic development, namely low industrialization and urbanization rates. This structural factor, which was evident during the periods of seasonal unemployment, was no less so at a larger scale during the seasonal work peaks, when the farms hired migrant peasant workforce from other regions to meet their needs, to crowd out local workers' demands and keep wages low. Given the concentration of the demand for labour and the paucity of job alternatives, we can also talk of an oligopsonistic labour market demand. The sources of abundant and cheap labour ran dry from the 1960's on, because of migratory outflows of Portuguese workforce to Europe and of new industrial ventures around Lisbon that provided a large demographic outlet. Most authors agree in dating from the 1960's the erosion of the economic *latifundium* proper, and its evolution to a more updated agrarian capitalism, while largely keeping land property structures (Cf. Balabanian, 1980: 724-60; Baptista, 1980: 366-71; Freitas, Almeida and Cabral, 1976: 75).

Cutileiro (1971) draws a no less oligopolistic land property profile, strongly correlated with the farming oligopoly. Statistical data from the end of the 1960's shows that large-scale farming was closely associated with large landed property, though not fully dependent on it. A significant share of the large agricultural units had a landownership basis, and combined it with leased land to make up flexible *lavouras*, according to investment needs and capacities.<sup>2</sup> This situation closely matches that described by H. Fonseca (1996: 369) concerning the agricultural households enrolled among the largest taxpayers in Évora in the second half of the 19th century. He concludes:

Their direct farming activities did not encompass the whole of the land they owned, but neither were they confined to patrimonial farms; [...] the workings of the lease market were also crucial to the organization of their farming enterprise. They were probably the ones who both let and took more land in lease. (Fonseca, 1996: 430, my translation).

This structural trait of modern *latifundium*, the association of a farming oligopoly with a land property oligopoly, is not however an historical constant. Although often presented as an archaic structure dating from the Middle Ages or the Roman Empire, in the form portrayed above it was only consummated in the 19th century, after the liberal land reforms, even though its first steps date from reforms taken during the last decades of the *ancien régime* (Cutileiro, 1971; Fonseca, 1996: 309-48; Fonseca and Santos, 2001: 70-83; Silveira, 1988). Before that, aristocratic, ecclesiastic, territorial and welfare *ancien régime* institutions held most land property. Farmers' access to land was mostly mediated by lease contracts, even though the institutional concentration of landownership was somewhat mitigated by imperfect property (emphyteusis) (Silbert, 1978: 742-69). Therefore, among the major questions posed by the sociogenesis of modern *latifundium* there are those of whether a farming oligopoly was already in place prior to the 19th century, parallel to the institutional landownership oligopoly; and, if so, how was it formed and to what extent was it carried over through liberal reforms to the pattern of correlation between large landownership and large farming that has just been summarized.

While the property structure can be dated back at least to medieval times, leasing practices seems to have changed considerably. There is evidence that it was usual towards the end of the Middle Ages for the landlords to have the *herdades* fractioned and let in plots to several farmers (Beirante, 1995: 250-1, 331; Sousa, 1990: 83-4). As late as the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we can find some *herdades* fractioned in farming units let to two, three or even more farmers with autonomous contracts (Santos, 2003: 376). This recalls Virgínia Rau's ideal-type of southern Portuguese agrarian structure, upheld by Oliveira Marques, based on large property and small or medium rented agricultural units, which was supposed only to have changed in the course of liberal agrarian reform well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rau, 1961; Marques, 1968: 108-9). But there is evidence of earlier change. Published indicators about Évora reveal the concentration of large agricultural units composed of several *herdades*, together with a contraction of the group of *lavradores* who accessed them took off long before liberal reform. It was an incremental process gaining momentum during the first two-thirds of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Fonseca, 1990:

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2 Statistical data from the 1968 agricultural census, as published by Freitas, Almeida and Cabral (1976: 134-6) show that 81% of the agricultural units with over 100 hectares of land in the four districts making up the province of Alentejo owned at least one farm, while 57% combined owned land with leased land. Although the 100 hectares threshold is rather low to define large farming by regional standards, these figures, combined to the above on the multiple-farm composition of the large agricultural units, do provide a satisfactory indicator of the *latifundium* land pattern.

131-6; Fonseca and Santos, 2001: 46-7), lending support to the hypothesis of a “structural crisis” in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century held by Justino (1981).

This article seeks to go beyond descriptive evidence and to uncover explanatory social mechanisms underlying this process. The property pattern of the *herdades* in the municipality of Évora did not change much between 1700 and 1765. Only towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, prior to liberal reforms, did significant change take place in the property pattern, with the rise of lay plebeian ownership and the correlative drop of aristocratic and institutional ownership. This property transfer occurred mainly through the acquisition of emphyteutic “useful domain” (Fonseca, 1990: 118-38; Fonseca and Santos, 2001: 62).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the first stage of farm concentration must have been brought about by rearrangements within the lease market, while the downsizing of the group of *lavradores* reveals a drop of the effective demand in that market. Given this prominence of land leasing as the institutional access to farms during the *ancien régime* (Silbert, 1978: 765), any explanation of farm concentration must place the land leasing market at the centre of its inquiry.

Following a presentation of the economic sociology framework guiding the analysis, the article will proceed with a summary of the empirical evidence on general trends, namely in the evolution of relevant agricultural prices and of population, then that specifically on land lease institutions, rent, and risk sharing, and finally the overall conclusions.

### Theoretical framework

Contractual norms set the framework for transactions, but do not fix them entirely. They define the arena for bargaining on the relative weight of contract terms, on how to resolve their ambiguities, and on the concrete values involved in the transaction. On the other hand, contracts are imperfect in the sense that they cannot fully specify *ex ante* all future contingencies, let alone all the casuistic for their resolutions (Hodgson, 1994: 159-62; North, 1990: 52; Williamson, 1994: 100 [note 19], 101-2). In the course of contracts there is room for negotiation to resolve those contingencies, either using formal norms established in the juridical-political framework, or by informal resolutions supported by institutional routines and a legitimate moral order (Clay, 1990b: 355; Durkheim, 1978: 184-94). One must therefore look both at the situations of base negotiation, which lead to the terms of the contract and define the arena for the actors’ relationship during its course; and to the short-term negotiation situations in which general (formal or informal) norms and the terms of the contract are interpreted in response to unforeseen situations (Williamson,

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3 It must be stressed that under the “imperfect property” institute of emphyteusis, while the “useful owners” became landowners by right, the former owners retained “direct domain” (*dominio directo*) that still entitled them to yearly rent fixed by the contract (*foro*), although most other property rights were in fact transferred. See Silbert (1978: 756-62) for more detail about the role of emphyteusis in Alentejo.

1994: 94, 100 [note 19]), which may in turn feedback on the former. At both these levels, there is room for “complex interaction of formal rules and informal constraints, together with the way they are enforced” (North, 1990: 83).

A sociological approach to negotiation must understand the bargaining power relations, how the ability to define the meaning of the situation and to determine or influence the actions of others is distributed among the intervening actors (North, 1990: 16, 84; Smelser and Swedberg, 1994b: 19; Swedberg, 1994: 265; Weber, 1979: 46-50, 62). To begin with, such distribution is correlated with that of the property rights over the production factors at stake and the juridical and political capacity to have them acknowledged and enforced. At first sight, it would seem that the dominant factor in the land lease relationship would be land, and that landed property would command the bulk of the bargaining power. But since each of the factors cannot produce value but in relation to the others, it is in fact an interdependence configuration (Elias, 1980: 77-112; Elias, 1985: lviii-lxii) and the relative weight of each of them will vary in conjuncture with its relative scarcity to demand. In the case in hand, given the inelasticity of the offer, the effective demand for farms on lease determines the probability for land to produce income through the input of the farmer’s capital and of the work that he is able to mobilise and manage. A theoretical corollary is that landlords are able to impose more favourable conditions as effective demand for land rises — higher rents, transfer of investment costs to the farmers, less tolerance towards debt and to the non-compliance of contractual norms. As it lowers, the relative distribution of the bargaining power favours farmers, who are able to get better deals both in the negotiations of the contractual base and in contingency resolution (*e.g.* Alvarez Vázquez, 1984: 616-8; Amann, 1990: 346; Beckett, 1989: 597; Bilbao, 1984: 199-200; Brumont, 1980: 256-7; Brumont, 1984: 32-3; Clay, 1990b: 352-4; Coppola, 1978: 998-9; Giorgetti, 1973: 718; Hainsworth, 1992: 50-61; Mingay, 1990: 51-2).

Assuming markets to be social structures (Swedberg, 1994), the formation of demand is not made up of a simple aggregation of atomised, undifferentiated individuals. For one thing because, by definition, effective demand is composed of only those actors who are willing and able to offer the price in the market, in this case the minimum rent that the owner of the land is willing to accept. This introduces a first and obvious element of stratification. But as the consequences of the contract are deferred, it is not enough that a bidder offers to pay a given amount of rent. Effective demand will be confined to those bidders who offer that level of rent using institutionally authorised farming procedures *and whom the landlord trusts that they will do so*, within an admissible (and variable) risk margin (Hainsworth, 1992: 53; Mingay, 1984: 629). Such trust, indispensable to the establishment of contracts and to the functioning of the market (Hodgson, 1994: 164-8), can rest on two non-exclusive procedures of uncertainty reduction: *ex ante* evaluating the reliability of the candidate farmer, and nesting risk-sharing devices in the contract management that allow the farmer to proceed with the lease in the case of contingent unbearable losses.

The first type of device reduces landlords’ uncertainty by selecting tenants with qualities perceived to correlate with a high probability of meeting their future

obligations. As it is impossible to get perfect information, a margin of uncertainty remains due to information failure and to changes of the farmers' circumstances throughout the contract. However, tenant selection substantially reduces initial uncertainty. The second type of device deals with the residue of risk throughout the contract, by eventually subtracting a part of the tenant's contractual dues that the landlord acknowledges to be undeliverable because of fortuitous events. This kind of solution penalizes the landlord's income in the short run, but it allows him to control damages (fallow farms, lasting drops in rent) by partaking in farming risks, if no alternative is available.

Theoretically, the more demanding and selective the first process, the more confined will be effective demand, and the less the need for the second type of device. A brief theoretical exploration on these two types of devices will specify the interpretative guidelines derived from this hypothesis for the analysis of the empirical evidence.

The landlord's acceptance of a candidate tenant depends on perception that the bidder has resources and motivation to fulfil contractual commitments throughout the lease period without plundering the farm. This amounts to recognising him a quality that involves components as diverse as honesty, farming capital, technical knowledge, financial reserves or access to credit to sustain risks (Mingay, 1984: 629). Given asymmetrical information, since the landlord does not completely know the present resources and intents of each bidder, let alone foresee the future, trust has to be based either in personal knowledge reinforced by repeated successful interaction, or in a set of signals that the actors may interpret as indicators of the bidders' qualities.

Podolny's (1993) model of market competition defines the producers' market status as the quality of their products relative to competitor's as perceived by relevant actors like consumers, investors and exchange brokers. It is an indirect signal actors use to make decisions in conditions of uncertainty about the real relative quality of the products, because they cannot afford to systematically compare all competing products in the market. Podolny's core argument is that market reputation increases risk-averse actors' trust in the producer's promises and warranties, reducing transaction costs and generating increases in income to the producer, through higher prices or larger market share. This argument thus recalls the major role of informal constraints, including reputation, as means of reducing information costs and uncertainty in economic agreements (North, 1990: 61) and the concept of convertibility between symbolic and economic capitals (Bourdieu, 1972: 237).

Podolny's model is about competition between producers. However, it can be theoretically generalised to market situations in which validation of the assumption that the utilities transacted will be obtained is deferred and carries an inherent risk margin. The status of candidate farmers in the lease market can be conceptualised as a means of uncertainty reduction about the reliability and enforceability of their bids, that helps to assess their comparative advantages in competition and thus defines their bargaining powers next to the landlord. Arguably it is an important bargaining resource and one should try to understand

the evaluation attributes that make it up, how these evolve over time, and with what effects in the formation of effective demand for farm leases.

Among such attributes, Podolny includes the knowledge of the actor's past actions and performance, and the makeup of his social networks, assessing credibility by the association with other bearers of valued status. The latter dimension is directly related to more general theory about the role of social networks as providers of social capital in information gathering and trust building (Granovetter, 1985; North, 1990: 41; Powell and Smith-Doerr, 1994: 371, 385), taking social capital as the set of resources available to an actor through informal social organisation and networks (Bourdieu, 1972: 236; Bourdieu, 2000: 12; Coleman, 1994: 170). Networks also provide enhanced enforceability of contracts, by feeding performance back into the actor's reputation and by providing *ex ante* safeguards under the form of "hostages" to the contract (Williamson, 1994: 89, 97), as third party warranties.

Even for the best tenant farmers, uncertainty of different kinds is always present over agricultural activities and income. McCloskey (1989), following Bloch (1976), went as far as to explain apparently inefficient features of agrarian structures by risk-avoiding behaviour. Thus the problem of trust in agrarian contracts must be equated taking into account institutional risk management. The social selection of farmers just discussed is in itself a way to avoid risk, from the standpoint of the landlord. But the theoretically decisive question is that of landlord participation: does the landowner fully participate in the economic risks of farming, does he share them with the tenant farmer and to what extent, or does he entirely shift them over to the tenant?

A thread of theoretical analysis tends to relate bi-univocally this ranking of risk participation with three distinct institutional models: respectively, own account farming by the landowner, sharecropping and fixed rent tenancy. Building on this tradition, Francesco Galassi (1990) develops and tests a model for the distribution of the types of agrarian contracts. Setting aside own account farming, which is not relevant for the case to be discussed, this model assumes a discontinuity between fixed-rent tenancy (in which farm management, control over the workforce and risk are all under the tenant's responsibility) and the co-participative system of sharecropping (in which the landowner takes general management costs, the sharecropper takes costs of workforce control, and both share gains, losses and risks according to contractual quotas). Since the farmer's risk-aversion is assumed to be higher than the landlord's, the former will only accept a fixed-rent tenancy if he is a rich farmer and/or in presence of a well developed and accessible credit market that insures him against risks. Otherwise, the landlord will have to concede a co-participation contract with variable rent, providing insurance for the sharecropper in the form of risk sharing.

This model identifies a set of fundamental relationships that will be operative in the study of risk sharing in the case in hand. I emphasise the need for the existence of rich farmers with access to credit before the landlord can fully shift farming risks onto tenants. In a dynamical perspective, one can hypothesise that the differentiation, from an initially less wealthy peasant stratum, of a sufficiently

wide and stable group of farmers above that level of economic and social capital and seeking larger access to land, would restructure the market and reduce co-participative contracts in favour of fixed-rent tenancy. This model has an evident articulation with the above discussion of social selection of tenants by status, both concurring to the analysis of the formation of effective demand for leases.

However, two of Galassi's assumptions do not accommodate historical evidence on the effective management of risk into the model. These are *a*) to treat risk sharing as a dichotomous variable with one value assigned *a priori* to each type of contract. It is a semantic fallacy to assume equivalence between fixed contractual rent and fixed effective rent. Either formally, or as no less institutionalised informal routines, there is evidence of widespread practices of protection to tenant farmers in case of contingencies and runs of bad years, even when those practices were denied in the letter of the contracts (Bowden, 1990: 268; Clay, 1990b: 252-3, 358-9; Coppola, 1978: 999-1000; Faccini, 1983: 653; Gámez Amian, 1989: 88; García Figuerola, 1989: 52, 54; Giorgetti, 1973: 718; Holderness, 1976: 99, 102; Jacquart, 1992: 223; Wordie, 1981: 201). And *b*) to take credit as exogenous to the social relationship of tenancy, as ample historical evidence shows that credit was very often endogenous, under the form of tolerance to arrears and even of advances to tenants (Alvarez Vázquez, 1984: 617-8; Beckett, 1989: 597, 615-6; Bilbao, 1984: 199-200; Bowden, 1990: 268-9; Coppola, 1978: 998-9; García Figuerola, 1989: 54; Goubert, 1968: 216; Hainsworth, 1992: 58; Howell, 1990: 411-2; Mingay, 1990: 51-2; Sebastián Amarilla, 1990: 77; Wordie, 1981: 201).

Thus, risk sharing devices are often nested in the management of contractually fixed rent tenancy, and their output over time should be operationalized as a continuous variable. Granted that a minimum economic capacity of farmers is indispensable for the development of a lease tenancy system, especially for large farms, it does not follow that a wealthy peasantry and credit markets will necessarily be present. The transfer of risk from landlords to tenants may take place gradually, in the context of routine institutional negotiation processes. To the extent that it does, however, the shift from a co-participating type of tenancy to a fixed rent tenancy system requires the emergence of the kind of effective demand that can survive its hardships.

## Empirical evidence

The core information about leases and rents comes from the archive of the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* of Évora, a charitable institution created in 1499 by royal command after the blueprint of Lisbon *Misericórdia* that spread throughout Portugal and the empire (Almeida, 1993; Bethencourt, 1993: 150-1).<sup>4</sup> Its resources

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4 Indeed, one of the best signs of the importance of these local institutions is that they still exist. They often play important roles as private welfare associations. I owe to the *Misericórdia* of Évora my thanks for letting me use their inestimable historical archive.



included a sizeable amount of rents and rent shares from *herdades*, mainly in the surrounding region. Because of its heavy and relatively rigid expenditure, the *Misericórdia* depended both on the volume of its rents and on their stability. Record books of the directive Board keep valuable information about rent management policy, everyday negotiations and decisions about contracts; bookkeeping records tell of the expected and actually received incomes and of relevant decisions and events jotted down by the clerks.

I was able to use fairly complete series from 1595 to 1850 with only relatively small gaps. 31 *herdades* were selected within the region of Évora, which entered the receipt records until 1650 and kept in until 1850. The overall good quality of the series made it possible to compute rent indexes for the period 1595-1850.<sup>5</sup> Information about institutional and contractual arrangements agrees with late 18<sup>th</sup> century writings (e.g. Silveira, 1990: 90-4), with later descriptions of traditional usages (Picão, 1983: 20-3) and with qualitative evidence collected in regional studies (Borges, 2000: 207-9; Silbert, 1978: 762-9). The size and relative dispersion of the offer support the assumption that a large landowner's particular leasing policy could not deviate much from market trends, either in rent levels or in contractual arrangements.

### **Economic background: depression, growth and crises**

Figure 1 summarises trends in the region's economic and demographic evolution using two main variables: prices of wheat and number of baptisms as a proxy for population level. We can clearly see the signs of deep recession during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, aggravated by the independence war against Spain from 1640 to 1668. Recovery after the end of the war and the following growth cycle until the end of the 1750s display an irregular pattern of population growth checked by successive crises precipitated by crop failures: 1710-12, 1734-37 and the troubled period of the late 1750s and the 1760s. Afterwards, the recovery of baptisms never again reached the level attained at the peak of the first growth cycle. It stabilized around slightly lower levels and suffered rather more moderate indents, even throughout the acute price increases of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Household numbers in figure 2 confirm this trend of relatively fast growth in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, followed by decrease and stagnation until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Sharp indents in the baptism index tend to coincide with irregular increases in the price of wheat caused by crop failures, followed by recoveries through decreasing prices, in a typical *ancien régime* crisis pattern that became much attenuated after the 1780s. By contrast, periods of "good price" for wheat (gradually increasing stable prices due to growth of demand, not to crop failures) happened during most of the first decade the 18<sup>th</sup> century, from the late 1710s to the early 30s, from the early 40s to the mid-50s and from the mid-80s to the late 90s. This

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5 See methodological annex below for further detail.

kind of price increase was associated with population growth, and indicates the best economic conjunctures for cereal farming, with mutually reinforcing runs of fair crop years, increasing prices obtained by farmers, growth in demand and in labour force. Particularly the period during the 1720s, the 40s and the first half of the 50s was an atypically long run of fairly good conditions for the region's agriculture. The intense population growth in this period indicates that subsistence production was growing as well, and descriptive evidence suggests that this proceeded partly by widening cultivation of marginal land. This growth took place largely in the city, in towns and in large villages, which in an agrarian structure with scarce alternatives to farm labour indicates agrarian proletarianization, in some areas coupled with textile manufacture.

Figures 3 and 4 respectively show prices of mutton and pork relative to wheat, and of pork relative to mutton. During the phase of population increase and extensive agricultural growth, relative prices for meat, especially for pork, became more attractive. On the other hand, pig raising may have become economically more attractive than sheep after the 1730s and especially after the 1770s, linked not only to the local market for meat but increasingly to wider markets, namely to Lisbon (Santos, 1999). In fact, different sets of evidence converge in pointing out that during the phase of population growth, tension arose between different land uses and also around appropriation of land. Pig raising put pressure on the poorer soil areas, where the main cattle fairs for Lisbon traders were held. *Herdades*, according to local complaints dating from 1758, had for years progressively been taken over for their *montados*. There is also evidence of contradictory pressures in the same parishes — *herdades* used predominantly for pasture while brush land had extensively been put to slash-and-burn rye farming, following the different priority schedules of large commercial and small subsistence farming (Santos, 1987: 37-42). In those areas, population ceased to grow and began to decline much earlier, since the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These seem to have been the first moves towards partial substitution of cattle raising for cereal farming which according to late 18<sup>th</sup> century writers was later generalised (Justino, 1981: 68). When depression set in during the 1760s and the 70s, cereal farming certainly became less attractive and more restricted to better quality soils, which in turn reshaped both the offer of subsistence and the demand for labour and may have prevented faster population recovery — especially as concentration of farms had meanwhile set in, as we know.

Good prices for wheat and for meat during the first half of the 18th century attracted investment from urban strata outside traditional groups of farmers, who began to compete for land. Some records of social conflict over land takeover also show the more well off *lavradores* taking part in this race against their less successful counterparts. On the other hand, in the presence of competitive demand, the relentless rhythm of crises certainly exerted a strong selective pressure on farmers, liberating resources from bankrupt farmers to be grasped by more successful ones or by new strata of commercial farming interests. Given significant inequality in size of agricultural enterprises and of wealth of farmers, crises favour the largest and wealthiest who can take advantage of price increases

instead of being ruined by them, make more selective use of the different productive capacities of the soils and profit from the ruin of less successful farmers to capture released land resources at low prices or rents (Abel, 1973: 23-8; Bowden, 1990: 45-6, 77-9; Campos Palacín, 1984: 99-101, 315-6; Hufton, 1985: 122-27; Jacquart, 1984: 653-4; Labrousse, 1973: 198-201, 209-26; Meuvret, 1987: 167-9, 185-7, 189-91; Meuvret, 1988: 152; Romano, 1958: 265-76; Wrigley, 1992: 160). This interplay of high commercial demand for land with recurrent crises provides a first explanatory mechanism for the concentration of large farms in the region. Let us now look at how these tendencies were shaped within the lease market.

### Land markets, contracts and risk sharing

We can consider three ideal types to describe in a schematic way the hierarchy of land rent markets in the region during the *ancien régime*. First, there was a market for block rents, in which “general tenants”, in fact large trade businessmen, bid for blocks of rents owned by great, mainly non-resident aristocratic houses. They then took the market risk of placing each *herdade* of the lot for lease to obtain a global profit over the rent paid to the owners (Monteiro, 1998: 311-2; Pedreira, 1995: 376; Silbert, 1978: 762-5). The second was the lease for farming proper, in which medium and large farmers (*lavradores*) bid for *herdades* offered by landowners and “general tenants” who acted as landlords in this market. The third was a subletting market in which small sharecrop farmers (*seareiros*) bid for pieces of land in the *herdades* for one cereal crop only, generally forgoing any further rights. In this last market, it was the *lavradores* who acted as small-scale landlords (Silbert, 1978: 762-5). The *Misericórdia* was almost exclusively positioned as a landlord in the second type of market. Therefore it is mainly the relationships between landlord and tenant in the second type that the sources unveil, arguably the most decisive ones for the problem under scrutiny. However, they also show glimpses of the third type, either when the *Misericórdia* directly intervened in the sharecropping market as a last resort, or when its dealings with tenants carried into the records some information about the latter’s subletting arrangements.

To the *Misericórdia*, leasing was preferable to sharecropping because it generated more income (significant drops of perceived rent are evident when the *Misericórdia* had to let parts of the *herdades* to sharecroppers), because it guaranteed in principle safer and more stable income by capital-owning *lavradores*, and finally because sharecropping held higher surveillance and enforcement costs for this kind of landlord, characterised by the plurality and the geographical dispersion of rents. There is direct evidence of this reasoning by the directing board of the *Misericórdia*. When in 1664 a sharecropper claimed that the evaluation of the crop had been exaggerated and demanded an overseer to supervise the threshing operations and assess the amount of grain, the board preferred to come to an arrangement with him because “we know by experience that to send overseers to the *herdades* amounts to increase the costs in money and the theft of their fruits”. Thus it was only as a last resort, when the previous tenant had terminated or

breached contract and a new one could not be found, that the *Misericórdia* got directly involved in sharecropping contracts to avoid zero income and to have the land in good enough condition to entice a tenant the following year. When demand was weak, such arrangements might continue for a run of three or four years, but were replaced as soon as a lease tenant offered suitable rent. From the standpoint of the tenant, who had more direct control over the *herdades* that he farmed himself, subletting parts of the land to sharecroppers faced lower vigilance and enforcement costs and allowed him to obtain profit with virtually no investment on poorer quality land, to get his *montado* cleaned of undergrowth and uncultivated land freed of brushwood for later use at no cost (Baptista, 1980: 357; Artola, Bernal and Contreras, 1978: 65-6).

Leases were contracted for a term of years, mostly four, related to the duration of the typical rotation cycle. This short duration did not prevent considerable stability of farmers across several contracts, including succession. Landlords were generally not prone to evict a tenant who paid well and in time and tended the *herdade* suitably. They generally gave him preference over contenders, although he might have to accept a raise in rent. Short leases allowed the landlord to rapidly take advantage of periods of prosperity and rising demand to increase rents, while they had little opportunity costs in years of hardship because however long the contracts, the tenants would then either get rent abatements or denounce the contract and take off without paying.

General law in fact favoured risk sharing. Seventeenth century *Ordenações* that collected the general law of the realm still sanctioned the medieval norm that in case of total loss of crop for fortuitous causes not imputable to the tenant (including droughts, floods, plagues and war) rent should be totally acquitted, under a juridical figure known as *encampação*. If there was partial loss in cereal crops, the farmer should keep seed for the following year and deliver the rest to the landlord.<sup>6</sup> In the management of leases by the *Misericórdia* this principle was applied somewhat more flexibly. Informal tolerance to rent arrears could last for a few years before the tenant was classified as “bad payer” and his status next to the landlord became severely degraded. A more formal rent credit device was the *espera* (literally: “wait”): at the tenant’s request, if the board acknowledged that he could not fully satisfy the rent in time, it would defer the payment in part or in whole to a later date.

However, contingent damages could be too high for the farmer to bear even delayed payment. On the other hand, in hard times when the offer of leases was abundant it was easy for farmers to move out and quit their contracts. They then drove hard bargains pressing for reductions in future rent. The board on the other hand resisted abating the contractual rent as far as it could because such abatements imperilled future income, while at the same time striving to avoid being left with untenanted *herdades*. The short-term compromise, known as *quita* (literally: “acquittal”), consisted of a co-participative procedure whereby the fixed

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6 *Ordenações Filipinas*, IV, xxvii.

contractual rent was kept but a part was abated for that year. Before the harvest, the tenant requested acquittal on contingency grounds, often threatening to apply for, or already armed with a judicial mandate for *encampação*. The board then empowered agents to oversee the state of the crops and the causes of their failure. Based on their report, the board decided on the amount of acquittal. Both acquittal grants and refusals were recorded along with their justifications, and communicated to the accounting clerks. Refusals generally argued bad farming, e.g. that the tenant had not adequately tilled the soil or sown the full extent of land required by traditional rotation. But even justified refusals could later, under pressure, be overturned. The acquittal device enabled the landlord to keep the tenant through bad years while avoiding or at least deferring a more lasting abatement in contractual rent. The acquittal was often explicitly imposed by the tenant to accept a renewal at the end of his contract, or offered by the board as a bribe to the same effect.

As a consequence, economic analysis of lease rent must consider two variables: nominal rent stipulated in the contract and fixed for a number of years, and effective rent actually perceived by the landlord, subtracted of the acquittals and the unpaid rent due to *encampação* or to the tenant taking off without paying. The difference between the two is a direct short-term indicator of risk sharing by the landlord.

### **The evolution of rent and risk sharing**

Figure 5 shows the evolution of both nominal and effective rent indexes in 5-year mobile averages. General trends are clear. From very high levels of rent at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century before the depression set in, the 17<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a general downward slope that would only be inverted during the 1680s. All along this depressive trajectory, risk sharing by the landlord was at its highest, anticipating and deepening the falls in contractual rent. The *Misericórdia* tried as it could to keep the rent levels, but for lack of alternative to an impoverished demand during terribly hard times, not only had to accept contracts for ever lower rents, but also had to take in a large share of the agricultural risk. Rent levels took off some time after the end of the independence war as the economic fabric began to recover, and after a sharp break during the crisis centred in 1711, they grew to a secular maximum by the second half of the 1720s, some 20% below what they had been at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Rent fell again during the crisis of the mid-30s, not as deep as before and with less co-participation in risk. Stagnated until the beginning of the 1750s, it again grew at a fast pace during the first half of the decade but below the level of the 20s, and was cut down by the crisis of the end of the 50s and by the crisis-ridden depression of the 60s and the 70s. Although risk sharing increased during this critical period, it remained well below past levels during comparable drops in rent. Subsequent recovery and downturn between the mid-70s and the mid-90s, stagnation to 1810 and the moderate sinuous ascent to the end of the period, only slightly disturbed by the crisis of the early 1820s, all have in common

the waning of risk sharing to virtual extinction, in spite of harvest crises, and the remarkable stabilisation of rent oscillations relative to those observed in the past.

Figures 6 and 7 plot the evolution of effective rent against two of its main theoretical determinants, wheat prices and population. Given the association of most wheat price increases with harvest crises, and of these to demographic crises and to rent drops, it is no wonder that the relationships of effective rent with wheat prices and with baptisms are roughly symmetrical. For most of the period, rent drops when prices rise, drawing a lozenge pattern, and it rises parallel to the baptism index, either simultaneously or after a few years' lag. Predictably, agricultural crises caused both sharp price increases and difficulties in rent collecting, and population increases favoured rent either directly by increasing the number of competing farmers, or indirectly because lower labour costs increased farming profits and therefore the willingness to offer rent.

But the really interesting feature in both charts is the relative decoupling of rent evolution from both other variables in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rent stabilised at a comparatively modest level, as we have seen, becoming less elastic to changes in both prices and population. It is especially remarkable that since after the crisis of the mid-1730s, the effect of population growth on rent levels all but disappeared, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century rent could pass almost unscathed through sharp price peaks. While evidence of good cereal and cattle prices and extensive cultivation growth until the late 1750s would lead one to expect proportional increases in land rent, the decoupling between rent and population growth after the 1730s signals that much less of population increase turned to effective demand for leases.

We must recall that profit opportunities had attracted urban and trade-based capital into the lease market, that combined with large farmers to outbid less successful farmers. The relative decrease and later waning of acquittals suggests that these qualitative shifts in demand enabled the *Misericórdia* to progressively transfer higher proportions of risk onto tenants. Such a move would theoretically require a higher status benchmark for its selection of tenants, restricting effective demand to the wealthier and/or more credited among candidates and further putting the lid on the less successful ones, a process that the depression of the 1760s-70s reinforced to the point that the 1811-12 crisis already led to virtually no rent acquittals.

### **Risk management and selection of tenants**

For a landlord like the *Misericórdia*, who as we saw depended on this variable income to meet large and relatively rigid commitments, income stability was no less important than average income level. In 1650 there was a documented instance of the board's need to cut down almsgiving "because of the sterility of the year and of the great *quitas* and *esperas* that of need were granted to the farmers". So while primarily struggling to keep the *herdades* on lease through hazardous times, with the consequent risk sharing concessions explained above, the board also strived to

keep its income as stable as the conditions allowed. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century economic and demographic depression there was no alternative to almost permanent acquittals that in the worse years reached significant proportions of the expected income. Even this could not prevent frequent farmer bankruptcies, vacant *herdades* let in sharecropping, and medium and long-term fall not only in effective but in nominal rent as well.

But as soon as the war wounds began to heal, the board began to develop a more defensive strategy toward risk. In 1683 one very significant sign was recorded, when the board forwent a rent increase in one *herdade* to keep a farmer who was recognised a “good payer” status, based on previous experience. The more significant feature is that rent security was reinforced by a contractual clause that was to become infamous in agrarian literature a century later: the amount of rent was set “without any *quita* or *vista* [‘overseeing to assess crop losses’] or *espera*”. That is, the board explicitly accepted an opportunity cost, in the case 10% of the offered rent, as “insurance fee” to shirk all risk to the farmer. As we will see, this trade-off principle may have led further than the *Misericórdia* anticipated, but it was a definite element of its rationality.

In this first case, the farmer’s status was assessed by the landlord’s direct experience of his past performance. The social capital mobilised in the relationship was wholly endogenous. But new requirements began being added in a systematic way. In 1691, after a series of competitive bids for one *herdade*, the board accepted the highest bid but “because we doubted [the bidder’s] wealth, it was declared to him that if he finds *fiança* [third party warranty] that satisfies the board we will pass his contract”; and so he did. The same occurred in other cases, and as in one instance, in 1696, the higher bidder could not provide the warranty the board required “because he is not rich”, the *herdade* was let to another candidate. The dominant market status attributes began to be the candidates’ wealth and the collaterals that they could mobilise through their personal networks. Relevant social capital became more exogenous to the relationship with the *Misericórdia* and more dependent on social relationships to wealthy third parties, and selection of tenants became harsher. In 1699 the board dryly decided, without providing a justification, that “no acquittal is granted to the farmers of the *Casa [da Misericórdia]* in spite of the overseeing [reports]”. During the first decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, acquittals were granted much more sparingly. Then the violent crisis centred in 1711 put a sudden halt to these efforts, and during the recovery period that followed up to the end of the 1720s the issue was not raised afresh. Only during the crises and depression of the 1760s-70s the issue was again raised with redoubled emphasis. Leasing decisions from the early 60s recurrently stress the wealth of the farmers and the need for third party warranties as determinant criteria. In 1770 the principle was clearly articulated and generalised: “We have determined that no leasing contract shall be signed for any *herdade* without a warrantor, because of the many bankruptcies that usually occur”. In this determination we find the explicit relationship between the formal requirement for exogenous social capital and the deterioration of endogenous social capital based on previous performance for assessing the farmers’ market status, after the several rounds of crises in 1710-12,

1734-37, 1759-60, and later the price instability during the 60s and 70s. Personal wealth and exogenous social capital took the upper role in defining who had access to leases.

As a consequence of this progressive selection of tenants, acquittals lost weight in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even in the most critical phase, in the 60s and 70s, their relative magnitude was much smaller than in the 17<sup>th</sup> century crises and in the great crisis that peaked in 1711. In the violent crisis that culminated in 1812 there were almost none. And when in 1849 six requests for acquittal were submitted, *Misericórdia*'s lawyers dismissed them outright because "the farmers had renounced [in the leasing contracts] the benefit of fortuitous events". Along the process, the landlord had achieved to completely transfer risk onto the tenants.

Figure 8 plots by decade three indicators of risk to the landlord: the percentage of farmers leaving their contracts, the number of *herdades* let by the *Misericórdia* in sharecropping, and the average percentage of nominal rent that was acquitted. It makes quite clear the high correlation between the three indicators,<sup>7</sup> the appeasement of risk that begun to be achieved in 1690-1710, disrupted by the crisis of 1710-12, and the progressive transfer of risk to the farmers from the very high level of acquittals prevalent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the moderate levels of the 18<sup>th</sup>, even in the darkest years of 1760s-70s. Figure 9 shows a composite index of the same three indicators along with the average level of effective rent and its variation coefficient over each decade. It demonstrates that the final economic result was a trade-off of effective rent for rent stability and risk transfer to the farmers, and that the slope of the decline in rent (which in effect started a moderate recovery since the 1780s) was less pronounced than those of the decline of instability and of the decline in risk to the landlord. In this sense, the policy seems to have paid off. It is likely, however, that the trade-off was an unintended consequence of the strategy to reduce risk and instability, which through the harsher selection of tenants restricted effective demand to a stratum of higher market status farmers who incrementally outbid smaller, poorer and less successful competitors and concentrated farms to the extent shown above. Their bids did not translate to higher levels of rent because their chief comparative advantage, a risk-reducing status, was most effective in the selective process during the harder times, as poorer farmers went bankrupt and rents sank lowest. Gradually, as recovery periods took off after crises, they had less and less competitors because landlord policy shut off de-capitalised former tenants from effective competition. Thus this smaller group of large tenants was able to a large extent to fence off the board's expressed intentions to try and increase rents.

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7 Correlations range between 0,6 (significant at the 0,01 level) and 0,73 (significant at the 0,001 level).



## Conclusions: crises, lease market and social change

In an agricultural economy shaped by high risk and recurrent crises, the process of land concentration that partially reshaped the regional agrarian structure during the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be explained by the interaction of three main social mechanisms.

The first was the increase in demand for land during the economic and demographic recovery that followed the dramatic depression of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During the last decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, rising agricultural prices favoured demand for leases from farmers and from sectors of urban traders seeking to take advantage of agricultural business opportunities.

The second mechanism was the selective effect of repeated crises, whose asymmetrical effects iteratively favoured the wealthier and more resilient farmers and the new urban-based demand, while at the same time they made the landlord ever more sensitive to risk because of recurrent tenant bankruptcies and rent instability.

The third mechanism, central to this paper, was the effect of the landlord's strategy to avoid rent instability and risk sharing. The theoretical models adapted from Podolny and Galassi and put to work together proved effective in exploring this latter mechanism. As it tried to shirk the risk imposed by the co-participative leasing system, the *Misericórdia* had to select suitable farmers with the necessary economic and social capitals to sustain an effective fixed-rent system by taking on all agricultural risk. This led the landlord to redefine the basis for its assessment of the market status of the candidate tenants, emphasising a combination of wealth and credit expressed in third party warranty. The ultimate result of this shift in status requirements was to restrict effective demand for land and to obtain risk reduction and rent stability at, as an unanticipated consequence, a trade-off in rent level.

The de-institutionalisation of co-participative arrangements in the management of lease contracts, leading to increased selection of farmers and concentration of land resources, proved to be very class-efficient (Bhaduri, 1991: 55-6) not only in the sense of short term distributive consequences but also in the deeper sociological sense of class formation and differentiation of an agrarian elite. The winning stratum of wealthy farmers at the end of the process was able to capture a fraction of the produce that formerly was channelled to land-rent, as well as to take advantage of the availability of landless labour, and very probably of the transfer of a part of the previous demand for farms into the sharecropping market where they acted as landlords (Bernal and Drain, 1975: 23, 83-8; Giorgetti, 1974: 204-7; Suau Puig, 1991: 123-7). This same group formed the basis of the new agrarian bourgeoisie who invested the accumulated capital in acquiring land property, first in emphyteusis (Fonseca, 1990: 120-1; Santos, 2003: 332-6) and later, taking advantage of the sell of Crown property in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and of liberal land reform, in full property (Fonseca and Santos, 2001: 66-80; Silveira, 1988), and became the leading part of the landed elite in the modern *latifundium* agrarian class structure (Fonseca, 1996: 171-431). The demand for higher levels of

economic and social capitals made the concentration process virtually irreversible, shifting the social structure from the relative social capillarity pattern between sharecroppers and farmers depicted by Silbert (1978: 57-75) to that of rigid social stratification described by Cutileiro (1971), increasing and consolidating a rural proletariat and semi-proletariat that provided the wage labour and the sharecropping rent for the reproduction of the modern *latifundium* economy.

## Annexes

### *Methodological annex*

#### Rents

From the selected 31 *herdades*, 16 have records since 1595, and the remaining 15 entered the books gradually until 1650. From then on, only occasional gaps in the document series cause the number of *herdades* to be below the total in a few years. The only systematic gap is between 1701 and 1709, for which I could not spot the most important series of books and the number of observed *herdades* drops to two in 1703 and 1704, and to ten in the remaining years. This unfortunate gap makes data for those nine years very unreliable.<sup>8</sup> Apart from this, I could use a minimum of 23 *herdades* and for almost all years the complete set of 31.

The series were operationalized by converting rents in kind (wheat, barley and/or rye) to their money value using cereal prices for the year (the reference price of August), and then deflating these monetary values and the rents in money into their equivalent in wheat bushels, again at the year's price. I then used the average nominal rent of the 20 years 1670-1689 as base 100 and computed an index for all years of the series. The aggregate rent index for each year is the simple average of the indexes of all *herdades* present in that year.

According to the definitions, these indexes were computed both for nominal rent (*i.e.* the one stipulated in the contract) and for effective rent (*i.e.* the amount effectively paid net of abatements authorised by the board, or 0 if the *herdade* had not been occupied or the farmer had fled without paying the rent as it happens in a few cases; rents in debt and *esperas*, however, were not discounted as they were generally paid later and it would have been practically impossible to recreate the exhaustive accounting of arrears). The index of effective rent is computed over the base 100 of nominal rent.

#### Risk

The indicators of risk to the landlord are counted across each decade, except for the initial six-year period 1595-1600.

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8 Which is why in the figures the lines using data for 1701-1709 are pitched differently.

- Percentage of farmers leaving counts the number of occurrences (one occurrence is one pair [herdade, year]) in which the tenant is not the same as in the previous year, or in which there is no tenant. The percentage is over the total of observed occurrences within the decade.
- *Number of herdades in sharecropping* counts the percentage of occurrences in which the *herdade* was not on lease but was let by the *Misericórdia* to one or more sharecroppers.
- *Average percentage of acquittals* is the decade's average of yearly acquittals as a percentage of nominal rent.

The index of risk to the landlord is the weighted average of the three indicators, in which indicator 1 is weighted by 1 and indicators 2 and 3 are weighted by 2.

### Prices

Wheat prices use the year's price of the reference month of August, the month in which rents in kind were paid, and that served at the time as the reference price of the year for all kinds of economic operations. The main series of the Common Granary and the *Terreiro Público* of Évora were published by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho (1955, 1970) and I completed the gaps using the prices of liquidations of rents in kind and of wheat sales at the *Misericórdia*, as well as regression estimates on the prices of the barley and rye for the years with no data (Santos, 2003: 69-77).

Meat (mutton and pork) prices were collected from the municipal government's records (Santos, 2003: 110-1, 135-7).

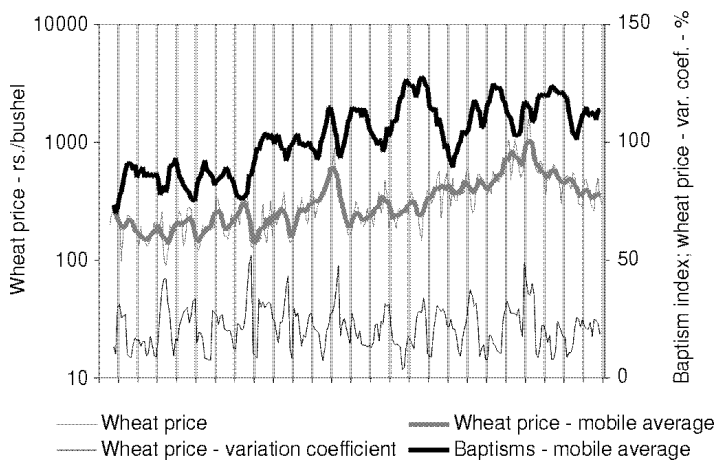
### Baptisms

Baptisms were collected from parish records of selected 15 rural parishes. To correct for gaps, an index series on the average of the period 1675-1700=100 was established controlling for all occurring gaps (Santos, 2003: 160-1).

### Households

Numbers of households for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were collected from several population and household counts. The sums include only the parishes for which there are complete data for the whole period, or for which reliable estimates could be made. Only a small number of parishes are missing (Santos, 2003: 162-81).

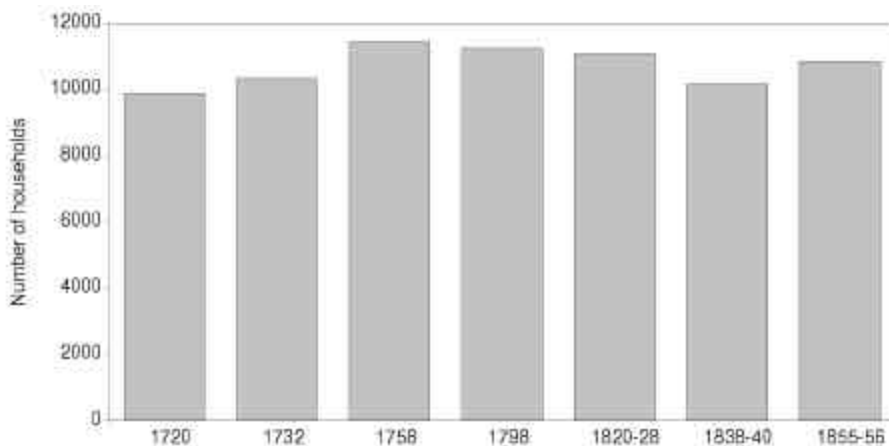
*Empirical annex*



**Figure 1** Wheat prices and baptisms, 1595-1850

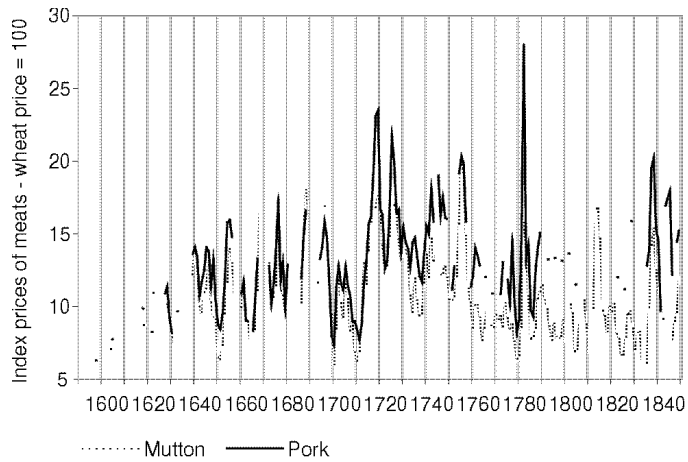
Note: baptisms index, base average 1675-1700 = 100. 5 years mobile averages and variation coefficient.

Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 2** Number of households in the region of Évora, 1720-1856

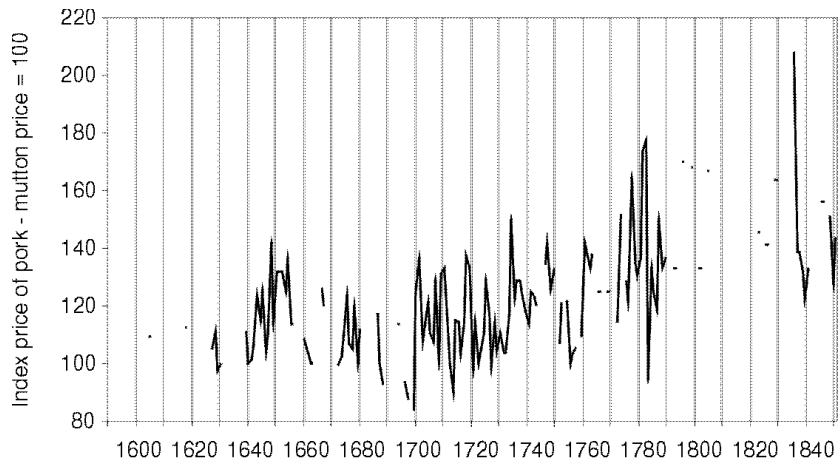
Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 3** Meat prices

Note: index, wheat price=100.

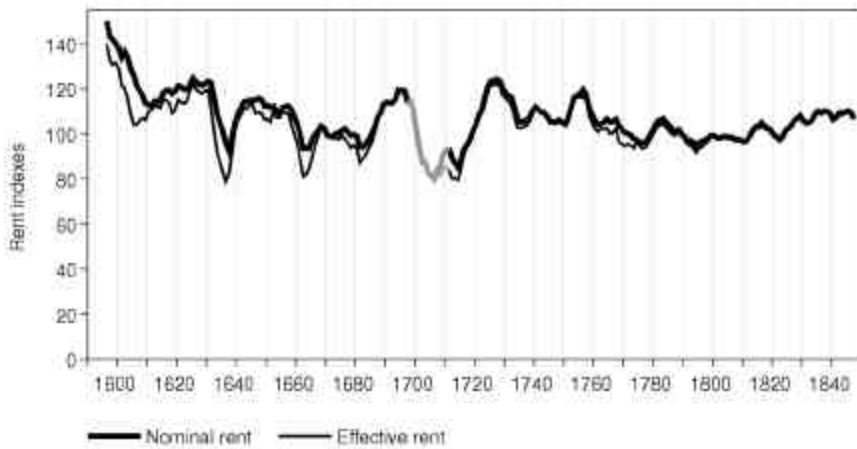
Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 4** Pork prices

Note: index, mutton price=100 coefficient.

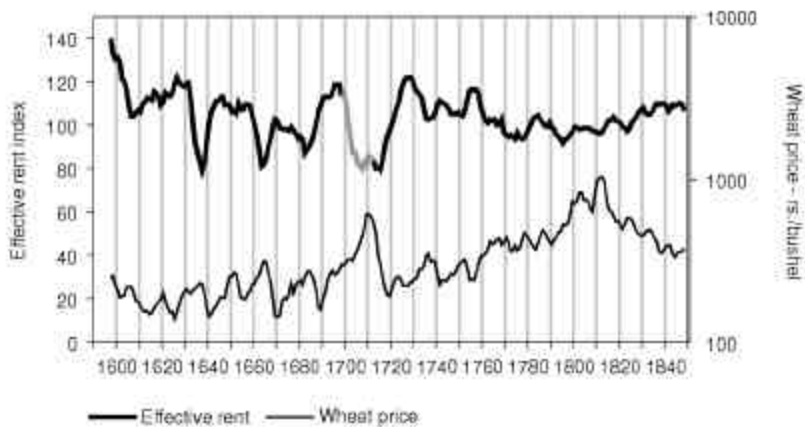
Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 5** Nominal and effective rents, 1595-1850

Note: indexes, base average nominal 1670-1689=100. 5 year moving averages.

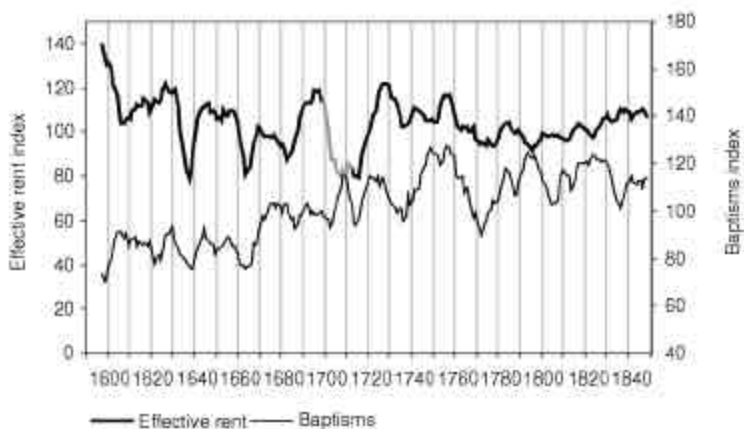
Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 6** Effective rent and wheat prices, 1595-1850

Note: effective rent index, base average nominal rent 1670-1689=100. 5 year moving averages.

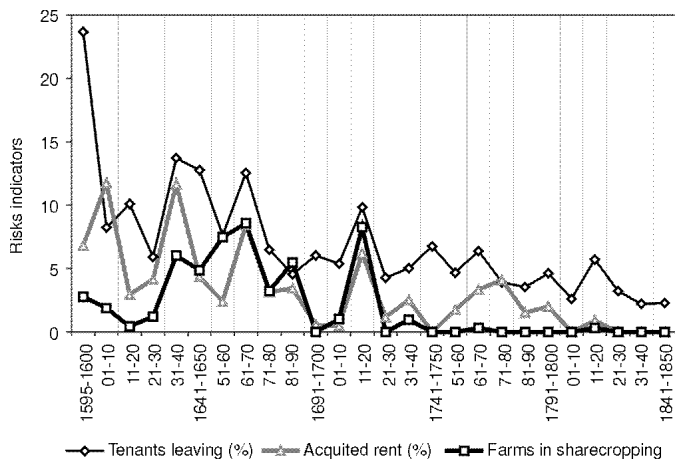
Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 7** Effective rent and baptisms, 1595-1850

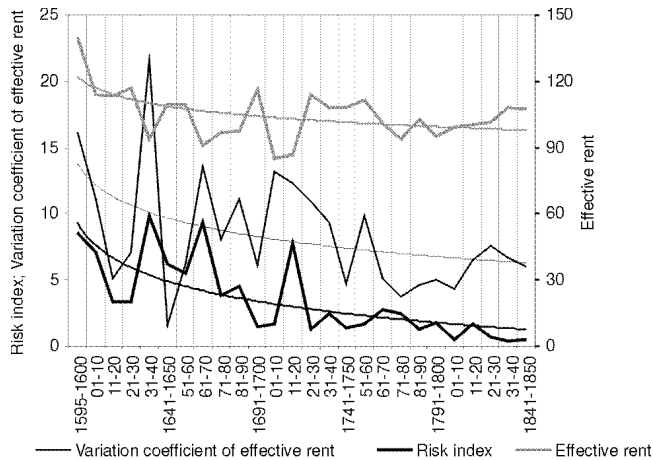
Note: indexes, bases average nominal 1670-1689=100 (effective rent) 1675-1700=100 (baptisms).

Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 8** Indicators of risk to the landlord, 1595-1600 to 1841-1850

Source: Santos (2003).



**Figure 9** Effective rent, rent stability and risk to the landlord, 1595-1600 to 1841-50

Source: Santos (2003).

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### **Resumo/ Abstract/ Résumé/ Resumen**

*Sociologia económica do latifúndio moderno: instituições económicas e mudança social no Sul de Portugal, séculos XVII a XIX*

A estrutura social agrária correntemente conhecida como latifúndio, prevalecente no Alentejo até à segunda metade do século XX, foi um traço estrutural fundamental da formação da sociedade portuguesa contemporânea. Este artigo usa um quadro teórico de sociologia económica, em conjunto com dados empíricos da região de Évora entre finais do século XVI e meados do século XIX, para revelar os mecanismos sociais que explicam a sociogénese do latifúndio moderno.

Palavras-chave Estrutura agrária, contratos agrários, partilha de risco, *status* de mercado.

*Economic sociology of the modern latifundium: economic institutions and social change in Southern Portugal 17th-19th centuries*

The agrarian social structure currently known as *latifundium* that prevailed in the southern Portuguese of Alentejo well into the second half of the 20th century was an important structural feature in the shaping of contemporary Portuguese society. This article combines an economic sociology theoretical framework with empirical evidence from the region of Évora, from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to the mid-18th century, to highlight the social mechanisms explaining the sociogenesis of the modern *latifundium*.

Key-words Agrarian structure, agrarian contracts, risk-sharing, market status.

*Sociologie économique du latifundium moderne: institutions économiques et changement social au Sul du Portugal, 17<sup>e</sup>-19<sup>e</sup> siècles*

La structure sociale agraire couramment nommée latifundium, qui était dominante dans la province méridionale portugaise de l'Alentejo jusqu'à la deuxième moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, a été un trait structurel fondamental dans la formation de la société portugaise

contemporaine. Cet article met en rapport un cadre théorique de la sociologie économique et des données empiriques sur la région de Évora dès la fin du XVIème jusqu'à la première moitié du XIXème siècle, pour déceler les mécanismes sociaux qui expliquent la sociogenèse du latifundium moderne.

Mots-clé Structure agraire, contrats agraires, partage du risque, *status* de marché.

*Sociología económica del latifundio moderno: instituciones económicas e cambio social en el Sur de Portugal, siglos XVII-XIX*

La estructura social agraria generalmente llamada latifundio, que era dominante en la región meridional portuguesa de Alentejo hasta la segunda mitad del siglo XX, constituyó un rasgo estructural fundamental en la formación de la sociedad portuguesa contemporánea. Este artículo usa un marco teórico de sociología económica y datos empíricos de la región de Évora desde el final del siglo XVI hasta mediados del siglo XIX para revelar los mecanismos económicos explicativos de la sociogénesis del latifundio moderno.

Palabras-clave Estructura agraria, contratos agrarios, coparticipación del riesgo, status de mercado.