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Annie Antoine and Julian Misch, eds., *Sociabilité et politique en milieu rural*. Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008. 472 pp. 23€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-7535-0540-7.

Review by Patricia R. Turner, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire.

The thirty-six short papers which comprise this edited volume share a common objective: to conceptualize how social practices and relations inscribe rural political behavior. Invoking as a common point of departure historian Maurice Agulhon's classic work on *sociabilité* in the Var, this project aims to reshape the terrain first surveyed by Agulhon by expanding it conceptually, geographically, and chronologically.[1]

This endeavor is not only welcome but long overdue. More than thirty years ago, Agulhon defined *sociabilité* broadly as a "general aptitude of a population to experience social relations intensely and publicly." [2] In the past two decades, however, the debate over *sociabilité* and its impact on political practice has too often been conflated with much narrower neo-Tocquevillean arguments about the democratizing function of civil society and social capital. [3] Support for this paradigm has recently waned under criticism that the claimed links between macro-democratic transformation and micro-social practices (i.e., that membership in local voluntary associations promote national democratic development [4]) are empirically weak and that the paradigm ignores the potential of social capital in certain circumstances to promote uncivil behavior and undemocratic institutions. [5]

This ambitious interdisciplinary project, the result of a conference at the University of Rennes in June 2005, provides a refreshing reorientation from grand political theory to *in situ* empirical analyses of political behavior, social organization, solidarity and conflict in five European countries from the mid-sixteenth century to the late twentieth. Organized into five thematic parts, the project carries forward the oeuvre of two prior colloquia on *sociabilité* and politics in the 1980s at the University of Rouen. [6] But it does so from a new vantage point, that of the rural village, *pays* and region.

While the project's contributors generally avoid overarching theoretical constructs in favor of empirical analyses of politics "under the microscope of *sociabilité*," they collectively embrace two argumentative frames of reference (p. 10). First, they emphasize the ethnography of locality. Inspired by the work of the sociologist Marcel Maquet and rural historians such as Jean-Luc Mayaud and Alain Corbin, these monographic essays eschew "globalizing visions" of rural society in favor of an ethnographic focus on specific rural localities (p. 11). [7] Second, the contributors contest standard models of rural politicization that rely on one-way "vertical" vectors, in which political ideology (i.e., republican radicalization) "descends towards the masses" from the national to the local and from the urban to the rural (p. 15). In the volume's introduction, Julian Misch criticizes this model for typifying the peasant masses as political apprentices who are "simple, passive receptors of the civilizing mission of urban elites..." (p. 15-16). In contrast, these papers emphasize politicization "*par en bas*," in which political ideologies are examined within the modalities of their practical and cultural appropriation by rural social groups (p. 16).

This project's ethnographic approach is particularly prominent in Part Three, which concentrates on how social networks and reproduction among rural elites shaped local power relations. The papers in this section avoid generic socio-professional classifications to ascribe social status. Instead, they focus on how power was exerted by specific social groupings via local, regional and national constellations of kinship networks and institutional affiliations. Lucien Faggion, for example, explores power relations among sixteenth-century rural notables in the *terre ferme* countryside of the Venetian Republic (pp. 227-238). Faggion utilizes notary records in the village of Trissino (1600 inhabitants circa 1550) to document how the political domination of fifteen families was reproduced generationally via inter- and intra-familial networks and patronage systems connecting the village of Trissino, the nearby administrative center of Valdagno, the provincial capital of Vicence, and Venice. His analysis illustrates how rural notaries in particular "translated the functioning of rural political life and the existence of a genuine *sociabilité* ...between the rural and urban world" (p. 235). In another essay in this section, Gilles Laferté maps the elaborate alliances forged by rural winegrowers near Dijon and Beaune with local associations, new regional educational institutions, and local and national governmental bodies (p. 313). Laferté argues this constellation of intersecting networks—local, regional and national—politicized rural Bourgogne between the two world wars by integrating winegrowers into the *dijonnaise* bourgeoisie (pp. 303-304).

Ethnographic approaches are also highlighted in Part Two of the volume which focuses on rural forms of *sociabilité*. Contributions by Yann Lagadec and Philippe Secondy call attention to the "unity of the rural world" as revealed by the diverse functions of its social groupings (p. 12). Lagadec examines agricultural associations (*comice agricoles*) in Brittany between 1840 and 1900. In an overwhelmingly rural region where electoral committees were transitory and other forms of voluntary associations were restricted to a few urban centers, Lagadec argues that Breton agricultural committees evolved to serve multiple functions: as regional vectors of agricultural innovation, as local promoters of traditional cultural practices, and as stable networks for cantonal political mobilization (pp. 137-146).

Secondy makes a similar argument in his analysis of *l'Association de la jeunesse catholique française* (AJCF), a Catholic lay youth organization, in the Hérault during the Belle Époque (pp. 191-200). With a national membership of 140,000 by 1913, the AJCF was organized in rural areas as "inter-parish unions," enabling it to promote "ties of camaraderie" among and between village-based notables and urban elites (p. 193-4). While their membership remained limited to the upper stratum of village adolescents, these inter-parish unions provided a variety of cultural and social services, including job placement services, theatrical troupes, sports clubs and lending libraries (p. 198). Secondy argues the AJCF's multiple cultural roles enabled it successfully to recruit a rural juvenile base to combat "the politics of de-Christianization" (p. 200).

As Julian Misch notes in his introduction, the implantation, appropriation and reception of politics in the rural milieu constitute a central frame of reference for this project (p. 11). This review can highlight only a few of the notable contributions that challenge standard views of rural politicization as archaic, isolated or passively imitational. Part One of the volume, which focuses on "appropriations and contestations" of rural political order, concludes with Ana Iglesia's paper on rural protest in Galicia during the two decades following the Spanish Civil War. She argues that the apparently disjointed, often inarticulate rural resistance to Franco's dictatorship reflected the varied contexts of rural conflict, which included: open conflict (recognizable actors and concrete action); non-directed conflict (concrete behavior that was not openly or consciously conflictual); institutional conflict (legitimated by local institutions or inscribed in traditional local practices); and implicit conflict (unexpressed via behavior, institutions or practices because it did not rise to a level capable of being channeled). Iglesia contends that this typology, when applied to rural resistance in post-Civil War Galicia, exposes the false dichotomy between "modern" versus "archaic" rural protest strategies and reveals that all social movements are "at once new and ancient" (p. 125).

In his essay “Des ‘*sans-culottes ruraux*?’,” Serge Bianchi begins by acknowledging the double paradox inherent in the idea of urban revolutionaries operating in peasant communities notorious for their anti-revolutionary resistance (p. 35). Recent historiography of the 1789 Revolution, he argues, posits a separate peasant political culture, hostile to the revolution and inured against Jacobin radicalization. Bianchi challenges the idea that the populist politicization of the Year II was singularly urban. Rather, he claims that pockets of a “*sans-culotterie rurale*” functioned in institutions such as popular societies, in practices and forms of political *sociabilité*, and in standard-bearers of demands for economic and social reform. Expanding the constitutive criteria for this militant “category,” he concludes, will clarify the general concept of *sans-culottisme* and reveal the convergences between its urban and rural forms as well as the contradictions between its rural expression and the rural political spaces estranged from the Republic (p. 35-36).

It is perhaps inevitable that a project of this grand scope and ambition would fall short in achieving some of its loftier aims. Its geographical scope is in fact limited. Only four of the thirty-six contributions to the volume focus on rural localities outside of France. Its chronological range is only somewhat more inclusive, with more than three-fourths of the papers pertaining to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, as its directors readily acknowledge, the project’s thematic framework breaks little new ground, but rather elaborates and expands on recent works by Jean-Luc Mayaud and others who have re-envisioned the rural community as a “*micro-polis*” (p. 11).<sup>[7]</sup>

The strengths of this project, however, far outweigh the minor deficits. The forty historians, sociologists and political scientists who contributed to this volume have realized to a remarkable degree Mayaud’s vision of French rural history as a “disciplinary crossroads” (p.11). Their nuanced portraits of rural *sociabilité* and political mobilization provide compelling evidence that reified historiographical divisions and one-way vertical vectors between urban and rural political culture are—at best— incomplete models. Urban and rural scholars alike will be inspired by their evocative and richly empirical descriptions of the social networks, institutions and political practices uniting village and *pays*, region and province, locality and nation.

## NOTES

[1] Maurice Agulhon, *La Sociabilité méridionale. Confréries et associations en Provence orientale au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Aix-en-Provence : La Pensée universitaire, 1966) ; *Pénitents et Francs-Maçons de l’ancienne Provence* (Paris : Fayard, 1968) ; *La République au village* (Paris : Plon, 1970).

[2] Maurice Agulhon, *Le Cercle dans la France bourgeoise, 1810-1848. Étude d’une mutation de sociabilité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1977), p. 7.

[3] As conceived by political scientists such as Robert Putnam, civil society is rooted in dense social networks of voluntary associations which create and exchange “social capital” and thereby promote democratic political values and practices: Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) and idem, ed., *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[4] For challenges to the civil society argument, see Ariel Armony, *The Dubious Link: Civic Engagement and Democratization* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2004); Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic” *World Politics* 49 (April 1997):401-429; and Omar Encarnación, *The Myth of Civil Society: Social Capital and Democratic Consolidation in Spain and Brazil* (New York: Palgrave, 2003)

[5] It should be noted that connections between *sociabilité* and democratic transformation are inherent in Agulhon's own work, in which he argues that the institutional loci of French sociability promoted republicanism by politicizing social practices: *La République au village* (Paris: Plon, 1970). As the editors of this volume point out, however, Agulhon would later contest reductionist understandings of *sociabilité* that limit it to formal or institutionalized forms of social interaction such as voluntary associations (p. 8).

[6] Françoise Thelamon, ed., *Sociabilité, Pouvoirs et Société. Actes du Colloque de Rouen 24/26 Novembre 1983* (Rouen : Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1987) ; Françoise Thelamon, ed., *Aux Sources de la Puissance: Sociabilité et Parenté* (Rouen : Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1989).

[7] See, in particular, Marcel Maget, « Remarques sur le village comme cadre de recherches anthropologiques », *Bulletin de psychologie*, t. VIII, 7-8 (April 1955): 375-382 ; Alain Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin*, 2 vols (Limoges : Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 1975) ; and Jean-Luc Mayaud, « Les dynamiques des sociétés rurales en France de la révolution de 1848 à la Première Guerre mondiale » in Edouard Lynch, ed., *Les Campagnes dans les évolutions sociales et politiques en Europe* (Paris, :Hachette, 2005) : 81-100.

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