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California Rural Communities, Farm worker Settlement and Citizenship Practices
Hugo Santos-Gómez / Dept. of Anthropology UCSB /
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Research activities.

This research project was developed following the program determined in its initial proposal, i.e., the research activities were undertaken as it was planned. In general terms they consisted in what is described below.

This project questioned the degree the settlement process could constitute a condition that furthers farmworkers' citizenship practices, framing opportunities for participation in rural community's political and civil institutions. In order to address this main question I initiated my research pursuing the following objectives:

- to identify political and civil institutions, as well as public arenas by which people, in this case farmworkers, make claims to community membership, forcing the inclusion of their agendas and concerns;
- to assess the extent and scope to which local political and civil institutions include farmworker agendas and concerns.
- to determine how the settlement of farmworkers affects notions of local membership and defines the limits of citizenship practices.

In order to reach my research goals I engaged myself doing ethnographic fieldwork in three related but different institutional arenas: a) local governments, b) local school systems, and local civil organizations. Even though I resorted to other methods to gather significant information, the ethnographic fieldwork provided the substantial part of information pertinent to this project. The research agenda was similar in these three arenas, to wit: to describe the extent to which farmworkers were reaching certain degree of influence through the making of claims and/or to being able to have representatives of them within those institutional bodies.

The ethnographic fieldwork consisted basically in two broader activities: interviews and participant observation. I carried out extensive interviews with members of the institutional bodies already enlisted and with members of the public as well. I also participated extensively in the regular meetings (when I was allowed to do it) and in certain moments I was invited to participate (from the simple contribution of opinions to the engagement in more elaborated tasks). When it was possible I took advantage of these opportunities in order to gain knowledge of both the people involved and the inner functioning of these institutions.

The research sites where this project was planned to take place was modified to a certain extent from what was planned in the initial proposal. With the agreement and consent of my advisor it was decided to reduce the number of research sites from the four (originally proposed in the project) to three. This change would not affect substantially the nature of the research, and would render a better ethnographical approach to the three sites that remained within the project's scope. The three rural communities in which the fieldwork was undertaken were: McFarland, Shafter, and Lost Hills. These three

communities are all located within the limits of the County of Kern, in the southern portion of the California's San Joaquin Valley.

Principal findings.

The main findings of this project can be briefly described according to the following lines:

- a) The need for more research on the social effects of the agricultural intensification, that in the case of the State of California, has been taking place since at least two decades ago, and the need to reconsider previous theoretical mindsets regarding the relation of farm workers and their possibilities of civic engagement. The relatively recent process of California's agricultural change (from field to specialty high valued crops) and the intensification of farm labor demands have spawned demographic and social changes, among them the novel process of sedentarization of the labor force and the reshaping of rural communities from localities of transient populations to localities where the labor force is confronted with the need to organize their community life in a viable way.
- b) The need to engage in more broad and extensive ethnographical research that could render visible different processes of civil society building that are gradually taking place in a significant number of rural communities throughout industrial agricultural regions of California.

a) My research found that to a great extent farm workers, particularly in those areas where it has been a change from field crops to specialty high valued crops, are much more stable in their towns than before. They are not as mobile as it was thought. This trend to the geographic stabilization of workers mobility is related to the expansion of labor demands of the new crops, which require intensive inputs of labor during extended times through the year. To a great extent the sociological approaches to farm workers engagement in civic and political arenas have been framed under the idea of geographic mobility and ethnic boundaries. In brief, these ideas convey the meaning of the farm worker as a mobile subject (moving to different locations following the employment seasons through the year, implying at the same time their difficulties to become active participant in the communities where they work and/or reside given such mobility). My ethnographic project allowed me to go to the agricultural fields and to observe and measure the kind and amount of labor involved in the production of new specialty high valued crops such as table grapes, and a wide variety of crops, and based on this data, to suggest the existence of a strong trend in the labor process that has been allowing workers to become much more stable in terms of geographic mobility and duration of employment throughout the year. Simultaneously, my project has provided useful information that contradicts what some authors have labeled as the "standard class model for rural California" (that equates ethnic or race divisions to class divisions). Regarding this issue I have been able to gather ethnographic information documenting processes of social mobility among farm workers (that has allowed them to reach different socio-economic positions different from farm labor, but also within the sphere of this economic

activity), and information of farm workers getting involved in civic matters in their localities without abandoning their character of farm workers.

b) My project was thought as a way to generate first hand information about the effects that the novel process of farm workers stabilization has had on the transformation of local civil society. To a great extent the sociological approaches to the social effects of industrial agriculture to rural communities have assumed that the farm labor class has been severely limited in its capacity to participate within the rural communities' civil society. This has been assumed, in part, because the strong domination and control exerted by growers and agricultural corporations, the state, and by local elites (whose lines of demarcation run usually along ethnic and racial lines), but also because the very nature of farm labor as a low income job, and its inherent geographical and temporal instability (following the crops through different seasons of the year). In part, its ethnographic nature responds to the inadequacy of other social research methods to capture emerging and new forms of farm workers participation within local communities. Such inadequacy has rendered important processes of farm workers involvement in the social and political life of local communities. My project, which was substantially based on ethnographic methods, has provided key information about new forms of farm worker participation in projects of civil society building and transformation. Specifically I was able to document the formation of sports organizations (soccer leagues) that articulate important segments of the farm labor class. These sports organizations are increasingly leading farm workers to have complex exchanges with local authorities and among them, on one hand demonstrating their capacity of civil society organization, and on the other hand demonstrating certain degree of empowerment. Through the example of farm workers sport organizations, I have been able to document not only their capacity of civic involvement and empowerment, but also how through activities as these, they challenge local notions of community belonging.

Participants.

Hugo Santos-Gomez PhD Candidate, Research Fellow
Prof. Juan Vicente Palerm Dissertation Committee Chairperson

Publications and Events.

- Comunidades Rurales y Agricultura Capitalista en California: Los Desafíos de la Ciudadanía. Paper presented at the Coloquio Internacional: Construcción de Comunidades Rurales de Mexicanos en California, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social. Mexico D.F. February, 2006
- California Rural Communities, Farmworker Settlement and Citizenship Practices. Paper presented at the Labor and Employment Research Fund Graduate Student Conference, Santa Barbara, CA. May 2006

- Soccer and Citizenship Practices in the San Joaquin Valley. Paper presented at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Meeting. San Jose, CA. April 2007
- Playing Soccer, Engaging in Civic Action. Paper presented at Transforming Central Valley Communities Coloquium. University of California, Santa Barbara, Strategies, Capacity Builders, Inc. Tulare, CA. April 2007
- Penalty!: Soccer and Farm Workers in California's Central Valley. Paper presented at the Reclaiming Our Bodies, Streets, and Communities: Scholarship and Transformative Space Conference. University of California, Santa Barbara, Graduate Student Colectiva. Santa Barbara, CA. November 2007

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