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The concept of "territory" in French planning : An essay in dialectical analysis

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Forword :

Thirty-five years ago, Gunnar Olsson was teaching at the University of Michigan while I was visiting for two years at the University of Toronto. I was then involved in "quantitative geography", quite new and popular at the time. But my curiosity went beyond matrix calculus or Volterra-Lotka distribution, into philosophy and particularly into Hegel's logic. I got in touch with Gunnar : both, we partook a deep interest in philosophy. It was the beginning of a friendship which saw us moving back and forth, with our graduate students, for philosophical seminars between Ann Arbor and Toronto. I still keep happy remembrances from this time past. Hopefully, this small paper might recall somehow our friendly meetings and our passion for philosophical thinking. Since then, my criticism of "territories" and of French "Aménagement du territoire" has gone further ahead. It has led to an [International colloquium](#) in 2007 and to the publication of a book on *The enemies of Paris*.

National and Regional Planning in France go, since half a century, under the name of "*Aménagement du Territoire*". Nobody seems to have noticed the pre-eminence given in this name to "territory" over men. The role of planning is defined, in this way, as ensuring equality (in public equipment, activities, development ...) between different pieces of land, not between different households. French media and politicians keep lamenting about territorial inequalities. When population, however, is concentrated in cities and resources are scarce, **equality between territories means inequality between men**. Even specialized journals, e.g in computer science, have discussed "*la fracture territoriale*" (inequality between territories) because cellular phones or ADSL may not be easily accessible in some remote mountainous regions. There has been few discussions, however, on the fact that old or poor households do not have easy access, for different reasons, to such electronic facilities.

I remember sitting, years ago, on a National Planning Commission : I was pointing out that all French households, after a long backward period, were finally equipped in telephone lines. A French geographer replied that this was true of the households, but not of the territories. I asked him if he wanted to build telephone booths every kilometre in the mountains ... I forgot his answer but in substance, it was yes ...

Such attachment to land rather than to men is so strong and so peculiar, in French geography and planning, that it deserves an analysis : this is the goal of this paper.

1 - The use of the concept

"*Territoire*" designates an area, a piece of land, but with peculiar connotations. It represents the country as opposed to the city, spaces vs points, "natural" and agricultural land against urbanized areas, regions (*la province*) vs Paris. The word appears as a modernisation of older terms, like "*la terre*", "*le terroir*" (often employed by nationalists), which designate the fine

peculiarities of a farm land. They are mainly used, today, in publicities singing the praise of a wine or a cheese and they are clearly related to the "good old times" : they include images showing necessarily a slightly dilapidated but charming old farm and an old farmer with a big moustache, showing to dumb Parisians how to eat a certain kind of cheese. Most cheese is produced, of course, in industrial plants but these plants, for some reason, are never shown. Territories have also a political connotation : at the beginning of XXth century, nationalists looked for old terms, quite forgotten, to express their love of the fatherland : "*la glèbe*", in France, "*die Scholle*" in Germany, were supposed to express attachment to the glorious soil and the immutable traditions.

Let us first quote the Littré dictionary : "*Territory : piece of land in the dependance of an empire, ... or a certain jurisdiction*". The first characteristic of a "territory" is thus to be submitted to some superior authority : this fits particularly well to the French planning system, where, for five decades, everything has been decided by the central State, with limited participation of local elected officials and practically none from private enterprises. The word describes the very centralisation it is supposed to fight. It has been widely used in politics : in the 1940's, during the German occupation, the government of maréchal Pétain kept opposing good farmers to bad city dwellers, rural areas to cities, land to urban agglomerations. In a famous speech, the old maréchal exalted "*the soil, the land which never lies ...*". Whatever the meaning of such words, it implied that cities were deceitful and un-French ... Still in 2005, the Prime Minister, Mr Raffarin, kept opposing Paris and big cities to "*the France down there*", "*the true France*", "*the authentic one*", rural territories and small towns exalted as "*la France d'en-bas*"...

Second characteristic : since a territory depends upon a jurisdiction, limits are of great importance. Administrators and geographers have gone into long efforts to draw limits of territories and regions, with the danger of fostering closed communities, nationalism, xenophobia.

The third point is the necessity to maintain all territories on an equal foot, which means paying huge subsidies to many of them and fostering clientèle.

Finally, exalting territories leads to putting rural areas before urban centers, protecting agriculture before industry and services : an expensive policy which started in 1892² and has been maintained by all successive governments until to-day.

The importance given to "territories" is thus a political, even an ideological choice, the desire to maintain a powerful and centralized State in its role through subsidies, of sole authority and protector of national unity. In a typical dialectic between areas and points, the importance given to territories scattered far and wide fosters political centralization.

2 - The bases of the concept

How could territories take such importance in France since a century ? The question is difficult. In the feudal middle-age, land was the source of power, of taxes and of soldiers, but its meaning changed with the Enlightenment and the ideas dispersed through Europe by the French armies of the Revolution and of Napoleon. The concept of "*nationality*", of "*national unity*" appeared at the time, often against but also as a result of, the French conquests in Italy, in Germany or in Spain. It was the birth of *nationalism*, attached to a territory.

¹ "Étendue de terre qui dépend d'un empire, d'une province, d'une ville, d'une juridiction"

² Laws proposed by Jules Méline, Minister of Agriculture, and voted to create huge taxes on imported agricultural products.

Then, concentrating people in a point instead of letting them be distributed over the national territory began to appear as a crime against the nation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau criticized the concentration of men in urban centers ("*Men are not made to live crowded together but equally distributed on the land they must cultivate... Cities are the abyss of mankind...*")³ and developed the importance of Nature, that is of a "natural" world, not modified by man. Romanticism, with Herder and Hölderlin at the end of XVIIIth century and then during most of the XIXth, kept opposing the awesome beauty of Nature to the ugly creations of man : the big cities of the Industrial Revolution. Rural territories, products of Nature, were constantly opposed to sinful cities, built by man. But these ideas were all over Europe. Why did they develop in such peculiar way in France ? Because of the growth of socialist movements in the cities, frightening the farmers as well as the bourgeois ? Certainly, but leftist movements were more important in England and in Germany ...

2.1) - Territories and the ostracism of urban dwellers :

The explanation may be found in the big trauma France suffered with the military disaster of Sedan (1870) and the resulting urban rebellion of the *Commune* of Paris (1871). Never had been rural areas and urban centers so violently opposed (more than 30 000 Parisians were executed in a week by an army of farmers). Never had big cities appeared so frightening. Then, began a strange effort to ostracise, to banish outside of the national community, the frightening masses of urban workers. The remarkable works of Anne-Marie Thiesse (Thiesse, 1991, 1997) have proved this point beyond any doubt. The most surprising is that such banishment has persisted until today. We have quoted the Prime Minister opposing, in 2005, the good France ("*down there*" : the France of small towns and of farmers), the "*true France*", to the population living in big cities , probably "*untrue*".

2.2) - Territories : the sacred "roots"

Such political trend has deep sources. At the turn of the XXth century, a famous writer, Maurice Barrès (Barrès, 1897, 1912) developed the theory of the necessary "roots". The "soil", the "territory" was not a physical object but a sacred matter made of the blood and the bones of our ancestors, "*the immense army of the dead*". There were some places which an invisible spirit kept haunting and which determined men's behavior. Barrès described a famous hill (the Sion hill in the east of France), resisting for centuries to German invasions, as "*one of these high places where blows the spirit*". A man, in order to be happy and good, must have grown up in a particular region whose invisible but effective qualities had modelled his soul. Men who moved away from their land, who migrated to big cities, where supposed to cut all links to their past, to "*fall, like corpses, in the crowd*", to become debased, footloose, "rootless".

A territory was not a piece of land any longer, more or less cultivated and productive, but a part of the sacred soil of the nation, a deposit of tradition and the source of human values⁴. It was a most clamorous expression of nationalism, based on national territory, with obvious consequences : the condemnation of cosmopolitan cities, of rootless urban migrants, of foreigners and, finally, of the eternal migrant, the man without territory, rootless since thousands

³ "Les hommes ne sont point faits pour être entassés en fourmilières, mais épars sur la terre qu'ils doivent cultiver. Plus ils se rassemblent, plus ils se corrompent. ... L'haleine de l'homme est mortelle à ses semblables: cela n'est pas moins vrai au propre qu'au figuré. ... Les villes sont le gouffre de l'espèce humaine. Au bout de quelques générations les races périssent ou dégèrent; il faut les renouveler, et c'est toujours la campagne qui fournit à ce renouvellement" (Rousseau, p 30)

⁴ "We must not say that land is submitted to fluctuations like any other merchandise. Land is more than that : it is the root, the fatherland. If land were only a commodity, we would not be made so unhappy by the loss of the Alsace-Lorraine" Imbart de la Tour, J (1901), *La crise agricole en France et à l'étranger*, Nevers, 372 p.

of years, the Wandering Jew. It was the time of the Dreyfus affair in France, one of the first examples of dramatic anti-Semitism in Europe.

2.3)- Territories as religious frameworks :

Several Christian writers⁵, famous before World War I, exalted the value of land as the necessary framework for a religious population. Farmers' toil in tilling the land had a redeeming value. Rural exodus was condemned for depriving land of farmers and attracting into big centers poor naive countryside people who became instantly victims of lust and sin. Country girls, in particular, were supposed to be unusually weak and to jump into brothels as soon as they left their native territories. Rural spaces kept the traditions, while urban centers dilapidated them and forgot all national and religious past.

After World War I, Christian faith weakened in France and the mood became rather pagan and pacifist. Urban centers became identified with industries and armaments : only rural territories could guarantee peace and serenity. A famous writer, Jean Giono (Giono, 1925), exalted life in isolated mountains, sang the charms of nature's gods and dreamed of a Paris reconquered by trees and wild boars ... Henri Pourrat (Pourrat, 1940), a minor but popular writer, celebrated by maréchal Pétain, exalted the farmer, chosen by God to continue the divine task of Creation, sang hymns to Hitler who hated urban agglomerations (Marchand, 1999) and wrote : "*Down with cities...*". A famous movie maker, Marcel Pagnol, produced in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's, several celebrated movies⁶ showing poor peasant girls madly attracted to big cities, falling into prostitution and losing their honor. Fortunately, some rude peasant came to save them from sin and took them back to the mountain where, without electricity, they could eat potatoes and recover their virtue, if not their virginity. Rural territories were decidedly the refuges of traditions, virtues, human qualities while urban centers were described as places of agitation, madness and sin, fostered by the disturbing presence of rootless foreigners⁷.

2.4)- Territories as political tools :

Rural propaganda culminated during the Occupation (1940-1945) with the regime of Vichy. Urban centers were declared dangerous enemies, while rural territories appeared as the very basis of the new fascist regime. A geographer, Jean-François Gravier, militant in extreme-right movements, applauded the Pétain regime and prepared, in an *Alexis Carrel Foundation* dedicated to eugenics, a book which was published in 1947 : *Paris and the French desert*. Gravier wanted to deport millions of people from Paris, but also from big centers like Marseilles, Lyons, Lille, ... in order to re-populate rural territories which were, he said, becoming "*desert*". The success of the book was immense : up to now, this text has been quoted in every geography manual and has been used as a bible by most planners until a few years ago. It does exemplify the opposition between cities and countryside, between territories and centers.

Other geographers partook in such anti-urban passion : Hildebert Isnard, an important theoretician of French geography, wrote that he wanted Paris to be shrunk to 1/83rd of the French population (France had then 83 départements), which implied the regular distribution of population over the national territory.

⁵ René Bazin (1899, 1901, 1907, ...) ; Paul Bourget (1885, 1896, ...)

⁶ *Angèle* (1934), *La Femme du Boulanger* (1938), *La Fille du Puisatier* (1940), *Naïs* (1945) ...

⁷ Such exaltation of rural areas vs centers was also extremely important in Germany ; Cf Klaus Bergmann, 1970.

In the 1970's, the work of Christaller and his *Central Place Theory* was introduced in France. It was used to oppose and to link strongly together urban centers and their hinterland : they were supposed to live only from their their surrounding territories. In this way, *Central Place Theory*, which was developed by Christaller in the 1920's within the most rural region of Bavaria, a very rural German province, became an "urban model", where all activities were based on agricultural production, without any place for city specialisation, industry concentration or big service activities, which constitute, however, the very nature of big centers. Few noticed the contradiction.

3) The dialectic Territory/Center :

This is unfortunate because it was possible to observe there the beginning of a fascinating dialectical process. Hegel develops, in his *Science of Logic*, a type of reasoning very different from the usual mathematical discourse and also distinct from Plato's dialectic. Mathematics are based on the non-contradictory principle : A is not Not-A. For Hegel, on the contrary, a concept contains its own contradiction : Being and Nothing cannot be understood one without the other. The two concepts merge in their synthesis, Change, which retains actually and Being and Nothing together (Hegel, 1975, pp 124-127). This kind of logic is more subtle than traditional logic and allow us to understand change much better : Change is actually embedded in it. The mathematician Georgescu-Roegen has made a famous use of such dialectical logic in economics (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). Let us try and use, much more modestly, Hegel's logic to analyse the complexity of a geographical urban system. Marxists might accuse me of "idealism" but I am here following Hegel, not Marx.

The geographer Etienne Juillard (Juillard, 1974), in a famous text, proposed the concept of "*polarized region*" : a region formed by a city living from and for its surroundings. From then on, the Christaller model has been very often quoted in geographical literature. The dialectic between city and countryside, territory and center, point and area, was beginning, but stopped there.

3.1)- The closed polarized region :

Let us try and develop this interesting dialectic by coming back to the basis of Christaller theory. All centers are supposed to be similar, prices are the same ; the only difference is due to the cost of transportation. Territory is considered as *metric* (without holes or nodes, which implies no fast highways nor rail road lines) and organized by *contiguity*, that is, by some continuous distance-decay function. Limits are clearly defined as the set of points were attractions toward different centers are equal (Reilly's rule). In this conception, territory is everything, the thesis ; the center (village or town), the anti-thesis, less important, is its exact negation. The synthesis appears in the shape of the **polarized region** where center and surroundings stay in contradiction to each other but live from each other.

Two remarks about this kind of primitive region : first, it is only a part of Christaller's model and the less logical one. Space, here, is organized by the "administrative principle" (k=7), i.e by inclusion. Christaller has proposed two other kinds of structures, hexagons organized for commerce (k=3) or for transportation (k=4) but these hexagons have no spatial unity. They do not form proper territories but hierarchies where pieces of space around a unique center at a given level are organized differently around different centers at another level : space here is infinitely fragmented. These two first models are topologically completely different from the administrative territory (k=7) (Marchand, 1973). The choice of the administrative principle allows

spatial stability at all levels since each small region is included, embedded entirely, into a bigger one. The $k=7$ principle is, by construction, a political concept, closed on itself and submitted to a hierarchy : it defines a set of "territories" in the true meaning of the word. Its choice for the "polarized region" was not neutral but preserved the hierarchical power of the central State.

Second remark : the model assumes the perfect similarity of centers at a given level. Without this assumption, people would cross regional limits to go and buy products in another town if their own center did not offer them. In other words, the polarized region is inefficient for transportation and commerce and ignores city specialization in different functions. It is a synthesis between territory and center which favors hierarchical authority and is definitely closed on itself.

3.2)- The open region :

Bigger centers, however, are organized differently : according to Hegel's logic, a change in quantity induces a change in quality. Since medium size cities are not similar, the polarized region contradicts itself into the **open region**, specializing in certain particular products and services. Industries, commercial societies, high level services induce a completely different structure of space. August Lösch noted already the contradiction, showing that agriculture produces on wide areas but sells in centers, whereas industry produces in a few centers but uses wide area markets⁸.

At this stage, the role of an urban center becomes more important than the role of its surrounding territory. The open region is at the same time similar to the polarized region, with a center making transactions with its surroundings, and radically opposed, because, with the specialization of centers, transactions are not limited any more within a region, but do cross largely their borders. Actually, the open region ceased to have definite borders. Simultaneously, space is not metric any longer : the cost of transportation loses its importance, the distance decay function does not limit movements any more. It becomes difficult to define regional limits. This new region is open, wide, specialized.

3.3)- The urban agglomeration :

With a still bigger size, the urban center becomes self-sufficient and negates its surroundings. We know from the Basic/Non Basic theory⁹ that approximately three quarters of its population will produce services and goods for the agglomeration itself. The last quarter will sale its goods and services quite far away. From the viewpoint of production, investments or human relationships, this new structure is not relying any more on its hinterland. Territory vanishes in favor of the city, area in favor of the point. Flows of men, capital, information or goods go now beyond the regional, even the national limits. A big urban agglomeration is in itself a territory, or rather a synthesis of center and territory, of point and area, but opposed, in any aspect, to the open region.

3.4)- Disappearance of the territory : network of world cities

With populations of several millions inhabitants, megapoles in developed countries tend to relate mainly with each other : territory disappears to be replaced by networks. Distances do not play much role any more : life in Paris (that is production, standard of living, activities,

⁸ "In agriculture, the number of production locations is larger, in industry the number of locations for consumption. Hence, in agriculture, producers group themselves around a consumption site ; in industry, sites of consumption about a producer. The sales market for agricultural commodities is punctiform, whereas that for industrial commodities is areal." (Lösch, 1967, page 63).

⁹ and much more profoundly, from the Input-Output Model (Leontief model).

political ideas, culture, ..) is much more influenced by events happening in Frankfurt, New-York, Tokyo or Los Angeles, than by what may happen in small French towns. Informal flows along networks of capital, information, innovations play the main role. The concept of Territory was based mainly on the notions of contiguity and dominance by a center, as resumed in the distance-decay function. Such properties lose their meaning in a network of world cities. Territory seems to have disappeared and left only centers and networks.

3.5)- The return of the territory :

Globalization, however, shows that if metropolises live with the whole world, they use differently distinct territories. The scale has changed : we speak here of huge continental blocks. Different parts of the world have different customs, different salary levels, different training capacities. In the past, such differences might have been stronger but they were much less influential because international flows were limited. Because borders have opened and because the world has become global, regional and national differences are dialectically playing a much bigger role. Big cities organize now world production by using these differences, particularly in salaries, in order to lower cost. A Personal Computer bought in Paris will have parts made in Malaysia, Taiwan and Mexico, have been assembled in Ireland and sold by an American company with a Finnish invented operating system like Linux. Territories become again important but at a world scale. Globalization, by putting territories in closer contact, tends simultaneously to exacerbate their originalities and to destroy them.

We have tried and shown that a series of contradictions within geographical concepts produce, from the village to the world megapole, a complex dialectical structure. The French case of Regional planning, favoring heavily rural territories against urban agglomerations, territories against points, may appear dangerous and over-simplified. It is dangerous for many reasons (see Marchand, 2009). One of them is that it requires huge flows of subsidies from cities to a countryside unable to live by itself, from agglomerations with high productivity to regions with low productivity : an economic waste of scarce resources. But more dangerously, it leads to equip territories which migrants are leaving (to try and maintain them on the land) while neglecting suburbs where these migrants are flocking. These suburbs, however, are a fundamental part of the nation : one third of the population dwell there, young couples working, paying taxes but lacking basic equipment. Recent rioting in Paris, Grenoble or Lille suburbs are but a symptom of the problem.

The conclusion of such dialectic is clear : if planners keep interested only in "territories" and remain stuck with the description of *Polarized Regions*, they are restricting themselves to over-simplified space structures, agricultural production and low level exchanges between decaying and ageing population. They will miss most of the modern economy which is developing in cities and particularly, in big metropolises and they will exaggerate outrageously the role of agriculture and of farmers.

4 - Emphasis on the "territory" : consequences

The preponderant role given to the "territory" in planning has had huge consequences. One may suspect that some of them have been actually wanted for political and ideological reasons.

4.1) Anthropological effects

From the anthropological point of view, the territory seems to have been used in France to rebuild a **community** feeling. Louis Dumont¹⁰ has shown that most cultures were based on strong communities (*Gemeinschaften*) molding men according to their own traditions. There, each human being is first defined as a member of his community before being an individual. The ideas of the Renaissance and of the Enlightenment, as well as the Industrial Revolution, have produced individuals, independent from each other, rootless and grouped quite loosely in societies (*Gesellschaften*)¹¹. The change has been paramount. It seems, according to Dumont, to have happened earlier and more completely in France than elsewhere, than in Germany, for instance.

Most conservative and religious groups have tried very hard, during the XXth century, to rebuild the disappearing communities, criticizing an excessive individualism, the loss of the "roots", the supposed despair of individuals lost in huge cities. Catholics leaders, for instance Charles Péguy or Emmanuel Mounier, have developed the theory of "*personalism*"¹²: the individual must become a *person* again, not an individual completely independent but a man enclosed in and defined by, a whole network of relationships (family, friends, co-workers, religious principles, etc...) controlling and dictating his behavior.

In Germany, the main tool used to rebuild communities during the 1930's was blood similarity: Walter Darré, minister of agriculture in the nazi regime, kept advocating the "**blood and soil**" communities (*Blut und Boden*), with obvious racist consequences. In France, where Enlightenment ideas were probably stronger, the basis to a renewed community feeling seems to have been the "**territory**", the small local region with its villages, where people knew each other, lived and died together. It is particularly telling that, in 1988, the socialist François Mitterrand, leader of the French Left, used for his political campaign for the presidency a poster showing France as a rural village in a small valley, protected by his church steeple, a surprising copy of a similar poster used, forty five years before, by maréchal Pétain ...

4.2)- Economical effects :

Putting territories before households has had important economic consequences¹³. Most State resources in France come from a few huge agglomerations: the Paris region (Ile-de-France) alone accounts for some 30 % of the national budget. Huge flows of wealth have been constantly directed from big cities to "territories". Among the 22 French regions, 19 receive each year from the State more than they send: they are subsidized. Regions containing the biggest agglomerations pay the subsidies, with Ile-de-France (Paris) paying 97 % of them¹⁴.

One might identify at least three kinds of flows going to territories. The most obvious, but not the biggest, represents subsidies of any kind paid by the State to the "French desert", i.e to the countryside. The *Cour des Comptes*, the highest French institution dedicated to controlling public monies, has evaluated such flows, direct and indirect, toward agricultural land at some 40 billions euros a year¹⁵: since there are 650 000 agricultural exploitations, it amounts, on the average, to some 60 000 euros a year per farm, or 5 000 euros a month. Subsidies represent

¹⁰ Louis Dumont, 1977, 1991.

¹¹ The Bishop of York has expressed quite clearly the community feeling: "I am because we are: I belong, therefore I am." Bishop of York in *The Guardian*, 15-11-2007.

¹² See for instance Lacroix, 1972.

¹³ See Davezies (2008).

¹⁴ Data in <http://www-ohp.univ-paris1.fr>

¹⁵ Cour des Comptes (1992) *Rapport Public sur l'agriculture*, Paris.

almost 90 % of French farmers income : they are, in fact, civil servants. Territories are sustained by the central State.

A second type of flows is represented by the very organization of the income tax system. Since taxes are based on income and State subsidies on population, there is a mechanical redistribution of wealth¹⁶ involving huge sums of money. The economist Laurent Davezies has shown that, on one hand, such transfers may have helped some regions which were backward and poor to develop. On the other hand, transfers are going from agglomerations with high productivity, engaged in the globalization process, suffering from world competition and from resulting unemployment, towards territories with local services, protected production, low productivity and hence, low unemployment, closed on themselves, with a better way of life. The future of such economic system may be questioned.

A third type of flows corresponds to the higher prices of agricultural products maintained by duties established by protectionist laws since 1892 in order to preserve rural territories. For instance, French consumers pay their wheat twice, their meat three times, their sugar four times the prices asked on world markets. Poorest households suffer much more than the others. There is no present evaluation of such over-cost for urban dwellers. In 1892, a prominent economist, Léon Say, evaluated this over-cost at 4 billions gold Francs, which would amount to-day, given the price of gold, to some 30 billion euros, more than 40 billion dollars.

A precise evaluation of the global cost of these policies protecting "territories" is not possible today. It seems that we may put it, in a very tentative way, at some 100 billion euros a year.

4.3)- Social effects :

These huge transfers of wealth are coming from the biggest urban agglomerations and particularly, from their most populated part, their suburbs. In the Paris region, for instance, 2.2 millions people live in the city itself : most of them are well-to-do and can afford to subsidize provincial territories. But the bulk of Paris population (8 millions) live in suburbs where they are largely abandoned by the State : poor transportation systems and lack of medical, cultural and educational equipments. Most of them are young couples who cannot afford Paris rents, but who work, pay taxes, make children and represent the future of the country. The emphasis on territories and the huge flows of wealth it induces, away from urban agglomerations, explain largely the social crises France has known in its suburbs and shows the danger (but also the reason) of such emphasis.

There has been in France, with the growth of suburbs since the beginning of XXth century, a constant effort to maintain their population ostracised, eliminated from the national community. Between 1920's and 1980's, it was the fear of the "*red belts*", the famous rings of suburbs, populated mainly by communist and socialist voters, surrounding the wealthy city centers. When the Left took power, in 1981, the danger was not credible any more. But a few years later, a new danger was announced : a "*green belt*" of "Islamist" suburbs dedicated to terrorism. The exaggeration of such claims, repeated constantly in the media, shows the desire, more or less conscious in so many people, to keep favoring rural "territories" over urban concentration and maintaining ostracism. Here again, the future seems dangerously oriented.

¹⁶ "Tax Geography reproduces income distribution while public spending geography follows population distribution because territories contribute to the national budget in function of their income and receive public subsidies according to their population. ... For instance, in Ile-de-France, State expenses and Social subsidies are 25 billions euros smaller than the corresponding taxes : these 25 billions represent a transfer toward provincial territories ..." Davezies, 2004 ; we translate.

Some sociologists are well aware of the situation (e.g : Body-Gendrot S & Whithol de Wenden C, 2007).

Conclusion :

Caring for territories more than for men has been a constant in French planning, as made evident by the violent hate expressed by Gravier against Paris and cultivated until the end of XXth century. Consequences may be considered as disastrous but love for territories and hostility toward big cities have been so deep and so permanent that few people seem to have realized the injustice and the danger.

Conditions have changed since two decades and the question is getting more confusing. French people seem to consider that Nature does not exist without farmers : they want a "humanized" countryside. The importance of farm subsidies, however, begins to be better known and to be resented. A new public passion for ecology shows that farmers are some of the biggest polluters in France. A third of Brittany communes, a very wet region in the west, have no drinkable water any more : excess of fertilizers and pesticides have poisoned water tables ; so much for Nature protection ...

On the other hand, the increasing fame of "bio" products, whatever the meaning of the word, indicates simultaneously a return to "Nature" and a criticism of intensive agriculture, still practised on more than 95 % of agricultural land. Ecology begins to turn public opinion against traditional agriculture. But farmers unions insist on the "CO2 footprints" of imported products ...

The cult of the "territory" is still very much present, even if most of the population work in cities. Most households express a strong desire "to go back to land", to live in detached houses within a small community, extending urban agglomerations. Wide urban peripheries, however, come with a heavy cost : transportation, public services, pollution, etc... People who want to move to the countryside do not want to pay for these extra costs and demand that the central State pay for them. This is another problem which still remains hidden but is likely to explode in the near future. Then, France will have to chose between its cherished territories and its quite unloved but so convenient and very profitable cities.

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