

The moral community of redistribution: interregional fiscal grievances in working-class urban Catalonia

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Verso running head : Mikel Aramburu

 **Mikel Aramburu**

Department of Social Anthropology, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Mikel Aramburu  mikel.aramburu@ub.edu

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ABSTRACT

Nationwide interregional redistribution has recently become a salient political issue in several wealthy regions in Europe, to the point of becoming a powerful motivation for pursuing political independence. Catalonia is a case in point. Rather than focus on the core of the nationalist movement, the present ethnographic study approaches its margins: it examines how working-class second-generation immigrants from southern Spain living in Barcelona voice their disapproval of what they see as an unfair territorial redistribution within Spain that allows for generous social protection in their parents' places of origin in the poor South at the expense of the hard-pressed workers in the productive North. The second generation's critique of interregional redistribution is a way of denouncing economic hardships in the absence of an effective alternative discourse for explaining inequalities within Catalonia. However, rather than expressing some sort of welfare chauvinism following a nationalist Catalan–Spanish divide, these particular fiscal grievances can be better understood against the background of migratory memories and subjectivities, and particularly of the imagination concerning the urban–rural cleavage. Ultimately, this ethnographic case invites us to recognize multiple and embedded rationales of social sharing,

which I attempt to encompass within the concept of the ‘moral community of redistribution’.

KEYWORDS

- redistribution
- moral community
- welfare chauvinism
- welfare regionalism
- geographical imagination
- Spain

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1. INTRODUCTION

While conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a working-class neighborhood in Barcelona, Spain, and seeking to examine grassroots notions of social justice in response to the economic crisis, I was surprised by how my interlocutors – the second generation of immigrants from southern Spain – contrasted the ‘easy life’ that their relatives and countrymen led in their parents’ places of origin with the ‘tough life’ in Barcelona. This contrast was usually interpreted as the result of an unfair redistribution within Spain that allowed for generous social protection in the poor South at the expense of the hard-pressed workers in the productive and hard-working northern areas [Q4].¹ It certainly was not the first time I had heard this kind of argument within the context of demands for fiscal sovereignty in Catalonia and elsewhere in Europe, but I was struck by the recurrence of this narrative precisely among those whose families came from regions in southern Spain.²

Although notions such as ‘welfare chauvinism’ (the reluctance to share with those who are not of our own kind) or ‘welfare producerism’ (a view of solidarity as conditioned by individual responsibility and a hard-work ethic), to use the terms coined by Abts et al. (2021), have often framed the understanding of fiscal grievances, the present ethnography shows that other elements are needed to understand these particular complaints. In our case, being impoverished during the past crisis intersects with family memories of rural–urban migration within a public discourse that frames redistribution as a primarily interregional issue. The concept of a ‘moral community of redistribution’ – that is, the actors’ imagined community of solidarity and the criteria of belonging on which it is based – allows me to link the aforementioned elements, which are related with material necessity, subjectivity and legitimate claims in the public arena.

The paper is structured as follows. I will begin by outlining the concept of a moral community of redistribution and its relevance for analysing folk conceptions of interregional fiscal struggles in the context of increasing demands of fiscal autonomy in certain European regions. I then turn to the Catalan context, focusing on political discourse and the economic impact of the crisis on the working classes. This will be followed by a brief presentation of the setting where the ethnography was conducted. Finally, I give an ethnographic account of interregional fiscal grievances, highlighting, first, the moral economy of scarcity and, second, the role played by migratory backgrounds in the forging of a distinct brand of fiscal grievance.

2. INTERREGIONAL FISCAL STRUGGLES AND THE MORAL COMMUNITY OF REDISTRIBUTION

Interterritorial redistribution has recently become a salient political issue in several European countries. ‘In contrast to the past,’ Keating (2021) notes, ‘it is not in the poor regions but in the wealthier ones, which are net contributors to fiscal equalization and national welfare programmes, that this issue has arisen’ (p. 337). Globalization and the politics of austerity are usually identified as the main economic drivers of current regional claims for more autonomy and even self-determination.

The globalization of trade flows challenged the legitimacy of a previous model of territorial cohesion in which disparities in production between territories were offset by state-wide redistribution which, in turn, stimulated consumption of the rich regions’ products in the poor regions (Davezies, 2015; Keating, 2021). With the globalization of economic exchanges, this Keynesian system fell into crisis, since [Q5] neither the subsidized regions needed to buy from the richer ones nor did the richer regions have their sole market in the poorer areas. Decentralization and the regionalization of social protection made

the new subnational governments responsible for important areas of the welfare state, and these have become much more sensitive and alert to their net financial balances vis-à-vis central governments (Ferrera, 2005; Keating, 2021; Lécours & Béland, 2010; Piketty, 2019; Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall, 2007).

The redrawing of the boundaries of redistribution has also been reinforced by austerity policies. The European Union's intervention in the member states to monitor fiscal imbalances and impose austerity has shifted the emphasis from welfare expansion to contraction of expenditure in social protection, much of the burden of which has fallen on the local and regional levels (Wissel & Wolff, 2016; Béland & Lécours, 2019; Keating 2021). This restrictive context tends to prompt political struggles to shrink the boundaries of redistribution of the remaining resources. The '*nouvel égoïsme territorial*' (Davezies, 2015), the 'nationalism of the rich' (Dalle Mulle, 2018) or the 'revolt of the rich' (Della Porta et al., 2021) are some of the terms proposed to portray this trend.

While fiscal decentralization can have the effect of drawing political power away from the state capitals, contributing to the spatial spread of economic activity (Ezcurra, 2015 [Q6]), the literature tends to highlight the regressive spatial effects of this process. Terms such as 'competitive regionalism' (Keating 2021) or 'competitive nationalism' (Law & Mooney, 2012 [Q7]) refer to claims for decentralization that take the form of interregional competition through lower taxation and deregulation. The free movement of capital encourages a race towards fiscal dumping between states and regions trying to attract investments and tax bases from other areas (see also Piketty, 2019; Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall, 2007).

However, Keating (2021) points out that a 'race to the bottom' in social solidarity is not an inevitable outcome of fiscal decentralization. In fact, the empirical evidence is mixed. Keating uses the term 'welfare regionalism' in reference to regional policies such as those of Scotland, which are more supportive of solidarity than those of the embracing state, and re-emerging regional/national identities are being constructed precisely around conceptions of solidarity in opposition to the neo-liberal state (see also Law & Mooney 2012). Lécours and Béland (2010) develop a similar rationale for the case of Quebec, Canada.

The Catalan case is more controversial. While della Porta and Portos (2021) suggest that the *procés* for independence is partially driven by a pro-distributive frame, Piketty (2019) interprets the surge for independence in Catalonia as a paradigmatic example of competitive regionalism/nationalism. In the end, as della Porta and Portos (2021) note, different social actors may support independence with different redistributive motivations. At this point, I think we should rescale our analysis (Keating, 2014) and focus on the spatial redistributive ideologies of particular social actors. The notion of 'moral economy' can be useful for this purpose.

In contrast to the main strand of literature on welfare state research, the interest in the moral economy of the welfare state focuses on civil society rather than on the political system, on the legitimacy of social sharing for ordinary people rather than formal rights (Götz, 2015). As originally proposed by Thompson (1971), the concept of the moral economy entails a commitment to meet each other's basic needs – a moral obligation of reciprocity that clashes with the profit maximization of the *Homo economicus*. However, according to more recent scholarship, this concept, rather than following a positive definition of the moral economy that designates a given moral of the economy, ought to be viewed as a field where different actors struggle with a variety of interests and values (Palomera & Vetta, 2016; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019 [Q8]). This conception of the moral economy as a fighting ground invites us to reveal not only the values and interests in which solidarity is embedded, but also those which oppose solidarity. Analysing social sharing in this way leads us to address the boundaries of redistribution, that is, to ask about with whom we feel obligated to share and with whom do not.

To analyse the rationales for social sharing and bounded solidarities, I believe a useful heuristic tool would be to speak of the 'moral community of redistribution', viewed as discourses and claims about belonging to an imagined community of solidarity. This is a controversy held at several interconnected levels, not only between actors but also, as I will show, within the inner subjectivity of the actors themselves. This perspective can help us examine the differences between reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi 1971). Quite importantly, the case analysed here – the second generation of immigrants with relatives in southern Spain – shows how redistributive boundaries can be created between people connected by 'bondness', by emotional attachments and dyadic reciprocity practices.

Belonging to a moral community of redistribution depends on legitimate public support of specific categories of welfare recipients, which has been analysed using a set of criteria for 'welfare deservingness' (van Oorschot 2006). One is that of 'identity' – that is, being recognized as belonging to the political and/or ethnic community in which the redistribution is being carried out. Related to this, the term *welfare chauvinism* has been widely used to refer to the inclination to exclude from redistribution those who are perceived as outsiders to the nation, the nation being the primary moral community of redistribution and the provider of the prevailing narrative of belonging and solidarity. It is an open question whether

'welfare regionalism', defined by Keating (2021, p. 335) as a rationale of devolution favouring welfare fuelled by 'affective solidarity' or 'common identity', also falls within the concept of welfare chauvinism, since these same elements can hinder solidarity outside this 'community'. As Dalle Mulle (2018) notes, income transfers between regions are especially contested when they are interpreted according to cultural or ethnic divides that allow for the interterritorial redistribution to be seen as transfers between different groups.

Much of the literature about welfare chauvinism tends to assume the previous and unquestionable existence of an 'us' and 'them' without bearing in mind the historical contingencies involved in producing and transforming these categories. Solidarity is not the natural consequence of a shared history, language or religion, but rather stems from myths and stories embedded in institutional practices that make us 'siblings' belonging to the same imagined community (Dubet 2014; Kymlicka 2015). The case addressed here is of particular interest for this discussion, precisely because the ethnic distinction between us and them is not that clear to begin with.

Deserving to belong to the moral community of redistribution is not only related to ethnic considerations but also to other criteria of deservingness, such as what van Oorschoot (2006) refers to as 'control' (for one's need to be considered deserving must be due to circumstances beyond one's control), 'attitude' (such as gratefulness) or 'reciprocity' (those who have paid taxes are considered more deserving). Abts et al. (2021, pp. 35–36) gather these last criteria of deservingness together in the concept of *welfare producerism*, a view of solidarity as conditioned by individual responsibility and a hard work ethic, which 'entail a moralization of social citizenship'. In their study on European radical right parties, they remark that what distinguishes these parties from other party families is the intertwining of welfare chauvinism and welfare producerism. However, this intertwining can extend to a more transversal political field. For example, Dalle Mulle (2018) points out that for the European secessionist parties he studied, both right- and left-wing, state-wide redistribution is seen as a form of leeching from the work ethic and the entrepreneurial spirit of rich regions by parasitic central bureaucracies and poor regions that are not willing to work (p. 149). Rather than a critique of redistribution per se, this implies keeping redistribution within the substate national community, which 'is clearly identified as the relevant collectivity of redistribution'. Dalle Mulle concludes that welfare producerism is 'strongly culturalized' (p. 150). However, I would remark that 'culturalized' is not necessarily the same as 'ethnicized'. As we will see, the social actors in our case combine these two dimensions of deservingness differently from the nationalist framework in which the ethnic entrepreneurs analysed by Dalle Mulle operate. I agree with Carmel and Sojka (2020) [Q9] in that, beyond the deservingness criteria, we need to be attentive to multiple 'rationales of belonging'. As we will see, in our context, the actors' conceptions of the moral community of redistribution appear to be embedded in their own experiences and subjectivities, in which, quite particularly, rural–urban migration seems to play an important role.

3. THE CATALAN CONTEXT

Until the 1980s' economic relations between Catalonia and the rest of Spain had been discussed primarily in terms of trade flows (in which the former was accused of having monopolistic privileges), whereas thereafter, with the restoration of democratic rule in Spain, public expenditure doubled as the welfare state developed (managed, to a large extent, by regional governments) and estimates of interregional 'fiscal balances' started to be calculated and made public.³

In the 2000s, improving state investment in Catalonia had become an important claim of the first left-wing Catalan government that included nationalist and non-nationalist parties, but it was not until the 2010s when interregional redistribution came to the forefront of political mobilizations, becoming one of the main sources of the surge of support for independence. In Catalonia, the party that has defended independence for fiscal reasons has been a left-wing party, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). ERC adopted a programme that focused primarily on economic nationalism, whereas the conservative Catalan nationalist party favoured cultural nationalism. However, with the economic recession of 2009–13 and the subsequent austerity policies, regional fiscal struggles became more relevant in the political discourse, so that Catalan right-wing nationalism began to adopt economic nationalism with determination (Keating 2014, Dalle Mulle 2018). Although austerity policies implemented by the conservative Catalan nationalist government in 2011 were strongly contested in the streets (the 15-M movement), soon this mobilization was largely bypassed by (or partially transformed into) the *procés* for independence that framed redistribution as a primarily interregional issue.

Duran i Lleida, a prominent Catalan conservative nationalist (but not pro-independence) politician, stated in 2011: 'in other parts of Spain, with our contribution, people receive a PER to spend the rest of the day in the village bar'. The PER (Plan for Rural Employment) was the name of the programme established in Andalusia and Extremadura by the first Spanish socialist government in 1984 to use public employment projects to guarantee a minimum of working days so that day laborers in rural areas could have access to the agricultural unemployment subsidy. Although the programme was later reinvented

under other names, PER lives on in the popular imagination as the quintessential example of chronic, accommodating subsidies which, according to the cliché, would be typical of the southern agrarian society.

Nonetheless, these words by Duran are very unusual in the public discourse of Catalan nationalist leaders. As Dalle Mulle (2018) notes, unlike Lombard and Flemish right-wing pro-independence parties, for the most part the Catalan nationalist intelligentsia has tended to avoid, though not without some ambiguity, degrading references to poorer regions in Spain – from which a large part of Catalonia's current population happens to originate (p. 147). The official narrative about fiscal grievances mainly denounces a system that has prioritized investments in radial infrastructures in Spain, particularly benefiting Madrid. Nevertheless, opinion polls say otherwise, with most people, especially among independence supporters, mentioning Andalusia (well above Madrid) as the region benefiting most from the central government (CEO, 2019).⁴

In any case, the narratives of interregional fiscal grievances are fairly cross-cutting in political terms, the evidence of which is their popularity in the working-class urban outskirts. Mostly Castilian-speaking and migrant-origin, these areas do not particularly favour independence and Catalan nationalism, although lately the appeal of this political project has grown in this social sector (della Porta & Portos, 2021).

To understand the appeal of the narrative of fiscal grievances among the working class, I believe we must briefly consider a few figures about the decline in this sector's living conditions. The income inequality in Catalonia is one of the largest in Western Europe ([Q10] Navarro, 2019). Growing noticeably during the period 2008–18, this pre-distributive inequality does not get much better after redistribution. Because of the Catalan government's regulatory capacity on 50% of personal income tax, the taxation of annual incomes up to €32,000 is the highest among the Spanish regions, while incomes between €70,000 and €200,000 were taxed below the Spanish average until 2020. Furthermore, the austerity policies applied by the Catalan government drive this region, with the fourth-highest per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in Spain, to rank 16th in terms of social expenditure per inhabitant. It was also the region that was taking the longest to reverse the social cuts that began during the debt crisis: 19% between 2009 and 2018 (AEDGSS, 2019). Finally, we see a difference of 11 years in the life expectancy between the richest and the poorest (Bilal et al. 2019).

The deterioration of public services and living conditions of the working class can be interpreted as a consequence of insufficient funding of the Catalan government within the state-wide framework of redistribution, but it can also be viewed as the result of a class policy which serves the interests of the social groups that have supported the parliamentary majorities during the last years of self-government. The two interpretations are not incompatible, and both are plausible, but clearly the former prevails socially. This can hardly be isolated from a regional context in which the Catalonia–Spain dialectic has dominated the debates about redistribution, generating its own 'structure of discursive opportunities'. According to Koopmans et al. (2005, p. 19), 'discursive opportunities determine which collective identities and substantive demands have a high likelihood to gain *visibility* in the mass media, to *resonate* with the claims of other collective actors, and to achieve *legitimacy* in the public discourse'. The ability to provide a convincing structure of discursive opportunities allowed the nationalist government to use the Great Recession to its political advantage despite having implemented its own austerity measures (Béland & Lecours, 2019; Dalle Mulle, 2018).

4. THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted between 2016 and 2018 in La Taxonera, a working-class neighborhood of about 11,000 inhabitants in north-eastern Barcelona. The neighborhood emerged in the 1950s as an area with practically no urban infrastructure, where people built their own one- or two-storey houses after migrating to Barcelona as part of the rural exodus in Spain. In the 1960s, the available land was fully built, and from that moment on La Taxonera continued to grow with the construction of taller buildings that allowed many of those born in the neighborhood to continue living in the area.

Although it was not the neighborhood hardest hit by the Great Recession, the average household income dropped from 76% of the city average in 2007 to 67% in 2014. Although unemployment had gone down after the intense economic recession, the income inequality was declining much more slowly. However, it cannot be said that 'class' was at the forefront of the diagnosis that inhabitants made of their situation.

Speaking in informal conversations and interviews, most of the people I spoke with mentioned wage cuts ranging from 10% to 40%. Nevertheless, the idea that the crisis had affected the majority of the society in all areas within the territory prevailed. The selection of the neighborhood by the city hall to receive a *Pla de Barris* (area-based programme) that carried with it additional investments was received with a certain ambiguity: they appreciated the resources that the programme provided but the label of a 'disadvantaged neighborhood' made them feel uncomfortable. They felt that the neighborhood had once been disadvantaged but that belonged to a distant past when it was a stigmatized shantytown where immigrants

from the Spanish rural exodus settled between 1950 and 1970, before the roads were paved, main urban facilities were set up and the metro arrived in the 1980s. Now the offspring of these immigrants emphasized that it was a 'normal' neighborhood inhabited by 'workers', although still somewhat overlooked by the administrations.

Much of my fieldwork in La Taxonera was conducted through informal conversations which took place in all types of locations including shops and the gym, with the other parents at my son's school and in bars, which became one of the main places for conducting fieldwork because of the lively dialogue between the bar owners and patrons. I also attended meetings with neighborhood associations and regularly followed some of my interlocutors on social media. Additionally, I completed 14 in-depth interviews with neighbours of working age, between 32 and 61 years old. Some were unemployed, but the majority worked full-time, working-class jobs. Additionally, three focus groups with educated professionals from working-class origins and migratory backgrounds were carried out.⁵

The research dealt with the conceptions of social justice in the light of the economic recession. In addition to examining how the crisis had impacted domestic economies, it also addressed who people blamed for the situation and who they thought ought to find solutions (King 2006). During the fieldwork, the Catalan pro-independence movement had a constant presence in the media, on social networks and in everyday conversations; therefore, the political climate organically elicited questions about interregional redistribution at the nation-state level, which is what I analyse here. This triggered the actors' geographical imagination (Gregory, 1994): a historically situated geographical understanding that intermingles cultural stereotypes portraying differences between the urban North and the rural South with a translocal knowledge based upon their relationship with the locales their parents came from. This geographical imagination arose in conversations about their own situations and senses of justice. The obtained ethnographic data are reliable as a result of having reached what is known as 'saturation' (Small 2009) – the point at which further discussion of the topic in new conversations or interviews does not provide much more than what has already arisen, which serves as a validation process (Agar 1986).

5. THE MORAL ECONOMY OF REDISTRIBUTING SCARCITY

In a welfare state such as the one in Spain, characterized by high pre-distributive inequality scarcely offset by modest public expenditure, the resulting administration of scarcity appears as a key element in the moral economy of redistribution. Scarcity is constitutive of a 'residual welfare regime' (Ferrera, 2005) in which it is common to reinforce the conditionality of aid and the criteria of deservingness. This has been intensified in the context of neoliberalism and of austerity policies set in motion by the so-called debt crisis. However, under neoliberalism, popular attitudes do not seem to lead to a questioning of welfare as such, but rather of the scope of redistribution (Abts et al., 2021; Crepaz, 2008 [Q11]; Kymlicka, 2015).

In our case, malaise about interregional redistribution appears to be formulated in two main criticisms. On the one hand, state-wide redistribution is often viewed as a zero-sum game in which one's gains are the other's losses. On the other hand, social aid in poor regions is seen as (re)producing economically and politically dependent subjects who live off the distribution of scant resources.

Regarding the view of redistribution as a zero-sum game, we can consider a few examples. Moises (33), a taxi driver, constantly alternates between references to the high taxes he pays and how tough and difficult life is in Barcelona, on the one hand, and how easy life is in Andalusia, where his parents originally came from, a place he knows well through the relatives who still live there, and which he describes as generously supplied with public aid thanks to the taxes paid in productive areas.

I think it is really unfair, really unfair, that I have to pay so much in taxes. ... My cousins in Andalusia live on 300 euros a month: a four-bedroom apartment, an en suite bathroom, a dining room, a living room, and pool access. Their rent is 300 euros. All you have to do there is pick up the phone, call the Andalusian Government and they help you out right away, 'Hey, man, don't you worry about a thing; you got two daughters? Okay, you've got a right to 340 a month, that's your right.' And you think, man ...

Moises compares the easy life in the South with the pace of his work. He and his wife have to work at night, which means that his little daughter has to sleep over at his in-laws' home. Moises highlights his role as a taxpayer:

The other day I read that in Barcelona we work from January 1st to July 7th just to cover our taxes. So, you go figure how to pay for the mortgage, gas, and everything else with what's left... 'Do you think it's different in the rest of Spain?' I asked him: You bet! If my monthly rent were 300 euros and I had already paid for my taxi, I wouldn't be out there driving it every single weekend, because I wouldn't have to. Why do they stop at midday and go to the bar for some tapas, and then go back to work in the afternoon? Because they can afford to. I can't

afford to go to a bar every day. I mean, I can do it, but I've got many more needs and different priorities.

Paco (43) had vocational training to become a ship's captain and worked in that field for a few years, but when the crisis struck, he lost his job and started working as a waiter in a bar:

Sometimes I even feel embarrassed of being ... of having Andalusian blood. I really mean it. Sometimes I have the feeling that I'm helping to move Andalusia ahead with my work, when maybe they, with little money, with few resources, get to go out and eat tapas. They're not about to give *that* up. It's true that 70% of Andalusians have a really, really good life. But they don't really spend much more than what they get. It's not like they take out loans to travel. They have enough to live on. And we don't.

Although views of this kind are more frequently found among those who lean towards supporting independence, these portrayals are by no means limited to that political sphere. For example, Moises sympathizes with the pro-independence movement, but Paco certainly does not. They both voice the not-so-rare opinion that we all have to work to support ourselves, and that whatever we have, we have earned with our skill and effort, and that it is not fair to have our wealth taken away by excessive demands for redistribution. According to Natchwey(2018), one way of dealing with one's own economic insecurity is to heighten the 'competitive self' given the lack of social and solidarity-based ways of facing that insecurity (see also Bauman, 2013).

In the context of austerity policies, scarcity appears to be accepted to a large degree as an unquestionable issue ('that's just the way it is', as is often said) which sets in motion a profit-and-loss calculation which leads the redistribution system to be viewed as benefiting some (illegitimate recipients) at the expense of others (productive taxpayers).

The second criticism of the interregional redistribution system, voiced particularly by those who define themselves as left-leaning, highlights the risk that the existing subsidies entail for their beneficiaries. These voices are critical of what they consider a (re)production of economically and politically dependent subjects whose autonomy and capacity for action are reduced. When I asked a focus group whether they interpret interregional transfers as 'solidarity' or 'plunder', Clara (52) first points out that as a social worker we can 'assume her solidarity as a given', but then highlights the corruption and wastefulness in public spending:

If they're going to misuse it, misspend it, and waste it on their... no way. We might as well keep [the money] here.... If they need anything, we'll send it over, but let them ask first... and show us a proposal. In my father's village, with the agricultural unemployment payment they get, they work three, four, maybe five [months] at the most. The rest of the year they live on agricultural subsidies. So, you think, get your act together, get to work, but stop milking this for all it's worth, buddies, because we're the ones paying for it. So, if you guys want support, we'll give you support. You want us to collect signatures? We'll collect signatures, organize rallies, whatever you need. But what doesn't make sense is for people in Catalonia to be working from morning till night and lose all of that so that you can live... .

Clara combines a view of distributive grievances as a zero-sum game (their comfort is at the expense of her discomfort) with a concern about redistribution hindering the emancipation of its beneficiaries. A similar association is expressed by Pablo (39), a skilled industrial worker of Andalusian descent, from the younger generation of independence supporters, and who identifies himself as *rojo* ('red', left-wing) following a family tradition. In Andalusia and Extremadura, the landowners prevail, and in order to preserve their dominant position, 'they feed the people'. And the people get used to living off 'handouts' (he illustrates this by rubbing his hands on his stomach). Pablo believes that in this case, redistribution helps to preserve the ruling classes, because it discourages political resistance.

As Ferguson(2015) points out, left-wing criticism of redistribution for encouraging conformity and thwarting 'structural' social transformation often overlaps with right-wing criticism for disincentivizing ambition and entrepreneurial drive among the disadvantaged. This overlap seems quite obvious in some of my left-wing interlocutors. Pablo says that the money allocated to interterritorial transfers should go to 'teaching them to fish' instead of feeding them. In Pablo's view, these communities 'live off subsidies', people have an 'easy life' and have 'gotten used to' the aid they receive from the productive North. 'It's only natural: if it's thrown in your lap, you don't make an effort.' Catalonia's independence would be good for Spain because it would force them to 'get moving', both in economic and in political terms. Pepa (60), a leftist skilled industrial worker, expresses a similar view: the government should promote production at the South instead of soaking up subsidies. Like the relatives I have [in Granada], who are receiving a pension without working. Maybe they worked for three months and got paid [unemployment benefits] for the whole year. Whereas here if I don't work all year round

Many of the people I spoke with stress the different criteria for accessing unemployment benefits 'here' and 'there'⁶. Their relatives and countrymen seem to get benefits without paying as much tax as they do, which poses a problem of equity related to van Oorschot's (2006) 'reciprocity' criterion of deservingness. Moreover, by not targeting productive investment, redistributive transfer aimed at social expenditure – albeit improving living conditions – leads to pre-distributive inequality and dependence on aid becoming chronic, which in turn reproduces the lack of reciprocity.

These views seem to reflect the centrality of workfare as a kind of moral credential for the modern independent subject, the prescriptive ideal of democratic citizenship and industrial society (Ferguson 2015; Martin & Yanagisako 2020). In post-industrial societies, as noted by Fraser and Gordon (1994, p. 324), the stigma of the 'dependent' is stronger still, as even women (who were essentially seen as dependent subjects in industrial societies) are moving towards emancipation. However, that does not mean that the close associations of gender with the notion of (in)dependence have been overcome. As Ferguson (2015, p. 41) notes, 'in the disapproval of "giving a man a fish," it is the "man," as much as the giving that is a problem'. In our case, the archetypal subsidized Southern unemployed person who spends the day in a bar is, without a doubt, male, and this subtle association further reinforces the stigma of dependence.

We must also bear in mind that for my interlocutors' parents, immigrants from the poorer parts of Spain, being recognized as Catalans was determined by their condition as 'workers'. According to the motto that defined the civic notion of Catalan identity, which became hegemonic after the 1970s, 'Catalans are all those who live and work in Catalonia.' Over time, the 'work' condition dropped off, but the mark of this productivist recognition of Catalan membership for immigrants (for ethnic Catalans, belonging depended on descent, not on behaviour) has lived on in family memories. Children tend to quote their fathers (most mothers from this generation and social class did not work as wage-earners after marriage) claiming that their work had helped to 'move Catalonia forward', a reflection used to claim a value and dignity that are earned by the merit of their work. So, now as in the past, a classed and gendered 'labourist rationale of belonging' (Carmel & Sojka, 2020) informs inclusion in the moral community of redistribution.

6. 'SOMETHING DOESN'T MAKE SENSE HERE': MIGRATORY BACKGROUNDS

Although the people with whom I spoke shared their perception of interregional distributive grievances with other sectors of Catalan society, they showed a series of particularities related to their migrant backgrounds. The first is that they provide their personal experiences as empirical evidence, comparing the way they live in Barcelona with life in the villages from which their parents emigrated. Although not all keep in touch with their communities of origin, most of them have visited at least once the places their parents left behind decades ago, where they still have relatives. These visits, which usually occurred during the holiday season and, in some cases, many years ago, are used to provide evidence for distributive grievances.

The informants' narrative concerning distributive grievances becomes particularly significant when we frame it within the context of their migratory backgrounds. The awareness of coming from an immigrant family has gradually been built on family accounts of the migratory experience (understood in the broadest sense: from the actual migration to the process of adapting to a new society and the subsequent relationship with the place of origin). Familiar memories of migration are, to a large extent, narratives of rural exodus to the cities which have a fairly strong impact on the self-image of people's individual and family paths. Comparing the life of ease in their hometowns today (which their parents left behind to 'escape hunger') and the harsh urban life in Barcelona (which in the past had been a land of promise and progress) highlights a dissonance in terms of these individuals' self-image as the children of successful migrants who escaped a life of hardship.

Rhetorical references to the 'backwardness' of their parents' places of origin abound. For example, at a public meeting with Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau in the neighbourhood of La Taxonera, a young mother complained that her street 'still has wooden posts, that look like ... well, not even my mother's village in Granada [knowing giggles in the audience], which is super-prehistoric, has wooden posts anymore'. To demonstrate the fact that Andalusia is an underdeveloped region, Pablo recalls his father's experience, having to leave because 'there was nothing' there, and because 'they were hungry'. This migratory narrative reinforces his idea of the endemic underdevelopment of southern Spain, where, nevertheless, 'life is easy'. This paradox, highlighted by other interlocutors, asks for an explanation, which is given by disproportionate redistribution.

Tatiana (33), a psychology undergraduate whose parents are Andalusian-born, is especially articulate in describing the irony of an easy life in the place of origin as it relates to a migratory narrative based on material progress:

I know people from Andalusia who have an apartment, a country house, a plot of farmland and three cars, and that gets me thinking: my parents [in Barcelona] are still paying for their

apartment and they've got another twelve years' worth of mortgage payments. They've been working their entire lives. My father's been working since he was 9. You can't help thinking, 'What have we done wrong? Something doesn't make sense here.' If the people who stayed back there, working the land, get all this in the end, and have a good life. ... Over here there are lots of people who get up at 7 am to go to work and don't get back home until 8 pm and don't even get paid amazing wages ... [not enough to] live comfortably, or own three homes, or have three cars. And that's one of the things that makes me angriest of all.

In fact, what is often being compared is not only (or not even primarily) a regional contrast between Andalusia and Catalonia, but rather notions of urban and rural life. That is a crucial difference with regard to welfare chauvinism, usually associated with ethnic/national identity. Dalle Melle (2018, p.150) points out that the 'nationalism of the rich' is based on a highly culturized welfare producerism according to 'a clear association between the imagined community of productive subjects and the entire nation, which is therefore portrayed as legitimately more deserving'. In our case, fiscal grievances are more closely linked to a perception of the self which relates more to the history of the family's migration and the urbanization process than to that of Catalonia as the relevant moral community of solidarity.

It is noteworthy that the location of the self is not usually Catalonia, but Barcelona. The city's centrality is especially emphasized when the informants speak of their parents, who immigrated 'to Barcelona' (even if their destination were any other metropolitan municipality), reproducing a narrative that was passed down within the family, as they have confirmed to me. In the conversations about territorial redistribution, it is also Barcelona whose effort, creativity, and innovative potential makes it capable of providing for the needs of other territories which cannot sustain their standard of living with their market value. The informant who describes this view most unforgivingly is Moises, who considers the territorial redistribution system to be a mechanism through which the city subsidizes the rural areas. For Moises, the main advantage of Catalonia's independence is that the size (and the number of net beneficiaries) of the rural areas would be smaller.

I think there would be more of a focus on what goes on here. If you have to take care of five sheep, you'll do it better than if you have to take care of six thousand. I think that if you're here as a state, you have your Barcelona, your Gerona, your Tarragona, your Lerida [the Catalan provinces]. And you say: Barcelona. Okay. That's the real big one. Tarragona, I'll give you four. Three [for Gerona], two [for Lérida], that would be the order, right? Just to give you an example. But we're not going to say, 'Lerida, seven, because the kids ride horses to school, and they need cars instead.' I know, but with the margin you're giving them, they'll be driving a fucking Mercedes. The thing is I've got to get up every day at 4 am to make some money so we can make ends meet. 'So you think Barcelona is the place that generates wealth,' I said. Yeah. I'd do a Barcelona-Madrid. And have the rest eat the crumbs. Our crumbs are riches for them.

Moises may be an extreme example of what appears to be pervasive in a geographical imagination that views the rural world as devoid of value and undeserving: 'If a kid in a village in Badajoz [Extremadura] has a tablet at school and my daughter is [in Barcelona] using notebooks, what is this all coming to?'

Nevertheless, migratory subjectivity also attenuates the narrative of distributive grievances to some extent. The people with whom I spoke tended to voice an inner tension between a kind of loyalty or sentimental attachment to their 'roots', on the one hand, and, on the other, their 'interests' in the place where they live. 'They're my family, but I'm the one living here' is a recurrent idea that surfaces in a variety of ways and reveals that if the moral economy (and the moral community) is a fighting ground between different actors (Palomera & Vetta, 2016 [Q12]), it could also exist as an inner struggle within the subject who circulates across different social orders and maintains different senses of belonging.

Our interlocutors tend to morally exonerate the beneficiaries of redistributive transfers. It involves a disclaimer of sorts, which is used to qualify the narrative of distributive grievances. For example, Tatiana views herself as split in two:

The people who live in those communities aren't to blame. How can we blame the people in Extremadura if their land isn't a place where big companies want to settle? So, if I lived in one of those regions, I'd like the other richer ones to hand out a bit of their earnings, so that difference wouldn't end up being as big. On my Catalan side, I do feel as though. ... I remember that in Andalusia the requirements for getting unemployment compensation were very different from the ones here. Here you have a job for a whole year to just get paid four pitiful months' worth of compensation. That's not what you need in Andalusia to get paid for a whole year. And I end up thinking, 'Hell, here we are, like idiots, breaking our backs, working ourselves to the bone, and after taxes and all the things we have to pay for, it's all for this, right?'

Most people with whom I spoke engage in a critical dialogue with the stereotype of the lazy, dependent Andalusian (or, more generally, Southerner) often underlying the public narrative about distributive grievances.⁷ Along these lines, it is worth mentioning the pejorative, nonstandard use of the word *perro/perra* (literally, 'dog'), referring to laziness. In the urban outskirts, a *perro* is a professional slacker who takes parasitic advantage of public aid without making an effort to achieve economic independence. There is a clear element of moral judgment in the use of the term. An opposition is often expressed between taxpayers and those who live on subsidies. However, during the fieldwork, several people were critical of the stereotype that identifies Andalusians as *perros*. At one point during his account, Moises criticized the stereotypes: 'The fact that you are Catalan doesn't mean you have it all, and an Andalusian isn't a *perro*.' 'You find *perros* everywhere,' says Montse (42, a radical right-wing anti-independence bar owner), rising up against the cliché of the freeloading Southerner, and adding that in Catalonia 'no one who's unemployed doesn't get paid', a fact she claims to know well from her experience behind a bar counter.

Like single African-American mothers or the so-called 'welfare queens' in the United States (Fraser & Gordon 1994), it appears that in Spain – not only in Catalonia – the (also gendered and ethnized) cliché of the rural Andalusian worker on unemployment eating tapas in a bar plays the role of what Fraser and Gordon (1994, p. 323) call 'the quintessential welfare dependent'. However, while my interlocutors reproduced this stereotype, they also attempted to maintain a distance from it, avoiding moral condemnation.

Most of the people I spoke with do not view dependent laziness as an ethnic attribute, but rather redefine it as the consequence of unconditional giving, the natural result of people having their livelihood covered with no need to sell their labour. Pablo clarifies: 'I'm not saying that [Southerners] are *perros*, but that's the way it is, if they give it to you, you don't make the effort. Down deep, we're all *perros*.' Or Salva (31, a bar owner, free-market and independence supporter): 'If I could get six months of unemployment payments after three months' work, I'd also go for it.' In a sense, this implies both an individual disclaimer and a systemic explanation: since it is human nature, the individual can do nothing about it if the political system generates those conditions. This is most clearly stated by Tatiana, who makes an effort to exonerate the people who benefit from a purportedly unfair redistribution:

It isn't the people's fault, okay? It's the government's fault, they're the ones who are supposed to know how the money gets handed out, where it ends up and what's done with it. What they can't do is keep on squeezing some people dry to benefit others, while those benefiting from it aren't even aware of it.

This last complaint of Tatiana's is shared by others who feel that their relatives and acquaintances in the South do not appreciate or are not even aware of the sacrifices that have to be made in the productive North to maintain interregional solidarity, a type of 'attitude' that, as van Oorschot (2006) pointed out, reduces the deservingness of the recipients of redistributed resources.

Last of all, I would like to add a noteworthy element in my interlocutors' relationships with their families of origin, if they still have living relatives, which is that they engage in 'generalized reciprocity', to use Sahlins' (1974) term – for example, taking a certain degree of responsibility for relatives moving to Barcelona to work or study. However, those same people who take in their relatives voice serious misgivings about sharing with them a redistribution system which they consider unfair, to the extent of using their experiences as empirical evidence for distributive grievances. This suggests that the issues that social sharing raises are different depending on whether it takes on the form of centralized redistribution or of dyadic reciprocity. People can feel morally obligated to help fulfil the needs of others through dyadic relationships without feeling the same obligation to share their community of redistribution. We can conclude from this that the realm of kinship obligations and the field of welfare redistribution are subjected to different regimes of value.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The narrative of interregional distributive grievances has captured the political imagination of most of my ethnographic interlocutors as well as of broad sectors of society in Catalonia (CEO, 2019: 21 [Q13]; Dalle Mule 2018; Garmendia & Leon, 2022). The independence movement has conveyed this mood, which nevertheless goes beyond this political project. To try to understand the appeal of this political and geographical imagination for the working class, first of all we have to bear in mind the role played by redistributive scarcity. In a welfare state such as the one in Catalonia and Spain, characterized by high pre-distributive inequality scarcely offset by modest public expenditure, and in the context of austerity policies set in motion by the so-called debt crisis, the resulting administration of scarcity appears as a key element in the moral economy of redistribution.

In the case analysed here, the moral economy of redistribution of scant resources does not, for the most part, seem to lead to a questioning of welfare as such, but rather of the scope of redistribution, a point that has been noticed elsewhere (Abts et al., 2021; Crepaz, 2008; Kymlicka, 2015). The notion of a 'moral community of redistribution' enables us to address this political trend. While della Porta (2021, p. 16) can be right in claiming that the lower classes were partially attracted to the independence project due to the pro-distributive frames promoted by the left wing of this movement, the ethnographic results show that this may have resulted to a great extent from the hope of decreasing the moral community of redistribution.

At first sight, 'welfare regionalism' (Keating, 2021) or 'welfare nationalism' (Law & Mooney, 2012) seem to drift to welfare chauvinism or 'social nativism' (Piketty, 2019). But our case does not easily fit the concept of welfare chauvinism for two reasons. First, the case considered here is inappropriate when engaging in a primordialist interpretation of the moral community of redistribution, because it is dissociated from a univocal (Catalan) national identity, insofar as most of the people I spoke with had bi-national identities. Although they identify more with the 'interest' of the community they live in than with that of their families' communities of origin, at the same time they express feeling conflicted and torn between their 'roots' and the 'here and now' of their present belonging. While, on the one hand, the undeserved character of the hard life in Barcelona is illustrated and highlighted in contrast to the supposed easy life in the hometowns, the informants tended to try to not pass moral judgment on their relatives and fellow countrymen. Therefore, the migratory background seems to lead to a torn conception of the moral community of redistribution. This highlights that the moral economy is not just a fighting ground between different actors but it can also exist as an internal struggle within the actors themselves (Palomera & Vetta, 2016).

Second, the undeserving element is not considered to be Andalusian culture, for having certain attributes (for its *being*), but rather a subject who, by his own *doing*, is an anomaly in relation to a normative subject, defined as independent and responsible for his own fate (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Martin & Yanagisako, 2020; van Oorschoot, 2006). Quite importantly, interregional redistribution is criticized for producing economically and politically dependent subjects. This resonates with what Abts et al. (2021) refer to as 'welfare producerism'. However, producerism can draw from different ideological sources, ranging from neoliberal workfarism to the 'productivist left' (Ferguson, 2015), including, as in our case, a subjectivity embedded in memories of the migration experience where acceptance achieved through work has been central.

Welfare producerism addresses behaviour-based criteria of deservingness, such as van Oorschoot's (2006) 'control' and 'reciprocity'. While for our informants the reciprocity criterion is certainly an important issue (which paradoxically delegitimizes redistribution but not dyadic reciprocity), the relevance of the control criterion is not so clear. Despite what one might assume from the image our informants convey of an unemployed person spending his days in a bar, what these people actually emphasize is that the situation of the unemployed in their families' hometowns is beyond their control. If, as Abts et al. (2021) suggest, welfare producerism implies moralizing about the economy, what we are dealing with here is not actually a narrative of assigning moral blame to an individual or collective subject, but rather the condemnation of a redistribution system that stimulates the tendency, supposedly inscribed in human nature, to seek the path of least resistance, thus creating a chronic dependency which, to some degree, those involved are unable to control.

Therefore, terms such as welfare regionalism, welfare chauvinism or welfare producerism, important as they are to assess broad contemporary political trends, need to be nuanced considering the multiple rationales of belonging to the community of moral redistribution, those rationales being embedded in specific social experiences. Quite importantly, the signification of fiscal grievances is influenced not only by material need but also by social memory and subjectivity.

The working-class people I spoke with contrasted the decline in their standard of living with the apparently easy life in the southern towns from which their parents emigrated, and this destabilized their subjectivity, the sense of coming from and being part of a migratory venture that enabled their families to leave poverty and underdevelopment behind and achieve progress in the industrialized urban North. According to my interpretation, distributive grievances provide an explanation for a situation seen as incongruous with family memories and narratives about the constitution of a self-made, independent subject through migration, urbanization, and a hard-working ethic.

To conclude, I believe that in our case, narratives of the 'easy life' in the rural South are, above all, a way of denouncing the hard city life for these impoverished descendants of the rural exodus, a rationalization that finds legitimacy in the local political ecosystem, within a given 'structure of discursive opportunities' (Koopmans et al., 2005). What the ethnography of this geographical fiscal imagination ultimately reveals is that the supposedly selected beneficiaries of territorial redistribution become scapegoats in a more complex process of impoverishment that lacks other legitimate explanatory narratives (particularly class-based explanations) capable of competing with the dominant discourse of interregional fiscal

grievances. Although no one attempts to explain the social malaise solely as the result of interregional fiscal imbalances, the popular success of this narrative probably has minimized the class dialectic within Catalonia by displacing and scaling up redistributive claims to a state-wide level, framing them as a primarily interregional issue.

DISCLOSURE[Q19] STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES

- 1 The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for Catalonia, the fourth richest region in Spain, is 58% higher than Andalusia and 60% than Extremadura, the poorest regions. ✗
- 2 In the third quarter of the 20th century, roughly 2 million people from the rest of Spain (mainly from the South) migrated to Catalonia. Coming from rural areas, most of them swelled the ranks of the Catalan urban working classes. Today, these people and their descendants make up almost half of the Catalan population. ✗
- 3 Since the 1980s, the Catalan 'fiscal deficit' vis-à-vis Spain has averaged between 3% and 9% of its GDP, depending on the method used (Dalle Mulle 2018, pp. 46–47). ✗
- 4 A Spain-wide poll (Garmendia & León, 2022) shows that Catalan respondents are those who disagree the most (followed by Euskadi and Madrid, the richest regions) with the statement 'the fiscal system should tax the richest regions to transfer resources to the poorest ones'. ✗
- 5 As in all ethnographic fieldwork – especially when it is conducted in urban areas – random, fleeting encounters occur with people who are not aware of the researcher's role. Although interactions of this sort provide valuable contextual information, in this article the informants who have been quoted verbatim (although their real names have been changed) are those who were aware of my role as a researcher and with whom I interacted either in conversations or in interviews. ✗
- 6 Notwithstanding this perception, the PER unemployment regime is just one of the many particular sectorial unemployment programmes that exist in Spain, but probably the one with the most modest benefits: a monthly payment of scarcely over €400 for a maximum of six months issued to about 200,000 people in Andalusia and Extremadura. ✗
- 7 See Hadjimichalis (2018) for the role that cultural and geographical stereotypes about European southerners played at the EU level as a moral justification of austerity policies and how these same stereotypes were reproduced within southern countries in relation to their southern regions. ✗

ORCID

Mikel Aramburu <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5605-5295>

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