

The Morality of Illegal Practice : French Farmers ' Conceptions of Globalization

著者(英)	Osamu Nakagawa
journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Studies
volume	81
page range	99-111
year	2013-01-31
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00002478

The Morality of Illegal Practice: French Farmers' Conceptions of Globalization

Osamu Nakagawa

Rikkyo University

1. Introduction

In his recent book Arjun Appadurai coined the phrase 'fear of small numbers' to refer to the violence of the majority toward minorities in the era of intense globalization (Appadurai 2006). For him, rapid globalization brought about by the 'cellular' organizations such as global corporations or financial markets, has destabilized the 'vertebrate' structures, nation-states in particular. Feelings of insecurity provoked by this destabilization have led nationals to consider minorities as the main cause of their insecurity. Minorities thus embody the risk of globalization and become objects of violence.

The process described by Appadurai also seems to be underway in the agricultural sector of southern Europe. In February 2000, in Andalusia, Spain, immigrant agricultural labourers were attacked by masses of locals, following the murder of a Spanish girl by a mentally ill Moroccan worker. In January 2010, in Calabria, Italy, a similar incident broke out. An act of aggression by some locals towards a group of African seasonal labourers provoked major confrontation between the inhabitants and the immigrant labourers.

No incident comparable with these two has occurred yet in the Provence region in France; however, as we will see later, conflicts between farmers and immigrant agricultural labourers are increasing. So, what can we say is happening? Is Appadurai's analysis also applicable here? This paper, using data from my ongoing fieldwork, will attempt to describe these conflicts, analyze how they are brought about and how farmers and immigrant labourers perceive the situation.

2. The farming population and globalization

The lower reaches of the Durance River in Provence is a very suitable region for the cultivation of vegetables and fruits; agriculture which supplies these products to the whole of France has developed there since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, in recent years the agriculture of the area has been undergoing rapid changes. On the one hand, the segment of the population related to agriculture is becoming increasingly diversified due to transnational migration. On the other hand, many farmers are in a critical situation due to the globalization of the market for agricultural produce.

The driving force of agriculture in this region has always been immigrants who have settled there in large numbers. Immigrants from Italy (1940s), Spain (1960s), Morocco (1970s) and other countries who had originally come here as agricultural labourers, later firmly established themselves as farmers.¹⁾ Newly arrived farmers in recent years have been mainly of Moroccan origin. Many settled immigrants, including those of Moroccan origin who have become farm managers, hire seasonal labourers from Morocco or East Europe. Also, many immigrants who came back to France after the end of the Algerian War (*rapatriés*) and refugees from Laos have established themselves as farmers. The ethnic composition of the region's farming population is thus very mixed, and by no means constitutes a homogeneous rural community. There are many cases of Italians who worked under the French after the Second World War establishing themselves as farmers in the 1970s. They started using Moroccans as labourers, and then the Moroccans eventually began farming independently using other Moroccans as farmhands. As one French peasant said, 'The French do not want to do strenuous agricultural work anymore, and the Moroccans do.' The foreigners are filling the gap left by the French who are giving up farming, thus greatly changing the agricultural scene of the region.

At the same time, the agriculture in that region has been exposed to severe trials in the context of globalization. The number of farms in the region is steadily decreasing. If we take the example of M town where I have conducted most of my fieldwork, the number of farms, which was 231 in 1979, had decreased to 147 by 1988, and fell as low as 57 by 2000. Although the latest data for the town is not yet accessible, according to certain calculations, there were only 35 farms as of 2009.

There is also a need to be very careful about the qualitative change of this decrease in farming population. Although numbers of farmers has decreased constantly since the 1960s due to the policy of promoting rationalization and the reduction of the number of farmers (Common Agricultural Policy of European Community), as Thomas points out, from the 1980s onward due to a decline in market prices there have been a significant number of bankruptcies among farmers who had invested in order to modernize their farms (Thomas 1992). In M town and the surrounding areas it seems that the farmers who remained were managing quite well until the beginning of the 1990s. However, the prices of the main vegetables dropped significantly in the mid-1990s, and one farmer after another fell into financial difficulties and started to go bankrupt, or gave up farming and searched for other means to make a living. The farmers themselves point to the intensified international competition and the reorganization of the distribution industry as the cause of their plight.

For many years, the main source of income for the vegetable farmer (*maraîcher*) was direct marketing to brokerage businesses in the producer market. In the old days there was a market in every town, and since the 1960s the government has organized these markets (M.I.N.=Marché d'Intérêt National). There, transactions were always conducted through face-to-face negotiations between the farmer and the dealer. Farmers fondly describe the old times, when such transactions were booming in the market.²⁾

But the times when markets were so prosperous that there were legends of farmers celebrating a successful day with champagne are now gone. Extra-market transactions

mainly conducted with distribution companies, which have grown to enormous sizes, have become the mainstream of the business and farmers come to deliver their vegetables and fruits to the shippers (*expéditeurs*), who then sell them to distribution companies. With this new system of circulation, farmers have become exposed to harsh competition with farm products from Spain, Morocco and other foreign countries, and many farmers feel a sense of powerlessness in a situation where large-scale distribution companies use their controlling power in order to force low prices on them.

3. Conflict relationships between farmers and shippers

Under these new conditions, conflicting relationships developed between the actors in the sector. Three aspects of these conflicting relationships are explored in this paper: (1) the relationship between the farmers and shippers, (2) the relationship between the farmers and (3) the relationship between the farmers and agricultural labourers. First, we examine the relationship between farmers and shippers.

The farmers' sense of powerlessness makes them resent the government and the shippers alike. All farmers say that the area's agriculture is finished now. One farmer voiced his opinion: 'In a couple of years you will come and find no farmers here anymore. It is that serious'. Their sense of powerlessness is directly linked with the images of agricultural globalization. For example, large-scale distribution companies now buy melons from all over the world, 'starting in Dakar at the beginning of a year, then buying from Spain, south western France, and Touraine'. Farmers say that their area with its small-scale production simply does not have a chance against the system. They say, 'How can France hold its own when they can make exactly the same thing in Spain or Morocco with wages far cheaper than ours?'

The situation seems to be that the government has forsaken the farmers altogether 'as if we don't exist'. A deputy mayor of M town grieves, 'It is over; it is really over unless the government changes its policy... We are paying taxes which are much too high and hiring a labour force which is far too expensive. In this situation, we simply cannot compete with cheaper countries.'³⁾

Together with this discontentment with politics, sense of utter powerlessness in transactions appears in conversations of the farmers. It is most strongly voiced in narratives about their relationships with shippers who are their direct business contact. Large-scale distribution companies impose low prices on the shippers, and the latter pass the same on to the farmers, who repeatedly lament about 'not being able to negotiate the prices at all'. What is even worse is that transactions with shippers often lack transparency. At the moment when farmers deliver their vegetables, they do not know how much and when they will be paid. This trust-based system functioned well when the prices were high because every transaction left both parties feeling more or less satisfied, but now the farmers feel that they are coerced into accepting low prices without ever knowing whether the shipper paid the correct price or cheated them. Shippers are said to 'pay us just as much or as little as they want depending on the price they could finally sell'.⁴⁾

4. Conflict relationships between farmers

But these antagonistic feelings towards the shippers do not lead the farmers to be cooperative amongst each other. On the contrary, this situation makes them more antagonistic towards each other.

Activities aimed at overcoming the present difficulties through cooperation are almost nonexistent. Most explain the lack of any sort of cooperation by the deeply rooted individualism of the vegetable farmers. Unlike wine farmers, who commercialize their products via cooperatives, vegetable farmers have always utilized the system whereby each conducts his own transactions in the producer market. As it is often said, for them ‘a neighbour is not a friend but an enemy’. Farmers do not even set prices in the markets on a more or less same level, and someone is always trying to beat others by ‘price slashing’ (*casser le prix*).⁵⁾ As one farmer said, ‘This is just the way it is. Everyone is for himself here. There is no solidarity among us.’

But in the old days, although there was no solidarity, ‘since all of us were successfully making a profit, everyone was working on his own’. ‘In those days if you did your work well you made profits’. Good workers were praised, and failures were, as a rule, attributed to not making enough effort. Even now when the conditions of agricultural produce market have been greatly aggravated, the same ideas still persist according to observers. A director of an organization providing support for ‘farmers in crisis’ states that the beliefs of farmers regarding labour are those of ‘magical thinking (*pensée magique*)’, where hard work never fails to be amply rewarded.⁶⁾

The same ‘Self-responsibility Theory’ was used as a means of explaining the success of the survivors of the 1990s crisis.⁷⁾ Many of the farmers are now seeing their hardships as a consequence of globalization—something that they can do nothing about. However, at the same time, the farmers who survived the changes and succeeded in expanding their farms are maintaining the view that their success is a result of their hard work, and that those who failed, failed due to sheer laziness. Thus, survivors do not attempt to raise chances of farmers’ survival as a group, while others wait for survivors to fail just as they did.⁸⁾

5. Conflict relationships between farmers and agricultural labourers

As farmers are powerless against the shippers and cannot unite to counter the forces of globalization, they tend to impose worse working conditions on their labourers to improve their own situation. For them, labour cost is almost the only available variable of adjustment. With a growing awareness of this situation, labour unions, the anti-mainstream farmers’ union *Confédération Paysanne* and other human rights organizations are increasingly criticizing the exploitation of agricultural labourers by the farmers. In the Provence region, the problem of seasonal workers has been the most important issue in recent years.

The acceptance of settling immigrants stopped in 1974 but the inflow of seasonal migration labourers to France has continued through government organizations that have

mainly supplied Maghreb labourers to the agricultural sector. Seasonal labourers are usually referred to by a common name OMI, which is an abbreviation of the old name of the government organization Office des Migrations Internationales. OMIs usually stay in France for only four to six months a year while engaged in seasonal labour. However, they are bound by a yearly contract which is renewed or not depending on the judgment of the manager. Consequently, 'They are mainly concerned about earning as much as possible and having their contracts renewed, and for that reason they are as a rule good workers, tending to be obedient and not complaining about their working or living environment' (Morice et Michalon 2008: 12). Therefore, as it is often said, illegal behaviour in terms of working or living conditions is rampant among managers. According to one point of view, as much as a half of agricultural labour escapes the control of the state (Morice et Michalon 2008: 21).

Criticizing such conditions, labour unions and Confédération Paysanne have started a movement to support foreign seasonal labourers and are demanding improvements to their employment conditions. From the viewpoint of such support groups, seasonal labourers are akin to slaves. Therefore they criticize farmers for exploiting seasonal workers, while promoting alternative agricultural models.⁹⁾

An important incident occurred in July 2005 in the Bouches-du-Rhône department, where I conducted my fieldwork. 240 foreign seasonal labourers (Moroccans and Tunisians) working at the largest peach production farm in France, gained the support of CGT, a labour union, and went on strike. Their demands were that the unpaid salary for overtime work should be paid and better living conditions provided. Since the strike took place in the midst of the picking season, the authorities intervened immediately and ordered the manager to make the payments. Furthermore, the state governor got a promise from him that these seasonal labourers would be hired the following year (Le Monde 17-18, 21 July 2005). However, after the harvest was completed, the manager filed for bankruptcy of the orchard company, established a company under a different name the following year, and outsourced the harvest work. In spite of the promise, 'not one manager in the area would hire those who participated in the strike' (Morice et Michalon 2008: 25).

This incident was widely played up by the media as a typical event showing the weak position of foreign seasonal labourers and their exploitation by the farmers.

6. The morality of illegal practices

Criticism against the exploitation of agricultural labourers, especially seasonal labourers, is increasing. It emphasizes the need to protect labourers' rights, by, for example, ensuring decent living conditions and wages determined by the law. The farmers do not readily accept this kind of human rights discourse. On the contrary, they often oppose it because, according to their views on social justice, they themselves are victims of globalization, and thus for them illegal practices are sometimes morally justifiable.

We have already noted the sense of powerlessness among the farmers and their inability to resist globalization. Due to this sense, illegal practice is often justified as

unavoidable. One market in a neighbouring town managed by the town's authorities is particularly often mentioned as the centre of illegal transactions. Although all the M.I.N.s existing in the area lost the air of prosperity they once had and are more or less deserted, it is said that only this market, where farmers, small-scale wholesalers, and retail dealers gather, is still bustling with people. The reason for this is that in that market 'everything is done in "black" (tout se passe au noir)'. Transactions are conducted by cash paid on the spot and no receipts or any other paper documents ever remain. In this way, farmers can get an income that leaves no record, thus effectively escaping taxation and social security costs. And, as many say, the money thus gained is often used to pay for overtime work or for employing illegal labourers.

There is a view that such practices are permitted by the public administration. A member of the staff of a farmers support group says, 'For governmental authority, letting such things go unnoticed is a way to ensure social peace (la paix sociale).' According to this view, public administration tries not to drive the farmer into too tight a corner. When seen from a farmer's eyes, such a market is a good thing that helps farmers make a living. As farmers say, 'Thanks to this market, we can take a breather.' Although it is unclear how many farmers actually use this market at present, it definitely symbolizes the permitted illegal practices.

The feeling that one cannot rely on the government and the idea that illegal practice can be morally acceptable has appeared in dramatic ways in the reaction of one farmer towards the strike I described earlier. P, a smallholder who lives near the place where the incident occurred, voiced a view quite different from that of the newspapers which presented the incident as evil. In his view, the relationship between a farmer and his migrant workers is not one of exploitation, as the unions say, but one of solidarity of those who cannot make a living without resorting to illegal actions. When I brought up the subject of this incident during a conversation with P, although he did admit that the manager C was a bad man, he objected to the view of labour unions and Confédération Paysanne as follows.

I won't deny that C is an awful man who fully deserves the blame. But because of that strike the Moroccans with a career who worked at C's farm can't get employment anywhere anymore. They are now forced to stay in Morocco and can't earn the money they need. We need to understand that though it may be illegal, the important thing is that they could make much more money here than in their own country. And you cannot say that it is all that bad. That's why I am not always convinced by what Confédération Paysanne says.

P's words indicate that farmers cannot make a living based on the sense of justice promoted by Confédération Paysanne, and if seasonal labourers are happy to go against the law to get a higher income than what they can get in their own country, such practice should be recognized as morally acceptable. He says, 'If we do everything by the law, they won't be able to come here at all. So what do we do? We look for the best point of reconciliation in between.' The situation for a manager of large-scale farming who hires

no less than 240 seasonal labourers during harvest time is quite different from that of P, who produces vegetables with his wife using only one hired farmhand. Nevertheless, P identifies himself with the large-scale managers. When large-scale farmers are accused by unions, smallholders such as P feel as if the accusation is directed at them, too. And by his interpretation of the story, he asserts the moral justness of the farmers who cannot but dabble in illegal practice.

P presents the illegal practice not as exploitation but as a type of 'trust relationship (rapport de confiance)'. The following story told by him illustrates this illegal but mutually beneficial relationship. One of P's friends, a former refugee from Laos, had at one time employed five illegal immigrants from Thailand. He paid them less than the minimum legal wage, but had a good relationship with them. They even slept in the same room with him. However, the police eventually raided his house and the five were deported. He, albeit for a short period of time, was imprisoned. Nevertheless, as he says, the five Thais still call him on the telephone asking whether they can come back and work for him again. P says that such illegal practice is indispensable in order for farmers like him to get through their difficulties somehow and improve their circumstances.

We cannot be sure whether the relationship between the Laotian manager and his Thai labourers was based on such trust. However, what we do see in P's narrative is a concept of legitimate or justifiable actions that is quite different from the concept of legality or justice promoted by the government or unions. In a situation where he is powerless against the forces of globalization and cannot expect any protection from the government, P tries to attach value to relationships that cross the limits defined by law. For him, the relationship between a farmer and his labourers is a harmonic one based on reciprocity.

However, the same actions, which are permissible in hard times from the viewpoint of a farm manager, are sometimes regarded as a compulsion by the labourers, and this view often appears in their narratives.¹⁰ Whether a relationship becomes hostile or paternalistic depends from case to case. However, we can say for sure that the representation of illegal practices as the right of a weak farmer puts various inherent conflicts into parenthesis. And this also leads farmers to oppose the 'right-thinking' human rights discourse of the Unions.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have presented two arguments. (1) The globalization of agricultural market makes the farmers resort to informal practices and sometimes to illegal treatment of immigrant labourers. As I have shown in this paper, the farmers' sense of powerlessness in the globalizing market and their incapability of cooperating among themselves contribute to this process of informalization. (2) Criticism of illegal practice from the viewpoint of human rights movements is not necessarily acceptable for farmers, because farmers consider themselves to be victims of globalization, and think that certain illegal practices are acceptable in their situation. They regard their relationships with immigrant labourers as those of reciprocity, and not of exploitation. This patron-client view is

opposite to the legalist view of the Unions. As a result, farmers become hostile to the Unions' criticism, because it renders their already difficult survival totally impossible.

Therefore, this case, to which Appadurai's analysis seems applicable at first sight, turns out to be more complex. Human rights movements consider, as Appadurai does, that the effects of globalization are the causes of violence by nationals (farmers) toward minorities (immigrant labourers). However, farmers see this differently. Resisting the image of the villain forced upon them by human rights movements, they present their relationship with the immigrant labourers as that based on reciprocity. Thus, we find here a significant conflict in perception of the relationship between nationals and minorities under globalization.

Appendix: Imagination of AMAP

Attempts to envision new forms of agricultural output and distribution, and of new relationships between the farmers of the area and the consumers are emerging. This trend is part of a larger movement for an 'economy of solidarity (*économie solidaire*)' which is an attempt to create an alternative economy. This movement tends to criticize the evils of a liberal economy and to develop associations based on reciprocity. A mechanism called AMAP has been developed by putting to practice the vision for an alternative society in the field of agriculture.

Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne (AMAP) is a system of measures aimed at maintaining small-scale environmentally friendly agriculture in the area. AMAP as a rule functions as follows. Consumers form a group which signs a terminal contract with one farmer for a year or some other fixed period and pays the total cost for that period in advance at a price considered to ensure a sufficient income for the farmer. The farmer promises to supply farm products of various types throughout the year and distributes seasonal farm products to the customers every week. Consumers participate in the management through activities such as becoming involved in distribution of farm products, communication of information about them and, in some cases, they even temporarily participate in agricultural work. Through participation in the AMAP, farmers can stabilize the proceeds by long term contracts, while consumers can obtain organically grown vegetables produced under conditions they certain about.

The first AMAP was established in 2001 by a farmer in the Var department of Provence Region who studied the system of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the U.S. (Mundler 2007: n.p.) The concept of '*agriculture paysanne*' currently used in the name of the associations, is a concept promoted by the Confédération Paysanne, a French anti-mainstream farmers' union that tries to maintain agriculture by taking into consideration the culture and the environment of small-scale farmers while at the same time opposing the global rule of industrialized agriculture in every corner of the world. The AMAP embraces the ideology of the movements aiming at 'alternative globalization (*altermondialisme*)' and organizes various activities in order to maintain agriculture in the area. Based in Provence Region, the AMAP has spread to the whole of France and as many as three chapters of the AMAP existed in M town as of 2009.

One of the associations based in M town started when PM in his 30's suggested the idea of the AMAP to CM and CF couple residing in M town. PM was born in a neighbouring town and was working as an inspector of organic farms when he decided to purchase land in M town and start farming himself. CM and CF, who were interested in organic farming and had already tried the joint purchase of organically grown vegetables, recruited members using their network and started their AMAP chapter in 2004. There were less than ten members at the time of establishment, but there were over forty as of 2009.

As in other AMAPs, 'a relationship halfway between solidarity and business' (Mundler 2007: n.p.) has also formed here. In the AMAP's charter, there are such articles as 'Consumer solidarity with producers who fail to produce', 'Active participation of consumers in the AMAP, promoted by assigning responsibility to as many members as possible', which stress the need for consumers to go beyond a position of mere purchasers and join in solidarity with the farmers in order to uphold the ideology of 'Agriculture Paysanne'. The core participants of AMAP see the relationships existing in the organization in accordance with the 'spirit of AMAP'.

Participation in the AMAP is not only a means of obtaining organically grown vegetables; it is also a political commitment to protecting the agriculture of the region. As CF says, it is 'a relationship entirely different from going to a supermarket'. Therefore, even when the promised farm products cannot be harvested or are not of good quality (which is a possible risk as the AMAP produces about thirty farm products every year) the participants (called *Amapien*) need to fully accept these risks and support the farmer rather than quitting the association because of the poor quality. CM recognizes this relationship as 'sharing (*partager*) PM's crops' rather than 'buying his products'. 'If there is a lot, we share a lot, and if there is not much, we are content with sharing what there is.' Therefore, the farmer's problem is not someone else's; it is 'our own problem'. This very close 'social bond (*lien social*)' is often expressed by the metaphor of family relations. PM's wife PF says to the many *Amapien* who come to their farm to get their portion of produce, 'Here, you are at your own house (*chez vous*).' CM and CF also say: 'We really feel that we are at home here and that we are truly involved.' They are well informed about the personal circumstances of PM and PF, and their family has even helped with agricultural work in difficult times. CM says, 'They were having tough time when PM's parents died, and he told us that they needed our help. So we went and harvested the potatoes. We usually work indoors, so it was a great chance to get outside and stretch our backs a bit.'

However, needless to say, not all people involved with the AMAP share this viewpoint. Many participants see themselves more as 'consumers'. They are satisfied if they can obtain fresh organically grown vegetables and do not look for more. From this viewpoint the core participants criticize those who withdrew from the association when carrots happened to be of inferior quality. Moreover, they deplore the fact that many do not actively participate in distribution and other activities. As they say, 'The philosophy of the AMAP is not always understood.' However, and exactly for that reason, the core members try to create a proper relationship.

The standpoint of the AMAP tends to be critical of neo-liberalism and considers the practices of their organization as being outside of it. CM claims: 'We are outside the market economy.' The global economy destroys regional agriculture so that a farmer cannot make a living even if he works hard, and in M town, which has abundant agricultural lands, the number of abandoned cultivated lands is increasing year by year. In this situation it is vital to create non-commercial relationships between the area's farmers and others. The AMAP is regarded as one attempt to do just that. From this viewpoint, the AMAP criticizes large-scale organic farming as the opportunism of those blinded by the strategy of major distribution companies. For them, not only organically grown vegetables, but also the farmers who produce them are important.

However, they do not attempt to solidify their relationships with neighbouring farmers who are included in their vision of solidarity. Unlike PM, PF and several farmers doing organic farming, CM and CF 'Don't really know that much' about the farmers. Their solidarity with local agriculture thus stays at an abstract level.

Notes

- 1) In M town, there is an almost stereotypical narrative about the way immigrant farmers settle. According to this narrative, immigrants start living in the old decayed apartments located in the center of the city (which is on a hill with an old quarter that has a church in the center located at the top). At first they work for the already established farmers as agricultural labourers. They save money and eventually start their own farms, at the same time moving into residences in the lowlands that surround the town. As for the vacated apartments, they are quickly taken up by the new immigrants who come to the city and repeat the cycle.
- 2) 'Even the smaller farmers could make more than enough to survive, selling their produce in the markets. I used to go to the M.I.N. of C city. Not a trace is left of the old market now, but it was such a bustling place in those days! It was important to set out early and get a place in the center of the open air market (*carreau*). You see, the time the trade started was fixed according to the type of farm products, and as soon as the bell rang, buyers would run towards us all together. Then, in order to appraise the products, they would go all the way to the end and then come back. In this way, the largest number of buyers would eventually always gather in the center. Transactions were always conducted through face-to-face negotiations. A buyer would ask us how much, and we would write the price on a slip of paper and hand it to him. If the buyer said "no good", we would tear the paper up and write another one. And this is how it went, until we reached an agreement. Those days, since the market prices would go up and down all the time, one had to really know one's money. But now the market price is stuck down at the bottom, so we do not need to anymore'.
- 3) In the past, this deputy mayor participated in a protest action by FNSEA - the leading farmers' union and 'stopped trucks coming from Spain on the highway, took the tomatoes out of the trucks and scattered them right on the road'. But he does not participate in these activities any longer.
- 4) 'A farmer is a slave. Before, we could negotiate our prices. We could decide on our price

through negotiations in the market, and, if the transaction was concluded, get the money right there and then. It is not so any more. Now we don't know the price even after taking our produce to a shipper, and the payment is made later according to the price it was eventually sold for. Therefore, even if the price index is 1 Euro for that day, if the shipper cannot sell off at that price, we only get paid 0.5 Euro in the end. Shippers pay us just as much or as little as they want depending on the price they can finally sell it for'.

- 5) Often farmers, after offering their land for sale, quickly withdraw it when they hear that there is a chance of a neighbor buying it and making his landholding larger.
- 6) 'There is still faith among the farmers that if one works hard one will succeed. If one does not make profit, one tries to work harder, to produce even more. However, in fact the ups and downs of the market prices are completely unrelated to their labour. Quite the contrary, producing more leads to negative results. Nevertheless, magical thinking persists. Also, since producing vegetables used to be such a profitable line of work, one simply did not need to have a managerial sense to be successful.'
- 7) A former farmer who came to the area from Northern France and was the first to go bankrupt in M town, says, 'At that time everybody around us said that we went bankrupt because we didn't work properly, because we were outsiders.' However, others went bankrupt one after another just in the same way. According to him, 'Those who survived are the people who inherited everything from their fathers, those who simply had everything handed to them on a silver platter and had only to start work. We, on the other hand, had to start from zero, and had to borrow so much. That is why it was much more difficult for us than for others.'
- 8) Affirmation of such an attitude of self-reliance and rejection of cooperation can be seen in the views of Mr. and Mrs. M who converted to large-scale organic farming.

Mr. M was engaged in conventional type of agricultural production using agricultural chemicals from 1993 on the land he inherited from his father, but switched to organic farming after the birth of his daughter. He gradually borrowed more and more land and is now organically producing vegetables of various sorts on his 60ha farmland. He signed direct contracts with major distribution companies and is shipping his produce to supermarkets all over the country through their distribution network. At the same time, in order to safeguard the stability of the business, he created another company providing packaging services for agricultural products, and he does the packaging of the purchased vegetables. The farm engages 20 to 25 labourers for agricultural and packaging work according to the season. There are many seasonal labourers from Romania in the farm. Although he used to hire Moroccans, they started to demand more in terms of labour conditions, and tensions grew, so he switched first to Lithuanians and then to Romanians. Compared with the common-type agriculture and its never-ending worries about constant low prices, there is more demand than supply for organically grown vegetables, and thus it is possible to negotiate a fairly good price even when dealing with major distribution companies. This way Mr. and Mrs. M have adapted to the new distribution system centered around major distribution companies and successfully expanded their business.

Mrs. M believes that unceasing hard work is the reason for their success and refuses any kind of cooperation with other farmers who do not work as hard as she does. According to her, other farmers still possess the peasant mentality (*mentalité paysanne*), which means that they

go hunting and fishing in the agricultural off-season, making it impossible for them to change their old habits. They, on the other hand, had tried their all-or-nothing gamble (*ça passe ou ça casse*) in the risky waters of organic farming and were able to make progress only because they devoted all their spare time to work. 'When we decided to switch to organic farming, other farmers thought we were insane, and were literally sneering at us. But now they come to us and ask how they can switch to organic farming themselves.' Therefore, Mr. and Mrs. M refuse to join forces with other farmers who have a different mentality or to participate in their activities. They say, 'We will devote ourselves to our work on our own, promote our own projects, and develop our business further.' Here we can see farmers maintaining confidence in their own work and being distrustful of other farmers.

- 9) For a closer look at this alternative model, see the Appendix.
- 10) The following narrative shows tacit tension between a farmer and a migrant labourer. Y who came from Morocco, obtained French citizenship and at present is working as a legal agricultural labourer, has spent seven years of his life as an illegal immigrant. Until his life was normalized by a marriage with a French woman, he earned his living by illegal labour often referred to as 'bricole (trifle work)'. When a farmer needs something to be done quickly, Y would get a word about it from his network of acquaintances and go to work for several days or maybe just one. 'Employers gave us just as little as they wanted and there was never any room for negotiation. This is the life of an illegal immigrant'—he reminisces. Y legalized his status in 1999, began to work as a full-time agricultural labourer and was naturalized in 2006. As he has worked under the same manager for all these years, there is a certain amount of trust between them. He thus managed to invite his younger brother from Morocco to work as an OMI, and they spend six months every year working together. He says, 'Since I have been working for a long time under this employer and we can now trust each other, things are easier for my younger brother.' But tension is still there. 'Half of the pay for overtime work is paid illegally. And even when you are entitled to overtime pay, all you get is the minimum wage.' 'If you tried to refuse, the manager would simply hire someone else from the black labour market, so you end up accepting the work to earn a little more for your kids.' Tint of compulsion is thus ever present no matter how much the parties trust each other.

References

- Appadurai, A.
2006 *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Morice, A. et B. Michalon
2008 Les Migrants dans l'agriculture: Vers une crise de main-d'oeuvre, *Études Rurales*, 182, 9-28
- Mundler, P.
2007 Les Associations pour le maintien de l'agriculture paysanne (AMAP) en Rhône-Alpes, entre marché et solidarité, *Ruralia* 20: 185-215, [En ligne], mis en ligne le 14 juin

2008. URL: <http://ruralia.revues.org/document1702.html>. (Consulté le 15 avril 2010)

Thomas, F.

1992 *Agriculture en difficulté: problèmes économiques et sociaux des paysans en France, état des lieux* (Synthèse réalisée par Francis Thomas à partir du travail de la Confédération Paysanne et des associations "SOS Agriculteurs en difficulté"), Paris: FPH.