

# VOICES OF THE OPPRESSED: PEASANT RESISTANCE IN LATE MEDIEVAL CASTILE

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In his moving book, *Tormented Voices*, the noted American medievalist, Thomas Bisson, has accomplished a feat which we, historians of a distant past, often strive for but seldom succeed in achieving. Bisson has given voice to twelfth century Catalonian peasants and has captured, through the plaintive echoes of the *querimonia*, their grievances and sufferings<sup>1</sup>. In truth, however, even *Tormented Voices* or Carlos Barros's study of the great inquest of Galician peasants' complaints recorded soon after the revolt of the «Irmandiños» in the late fifteenth century<sup>2</sup> articulate these protests always in a mediated form. The scribes or royal officials who recorded peasants' grievances in these two particular cases only allow us to hear peasant voices as dimmed by the power of the written word. The royal agents, notaries, or scribes who memorialized the peasantry's cries and grievances in written testimonies transformed everyday speech into acceptable formulaic language, softening the rage of those at the bottom of society. That is, we hear the complaints of the peasants as «through a glass darkly,» shaped into new and more palatable forms and rendered to our ears in a different key by those recording the abuses inflicted on peasants.

What do we know about peasant resistance and how we know it are complex questions that would more than exhaust the little space allowed for this paper. Julio Valdeón's pioneer work on popular unrest opened a window into different types of resistance to the established social hierarchies and structures of power in late medieval Castile long ago. As with many other topics, Valdeón's capacious scholarship,

<sup>1</sup> BISSON, Thomas N., *Tormented Voices: Power, Crisis, and Humanity in Rural Catalonia, 1140-1200*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1998, pp. 1-27.

<sup>2</sup> BARROS, Carlos, *Mentalidad justiciera de los Irmandiños, siglo XV*, Madrid, 1990.

which we justly honor in this volume, showed, in the particular case of his *Los conflictos sociales en el reino de Castilla*, a broad understanding of the salient issues in Castilian history, while dealing with them in creative and innovative ways<sup>3</sup>. In the pages that follow, I am interested in three specific themes: 1) How and why did peasants resist royal and noble excesses in late medieval Castile? 2) How were these acts of protests recorded? 3) Why did late medieval Castilian peasants, unlike those in Catalonia, Galicia, and other parts of the medieval West, never engaged in large regional or kingdom-wide armed resistance.

Before beginning our brief and, by the nature of these type of contributions, limited account, some context is necessary. I focus here on a series of vignettes and discreet examples of acts of resistance by the northern Castilian peasantry in the period between 1200 and the reign of the Catholic Monarchs. By the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, northern Castile was already an area in the rearguard of the Reconquest. Moreover, from the 1270s onward the region suffered a long lasting social and economic cycle of crises<sup>4</sup>. These included demographic decline, adverse weather conditions, inflation, the plague, and, most damning, endless civil wars and open conflict between noble bands, the Crown, and urban dwellers<sup>5</sup>. This was a free-for-all which severely threatened royal authority and which led to untold excesses against, and tribulations by, the peasantry. Thus, for close to two centuries the conditions existed – war, pestilence, famines, and growing poverty in the face of the nobility's conspicuous consumption – for violent peasant resistance. What did then trigger sporadic acts of peasant defiance and how do we know about them?

#### HOW AND WHY DID PEASANTS RESIST ROYAL AND NOBLE EXCESSES IN LATE MEDIEVAL CASTILE?

Throughout history there have always been untold acts of individual resistance to oppression. Some of these deeds belong to the type so suggestively described by James Scott in his wonderful books about resistance from below, or what he has felicitously described as «the weapons of the weak». Many of these gestures of resistance and defiance are difficult to illustrate for the Middle Ages. They often consisted of isolated acts of symbolic resistance in the form of gestures, and other verbal and non-verbal ways of confronting power<sup>6</sup>. Peasant resistance, at least that

<sup>3</sup> On this topic see VALDEÓN BARUQUE, Julio, *Los conflictos sociales en el reino de Castilla en los siglos XIV y XV*, Madrid, Siglo XXI de España Editores, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> See VALDEÓN, Julio, «Aspectos de la crisis castellana en la primera mitad del siglo XIV», en *Hispania*, 1969, 111, pp. 5-24, y su «La crisis del siglo XIV en Castilla. Revisión del problema», en *Revista de la Universidad de Madrid*, 1973, 79, pp. 161-84.

<sup>5</sup> On the late medieval crisis see note 4 above and also my own work, inspired by Valdeón's articles and books. See RUIZ, Teofilo F., *Crisis and Continuity. Land and Town in Late Medieval Castile*, Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, chapters.10 & 11.

<sup>6</sup> See SCOTT, James C., *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, as well as his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990.

which we can document, was almost always communal, though crime and banditry, as Braudel famously argued, may be also seen as acts of resistance to the state. The village as a whole – or at least that is the impression given by the extant documentation or literary representations (think, for example, of *Fuenteovejuna* – took arms against an oppressor or appealed to the Crown for help. The most common instances of these collective acts of resistance were responses to noble violence or what villagers saw as unjust demands from their ecclesiastical and secular lords. A few examples will suffice.

On 20 December 1323, twelve neighbors of Santa Coloma, including the village's priest and blacksmith, in their own names and in the name of the village council, swore and recognized that they were the vassals of the monastery of Santa María de Nájera. They also agreed to build a wall around the village and not to sell, pawn, exchange or, in any other form, alienate any of their properties to any noblemen, nun or anyone else except to other good men of Santa Coloma. They also promised to prevent anyone, with the exception of the prior of the monastery, from building a strong house or tower in the village. The peasants became responsible for the expense of building walls or ramparts, for putting up gates and locks as well as for the maintenance and defense of the fortifications. We know that a wall was built, for in 1338 Alfonso XI ordered his *merinos* to prevent the walls of Santa Coloma from being torn down. The rebellious Don Juan Manuel, Don Juan Núñez and other magnates threatened Santa Coloma, but for at least fifteen years, the peasants had successfully defended their village against magnate violence<sup>7</sup>.

Other villages were placed in similar situations. In 1314, the villagers of Leza also recognized themselves as vassals of Santa María de Nájera and promised not to allow noblemen to purchase property in their village. Like those of Santa Coloma, they began to build a wall and a strong house. Four years later, in 1318, the prior of Santa María exempted the peasants of Covacardiel from dues for six years in return for their building a wall and for agreeing to defend the village. While small and unimportant villages, such as Santa Coloma, or more populous and economic viable ones as Covacardiel seemed to have weathered the stormy first half of the fourteenth century, others were not as fortunate. A royal charter of 1316 reveals the real impact of aristocratic violence. That year, the prior of Santa María requested from the king a ten-year remission from all taxes for his vassals in the village of Oriemo. The peasants of Oriemo had originally inhabited the village of Ribafrecha until 1315 or 1316, when the village was sacked. John Ferrández de Bezla and his followers burned the village, stole the peasants' property and destroyed the crops and gardens. Ribafrecha had a strong house, which was now occupied by John Ferrández and used to raid the surrounding countryside. On 20 April 1316 the regents agreed to exempt the villagers of Oriemo from all taxes for 10 years, except

<sup>7</sup> Archivo histórico nacional (AHA) Clero, carp. 1033, n.º 5 (20-XII-1323); n.º 15 (4-XII-1338). In 1363 the prior of Santa María de Nájera took possessions of Santa Coloma from the Logroño city council which held the village as security for a loan of 15,000 *msrs*. Carp. 1033, n.º 20 (12-XI-1363).

for *moneda forera* every 7 years. The same day as the previous royal charter, Alfonso XI, or his regents in his name, also granted permission to the peasants of Oriemo to build a wall in their new village, forbidding noblemen to settle there. Although the stronghold of Ribafrecha had not prevented the attack of rebellious magnates, the Crown, the monastery and the peasants themselves saw the building of walls and the exclusion of nobleman as the only hope for survival. Thus, in 1323, fourteen men of Oriemo promised to build a wall at their own expense with the usual provisions of not allowing nobles into the village. In these agreements, we witness peasants negotiating with their lords and, through their lords, with the Crown. Although building a wall was an expensive proposition and manning it a perilous enterprise – as the peasants of Ribafrecha *cum* Oriemo found out in 1316 – nonetheless, these agreements included important sweeteners, such as substantial tax exemptions. Far more importantly, they empowered the peasantry, gave them agency over their affairs, their own defense, and their very lives<sup>8</sup>.

Other strategies were also deployed to deal with noble violence. Not all villages chose building walls as the right path to protect themselves and to resist noble violence. The villagers of Cervera engaged in a long dispute with their lord, the monastery of Santa María la Real de Aguilar de Campoo between 1313 and 1331. Having been granted additional lands by the monastery away from their village because of Santa María's shortage of workers, the peasants of Cervera refused to pay dues to the monastery and threatened to seek another lord, one capable of protecting their interests better. The last extant document referring to this case, a royal letter of 1331 ordering the peasants to pay dues to the monastery, does not tell us of the final resolution of the dispute, but, clearly, for almost twenty years, the peasants of Cervera had used the threat of leaving as a way of obtaining better terms from the monastery. They had also withheld payment from the monastery in what was the equivalent of a rent strike. One should note that unlike many other monasteries in northern Castile, Santa María de Aguilar de Campoo was a formidable institution, with abundant resources, and wielding substantial influence in the highest political circles<sup>9</sup>.

The threat to leave a village and seek new lands and new lords was a radical but effective mode of resistance, especially when it involved monasteries with little fiscal resources or political influence. Nonetheless, the idea that peasants could pick up and go somewhere else as a community runs counter to our vision of a peasantry so fixed to the soil as to be undistinguishable from the village itself. Peasant mobility and their litigious resourcefulness is most evident in the case of Marute. On 30

<sup>8</sup> For Leza see AHN. Códices, 106B, ff. 113-20a (8-X-1314). For Covacardiel and Villa Almondar see f. 39 (8-IV-1285), ff. 133-35a (23-VI-1318).

<sup>9</sup> On the monastery of Santa María de Aguilar de Campoo see MERCHÁN FERNÁNDEZ, Carlos, *Sobre los orígenes del régimen señorial en Castilla: el abadengo de Aguilar de Campoo (1020-1369)*, Málaga, Universidad de Málaga, 1982 y sobre todo GONZÁLEZ DE FAUVE, María Estela, *La orden Premonstratense en España. El monasterio de Santa María de Aguilar de Campoo (siglos XI-XV)*, Centros de Estudios del Románico, 1992, 2 volúmenes.

March 1340, at the aforementioned village, the bells of the church of San Román called all the *vecinos* to a meeting with Doña Juana López, abbess of the Cistercian monastery of La Asunción in Cañas (in the Rioja). There, the villagers of Matute requested that the number of those collecting dues from them be set at three (the previous number is not stated but it must have been larger); they also asked that their obligations to the monastery be spelled out clearly. Later that day, the abbess met again with the villagers and told them that she knew all of them were planning to move elsewhere and abandon her lordship. Doña Juana pleaded with the peasants to inform her if this was so and to explain why they were taking such action. Those speaking for the village council answered that this was true. They wished to leave because «the royal merinos and tax collectors inflicted too many abuses on them and sought to collect taxes from which they were exempted.» Doña Juana asked how she could have been responsible for any of these abuses, if she was only asking for the dues which were rightfully owed to the monastery. The council agreed with her in principle, but also complained that after the forceful extortion of illegal taxes by royal officials, they had no money left to give to the monastery of La Asunción. The abbess protested that she could do nothing if the rest of the kingdom were also liable for such payments, i.e. if the conditions of illegal exactions were generalized throughout the kingdom and she added, as an excuse, that the people of Matute knew the king was on the frontier fighting the Moors. Nonetheless, she agreed to travel to the royal court and to beg the king, in her name and that of the council of Matute, for mercy and relief from illegal taxes. She pleaded with them not to leave the village, while threatening to take away all the monastic lands in Matute if they did so. This was, of course, an empty threat because without the villagers of Matute or without any other prospective settlers the land was worthless<sup>10</sup>.

We will hear of the peasants of Matute shortly, for they obviously were a contentious and legally minded bunch, but for now, we can see how effective the menace of leaving could be. In a country with severe demographic shortcomings, a land without peasants meant no rent. It often meant also the potential loss of village and peasants to a stronger lord, usually a noble capable of protecting his dependant peasants or of forcing them to stay. Doña Juana López had to travel to the royal court, a long and expensive enterprise, to pacify her vassals at Matute and to argue with an embattled king for tax relief for the village. Moreover, her arguments sought to deflect blame to royal officials and to use the king's *ida contra los moros* as a way of explaining why all had to undergo such sacrifices.

Refusing to pay seignorial rents or dues was a common act of resistance. Hundreds of complaints to the royal court by monasteries unable to collect dues from their peasants tell us of a society in which peasants withheld rents as a form of protest. In Cernera, the villagers refused to pay dues to the monastery of Santa María la Real. Those of the village of San Pedro refused to pay dues or recognize the lordship of the nuns of San Andrés de Arroyo for more than six years in the 1340s. This

<sup>10</sup> AHA Clero. Carp, 1025, n.º 18a (30-III-1340); n.º 19 (26-XI-1351).

was also, as has been seen, the tactic employed by the peasants of Matute to seek redress. As to them, we do not hear about our friends in Matute for eleven years after their day-long confrontation with their lord, the abess of La Asunción, in 1340. On 26 November 1351, however, they reappear in the historical record. That day, after a long inquest, a lengthy document was drawn. For eleven years, the peasants of Matute had refused to pay a single penny in dues or the customary contributions of bread and hens to the monastery. Finally, the abess, by then a certain Doña Teresa de Leyva, sought help from the bishop of Calahorra, who excommunicated and anathemized all the villagers for their refusal to fulfill their obligations. The 1351 document also reports the suspension of these ecclesiastical punishments by Diego Pérez de Trecino, bachelor in decretals, canon and sexton of Armenia and vicar of the bishop of Kalahari in return for the villagers' payment of 2,500 *mrs.* to the abess, the dues in arrears for past 11 years. Even though the peasants ended up paying, it is clear that for more than a decade they were able to resist the pressure of the monastery. Moreover, in 1351, when they finally gave in, they did not pay any penalties for their delay. In fact they had the income of the monastery for their use for more than a decade free of interest<sup>11</sup>.

But peasants did not just react. Often they took the initiative and became the aggressors. This type of peasant violence was most commonly found in disputes over boundaries. From the early thirteenth century onwards, the Castilian countryside was vigorously redrawn as boundary marks delimited rural spaces<sup>12</sup>. Conflict over boundaries, reflected in numerous royal inquests and litigations, ranged from the individual peasant seeking to increase his holdings by illegally moving the boundary marks to communal violent actions. In Gonzalo de Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* c. 1250s), *milagro XI* tells the story of an avaricious peasant «who loved his land more than his Creator» and who, to increase or gain property (*heredad*) illegally, moved the landmarks bordering his lands<sup>13</sup>. Of collective armed aggressions by the peasantry, we have numerous examples and a few will be sufficient to illustrate my point. In 1288, Doña María, the prioress of the monastery of Santa María in Fresnillo de las Dueñas protested against the violent actions, land appropriations, and deception of the knights and other men of the village of Montejo. Sancho IV ordered his *merino* to place landmarks between the jurisdiction of the monastery and that of Montejo; nonetheless, two years afterwards, the men of Montejo, armed to the teeth, came into the lands of Santa María in the dark of night, removed the landmarks, killed the monastery's cattle, and stole fifteen sheep. Even though two years before the king had already ordered an end to the violence and had, through his officials in the area, set the boundaries between the

<sup>11</sup> AHN, Clero, carp. 1025, n.º 18a, 18b, 19 (30 marzo 1340-26 noviembre 1351).

<sup>12</sup> On the emergence of boundaries and other forms of itemization in late medieval Castile see my *From Heaven to Earth. The Reordering of Castilian Society in the Late Middle Ages, 1150-1350*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> GONZALO DE BERCEO, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Madrid, Castalia, 1982, pp. 59-60.

village and the monastery, he now had to commission a new inquest. Once the inquisitors learned of the veracity of the monastery's protests, the king sent a royal letter to the *merino* of the region, commanding him to take appropriate action. In his 1290 letter, Sancho IV enjoined the villagers of Montejo and Saint Quirze (another village which seems to have also been connected with the violence) to return the property stolen and to replace the landmarks. In yet another instance, the monastery of San Pedro in Gumiel de Izán entered in litigation against the village council of Fontoria de Val de Aradores over the removal of landmarks in 1301. In a scene which replicated the greedy peasant in Berceo's *milagro*, the peasants of Fontoria had removed or placed the landmarks to gain land belonging to the monastery. A team of peasants from the village council of Estudios de Baño placed new landmarks along the boundaries between the monastic lands and those of Fontoria to make clear the limits between the two properties<sup>14</sup>. Similar actions led to a long litigation between the monastery of San Salvador de Oña and the municipal council of Frías in the 1280s. This confrontation, studied in magisterial detail by Isabel Alfonso and Cristina Jular Pérez-Alfaro, shows that among the monastery's grievances, beyond the refusal to pay to the monastery its customary rights, one finds the charge that men of Frías entered the monastery's woods and meadows «without reason or right» in the location of Piedralada and in many other places named in the arbitration<sup>15</sup>.

One should note that these attacks – certainly most of the attacks recorded in the extant documentation – were aimed at monastic establishments. Are we seen active peasant resistance against all types of lordships or just the general weakness of some rural monasteries which made them easy targets for noblemen and strong rural councils? Since ecclesiastical establishments depended on the Crown for protection, in times of royal minorities or political upheavals, some of these monasteries became easy picking for their neighbors. Peasants were victims of unruly nobles, but they were predators as well.

#### HOW WERE THESE ACTS OF PROTESTS RECORDED?

How do we know about these acts of violence? In Castile it is always through the evidence found in royal inquests, litigations, and the like. The villagers protested mostly to the king; monasteries did likewise but more often than not against the excessive zeal of royal officials. The Crown responded slowly or not at all. Inquests took time. Final recommendations may have never been carried out, or, as we saw in

<sup>14</sup> AHN, Clero, carp. 225, n.º 2 (9-May-1288); carp. 225, n.º 3 (8-April-1290).

<sup>15</sup> See the pioneer article by ALFONSO ANTÓN, Isabel and JULAR PÉREZ-ALFARO, Cristina, «Oña contra Frías o el pleito de los cien testigos: Una pesquisa en la Castilla del siglo XIII», en *Edad Media. Revista de Historia*, 2000, n.º 3, pp. 61-88; OCEJA GONZALO, Isabel (ed.), «Documentación del Monasterio de San Salvador de Oña (1032-1284)» in *Fuentes Medievales Castellano-Leonesas*, Burgos, Ediciones J. M. Garrido Garrido, 1983, 3, p. 238.

the case of Matute, delayed for a considerable period of time. Castilian peasants were a litigious bunch, and they could stretch the time to pay or to withdraw from illegally occupied lands for a considerable period.

But peasant resistance was inscribed into history, into the official record, only because, at the end, the results of litigation benefitted and supported the interests of the ruling class. These accounts provided exemplary lessons to all. They showed to the villagers, since royal and/or episcopal letters or accords between peasants and their lords were read publicly to the village community, the king ordering the peasants to pay to their lords; the bishops excommunicating recalcitrant tenants. Often, what we see in the extant documentation is the eventual and unavoidable defeat of the peasantry. The unrecorded history may have been, of course, very different. But the point here is that what the extant evidence did in most cases was to reify the social hierarchy. Even though the documents allow us to see instances of peasant resistance and even successes or relative success in resisting lordly power, the stark reality is that in the enforcement of legal actions, the peasants were most often than not the ones who lost.

#### WHY DID LATE MEDIEVAL CASTILIAN PEASANTS, UNLIKE THOSE IN CATALONIA, GALICIA, AND OTHER PARTS OF THE MEDIEVAL WEST, NEVER ENGAGED IN LARGE REGIONAL OR KINGDOM-WIDE ARMED RESISTANCE?

Unlike Catalonia, where the *remença* peasants rose up in arms in what proved to be the only successful peasant uprising in medieval Europe, or Galicia, where the Irmandiños rose in a region-wide rebellion, or even other parts of the medieval West, where large scale peasant uprisings occurred throughout the fourteenth century, Castile had not any large kingdom-wide or regional rebellions<sup>16</sup>. It is not as if Castilians were incapable of joint action. Surely, the elite and the middling sorts could and did form kingdom wide ties, as the successive Hermandades of the late XIIIth and early XIVth centuries prove. These broad alliances of urban oligarchs and lower nobility, however, came into being not to challenge the power of the crown but to protect the monarchy from the ambitions of the high nobility. Peasants could also take arms as a collective group in the defense of the kingdom. In the late fifteenth century, when Henry IV's reign sank into the nadir of impotence, as he was confronted by the ruthless actions of the high nobility led by the Villenas, the monarchy still had an extraordinary reservoir of good will among the peasantry and the lower orders of society. In that fateful year of 1464, as Villena and his forces prepared to

<sup>16</sup> For the *remença* rising see FREEDMAN, Paul H., *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. See also Barros' work cited above. For the rest of the medieval West see MOLLAT Michel and WOLFF, Philippe, *Ongles bleus, Jacques et Ciompi: les révolutions populaires en Europe aux XIV et XV siècles*, Paris, Calman-Lévy, 1970.



assail the king, thousands of peasants armed with pitchforks, knives, and staves rallied around the king and escorted him to the safety of his beloved Segovia. This deep rooted and popular understanding of the king as the final preserver of order and justice came to full fruition during Isabella's first year as queen. Nonetheless, the unexpected actions of the peasantry in support of the Crown do not explain Castile's lack of broad popular insurrections. What then are the explanations for the absence of large peasant risings?

The Reconquest and the Repopulation, those eternal ghosts of Castilian historiography, were very much responsible for the absence of widespread resistance from below. First, the ebb and tide of Castilian history, its flow southward, provided a fluidity to the Christian population which was absent elsewhere in the medieval West. The successive expansions south, culminating in the taking of Andalucía in the mid-thirteenth century, siphoned peasant and urban population off from troublesome areas. Second, traditionally, from the ninth century onwards, new settlements received rather liberal resettlement charters (*fueros*). This usually meant improvement of the legal conditions under which peasants lived in their original habitats. Repopulation worked precisely because of this. Kings, counts, monasteries could not expect their dependant peasants to move unless better conditions were offered elsewhere, most noticeably among them, reduced work obligations and more flexible rents. The absence of servitude in Castile, albeit with the long survival of customary economic and work obligations, also explains, to a certain extent, why there could not be a war of *remensas* in Castile as there had been in Catalonia. Simply put, there were no serfs, and lordly attempts to bind peasants to the land in the mid-fourteenth century failed miserably. For peasants and the poor in the northern towns, the southern frontier first, and America later, always beckoned as a release from difficult times. Third, the Reconquest and the concomitant repopulation of newly gained territories were instrumental in thinning out the population of all of Castile. Although there were localized demographic pressures, the reality is that throughout the Middle Ages, Castile suffered from severe demographic shortages. After the expulsion of the Mudejars in the 1260s, the rich Andalusian countryside remained underpopulated into the fifteenth century and the Atlantic boom. Parts of Castile were almost deserted, as depicted in the vivid accounts of early modern foreign travelers. Castile was never a rich country, but without acute competition for resources, the opportunities for friction were diminished, the opportunities to establish links across a vast and fairly empty landscape scarce.

Yet, there are other reasons for the absence of nationwide or regional resistance in Castile. As the Reconquest came to a stop, as violence against those below mounted, attacks against religious minorities, above all the Jews, also increased. From the early thirteenth century onwards, the ordinances of the Cortes – which articulated the aspirations of the urban oligarchy – reflected their vindictive demands against religious minorities, their desire to punish them financially, to segregate them physically. Ubieto Arteta noted long ago the links between economic downturns and

violence against Muslims and Jews in Castile<sup>17</sup>. In late medieval Castile, popular resentment and frustrations were channeled in attacks against the Jews, *Conversos*, and Moors, and, more often than not, these attacks served the interests of the ruling elite. Worse yet, the common people were used as battering rams in the internal struggles of the ruling class. This was certainly the case in Seville, Toledo and Jaén during the anti-converso riots of the 1440s and 1460s.

I could continue to provide explanations for the Castilians's lack of broad opposition from below to the existing order, but space is running short. Allow me to list some other explanations, before I conclude. They are: 1) the secular character of the Castilian monarchy which, although denying to the Castilian kings the «public» sacred rituals of their French and English counterparts, made them also less vulnerable to attacks from disgruntled nobles or ecclesiastics on the grounds that the monarchs were violating their divine trust, as was the case in France in the 1320s and afterwards; 2) the growing importance of festivals, royal entries and carnivals as sites for hegemonic discourses and as forms of release of accumulated frustrations. These festive events, meeting places for all social groups, taught obedience to authority and acceptance of the existing hierarchy of power. They also provided spaces for dissent. As I have argued elsewhere, they did so very successfully in late medieval Castile.

At the end, what is clear, however, is that the relationship between peasants and lords in late medieval Castile was one nuanced by the historical context and by specific local conditions. It varied from village to village, from decade to decade, from lordship to lordship. In many instances, it led to local acts of violence without leading to those collective explosions of rage which have become emblematic of resistance. These local conditions allowed for acts of defiance. They allowed the peasants small and short-lived spaces from which to lay claim to their dignity. Thus, we saw the peasants of Matute arguing as free men against their lord. They allowed for a little time to gain a respite, however futile at the end these efforts proved, from their unceasing toil and their lives of dependance.

<sup>17</sup> UBIETO ARTETA, Antonio, *Ciclos económicos en la Edad Media española*, Valencia, 1969.