

The Greening of the Underground and Anti-Francoist Working-Class Movement and the Limits of the Trade Unionism and Environmentalism Nexus in Spain (Case of Aragon 1967-1982)

El enverdecimiento del movimiento obrero antifranquista y clandestino y los límites del nexo entre sindicalismo y ambientalismo en España (el caso aragonés, 1967-1982)

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Abstract: This paper explores the intersection between environmentalism and the underground working-class movement in Spain during the last years of Franco's dictatorship. It also examines how industrialization and the Francoist regime's development policies, which led to severe environmental degradation, fueled working-class opposition, particularly in industrial regions such as Aragon, our regional case. The research highlights the paradox of workers opposing the very industries that provide their livelihoods, driven by deteriorating living conditions due to industrial pollution and poor urban planning. It outlines how environmental protest, often led by women and local communities, became a platform for broader anti-Francoist opposition. The paper discusses key events such as urban working-class campaigns against pollution and resistance to large infrastructure projects such as dams and nuclear power stations in Aragon, which were linked to the regime's modernization efforts. We develop a regional approach, focusing on Aragon due to the availability of local archives and the detailed data they provide on environmental discourses and actions. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of how environmental conflicts and working-class opposition to Francoism were deeply intertwined, creating a nexus between environmentalism and unionism. The study also examines the role of underground trade unions and political organizations, especially industrial and peasant unions, in supporting environmental protests and framing them within a broader struggle against the dictatorship. Finally, the research reconstructs the break-up of the environmentalist-unionist nexus with the advent of democracy (1978).

Keywords: environmentalism; trade unions; environmentalism-unionism nexus.

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Resumen: Este artículo explora la intersección entre el ecologismo y el movimiento obrero clandestino en España durante los últimos años de la dictadura franquista. También examina cómo la industrialización y las políticas desarrollistas del régimen franquista, que condujeron a una grave degradación ambiental, alimentaron la oposición entre la clase obrera, especialmente en las regiones industriales. La investigación pone de relieve la paradoja de que los trabajadores se opusieran a las mismas industrias que les proporcionaban su sustento, impulsados por el deterioro de las condiciones de vida debido a la contaminación industrial y a la mala planificación urbanística. El artículo demuestra cómo la protesta ambiental, a menudo indicada por las mujeres y comunidades locales, se convirtió en una plataforma para una oposición antifranquista más amplia. El documento analiza las campañas de la clase obrera urbana contra la contaminación y la resistencia contra grandes proyectos de infraestructuras como presas y centrales nucleares, que estaban vinculados a los esfuerzos de modernización del régimen. Desarrollamos un enfoque regional, centrándonos en Aragón, debido a la disponibilidad de archivos locales y a los datos detallados que proporcionan sobre discursos y acciones ambientales. Este método permite una comprensión matizada de cómo los conflictos y la oposición obrera al franquismo estuvieron profundamente entrelazados y crearon un nexo ecologismo-sindicalismo. El estudio también examina el papel de los sindicatos clandestinos y las organizaciones políticas, especialmente los sindicatos industriales y campesinos, a la hora de apoyar las protestas ecologistas y enmarcarlas en una lucha más amplia contra la dictadura. Por último, la investigación reconstruye el momento de ruptura del nexo ecologismo-sindicalismo con la entrada de la democracia (1978).

Palabras clave: ecologismo; sindicalismo; nexo ecologismo-sindicalismo.

Introduction

AFTER THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR and World War II, Franco's dictatorial politics established a national plan to develop and, in particular, to industrialize Spain. This was a poor nation that benefited from international aid for development between the 1950s and the 1970s. In an international economic framework, the developmentalist and industrialist models were applied to other totalitarian and authoritarian countries, as well as to democratic countries, such as France, Italy and West Germany,¹ which Franco used as an example.² The process of industrialization initially pursued autarchic and almost self-sufficient objectives, and

1 CHANEY, S. **Nature of the Miracle Years**. Conservation in West Germany, 1945-1975. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008. JOSEPHSON, P. R. **Resources under Regimes**. Technology, Environment, and the State. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. PESSIS, C.; TOPÇU, S.; BONNEUIL, C. **Une autre histoire des Trente Glorieuses**: modernisation, contestations et pollutions dans la France d'après-guerre. Paris: la Découverte, 2013. SEGRETO, L. Miracles et défaillances de l'économie italienne. **Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire**, [S.I.], v. 100, n. 4, p. 121-129, 2008.

2 CARR, R. **España 1808-1975**. Barcelona: Ariel, 1982. MARTÍN ACEÑA, P.; MARTÍNEZ RUIZ, E. La edad de oro del capitalismo español: crecimiento económico sin libertades políticas. In: TOWNSON, Nigel (org.). **España en cambio**. El segundo franquismo, 1959-1975. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2009. p. 1-22.

subsequently, underwent a phase of liberalization that allowed the inflow of foreign capital into certain sectors. In order to secure energy and water, the state located these industrialization projects near waterways, and consequently coal-fired power stations, chemical complexes and cellulose factories were established in rural areas, outside city limits. The ambition was to develop "anti-economic" rural and agrarian areas.³ The fascist pro-farmer discourse soon gave way to capitalist and liberal economics. During the nationalist industrialist period (1945-1960) and the developmentalist period or "miracle years" (1960-1970), industrialization was offered as the best example of the Francoist triumph over Spain's secular backwardness.⁴

Within two decades (1960-1979), the rapid growth of industrial production completely altered the landscape.⁵ After 1964, the policy of creating "development poles" also encouraged rural-urban migration. A number of cities throughout Spain received the "development pole" label, with Saragossa, the capital of Aragon, being the first to do so. Others, such as the Bilbao area and Avilés, in northern Spain, had been involved in the iron and steel industry for decades. Urban expansion ensued around the suburban and industrial areas in order to accommodate migrant workers. Yet precarious living conditions persisted, and the expansion of housing did not take into account issues of air pollution, water supply, green spaces, health centers, schools or transport needs. From the 1950s to the 1970s, people protested, legally and not so legally, this was what happened in the case of the protests against the reservoirs and the pollution of the water in rural areas.⁶ After the student protests of 1957 and the mining strikes of 1962, working-class organizations, especially the Communist Party, re-emerged on the political scene. Working-class identities were also reshaped by migration processes and the chaotic growth of the suburbs.⁷ One of the first working-class neighborhoods to demonstrate against pollution in the industries in which their residents worked - with women leading the way - took place in Erandio in the Bilbao region between 1968 and 1969.⁸ The first two martyrs of the anti-pollution struggles died in these demonstrations.

One key question is why these workers, their families, their associations and their trade unions would oppose the industries that provided them with a living wage, particularly within the context of an authoritarian regime. It is necessary to consider how the underground working class, the communist Comisiones Obreras and the workers' organisations of the Catholic Church, reacted to the environmental conditions and policies of the regime. To what

3 CUESTA, J. M. **La despoblación del Sobrarbe** ¿Crisis demográfica o regulación? Zaragoza: CEDDAR, 2001.

4 ARCO, M. Á. Del. **Was Francoism Green?** The Francoist Dictatorship and the Environment (1936-75). 2010, unpublished work.

5 BARCIELA, C.; LÓPEZ, M. I.; MELGAREJO, J.; MIRANDA, J. A. **La España de Franco (1939-1975)**. Economía. Madrid: Síntesis, 2001.

6 CORRAL-BROTO, P. Expertise and Rural Protest Against Industrial Pollution from Early to Miracle Years in Francoist Spain (1945-1965), In: GANDARA, Gercinair Silvério (dir.). **Natureza e cidades**. O viver entre águas doces e salgadas. Goiânia: Editora da PUC de Goiás, 2012a. p. 214-231.

7 DOMÈNECH, X. La formación de la clase obrera bajo el franquismo. Nuevos debates. **Ayer**, [S.I.], n. 79, p. 283-296, 2010.

8 BUCES CABELLO, J. **Erandio 1969**: sendatu gabeko zauria, una herida abierta. Erandio: Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi y Ayuntamiento de Erandio, 2021.

extent did working-class organizations support environmental protesters, and what kind of environmental and political views did they encourage? To what degree did working-class movements contribute to the review of industrial and hydrological planning, large dams and river transfers? To what extent did they criticize urban pollution and the pattern of its distribution? Some environmental historians⁹ have demonstrated that environmental conflicts appeared after 1947, showing that in this regard, the working-class opposition did not remain silent in the face of this authoritarian, traditional, national-Catholic-conservative, industrialist and ultimately capitalist regime.

Environmental labor studies have been very prolific in recent years. Stefania Barca has developed an examination of the political ecology of labor, providing a fundamental critique of the historical background of an ephemeral red-green agenda and the "labor/ecology nexus".¹⁰ Recently, Barca has also examined how the ecology of labor organizations aimed to spread ecologically oriented ideas inside industry.¹¹ In 2014, Barca had already spearheaded the study of the ecologism of the working or labor worlds.¹² In France, Renaud Bécot and Gwenola Le Naour have succeeded in introducing the theme of environmental toxicity into studies of workers' unions.¹³ The topic of toxicity and pollution is also classic, as the research includes, for example, case studies of silicosis among miners and copper mine pollution among workers and peasants.¹⁴

The distinction between ecologism and environmentalism remains problematic. Spanish and Latin American environmental studies have defined environmental (*ambientales*), environmentalist (*ambientalistas*), and ecologist (*ecologistas*) conflicts.¹⁵ In our study, we prefer to keep the adjective "environmental" (*ambientales*) for actions that demand environmental rights, such as the right to clean air, a green city, clean water, the countryside, and so on. We choose to use the adjective "environmentalist" (*ecologistas*) for those who in the seventies already had a way of thinking that emphasized social reproduction and were

9 ARCO, op. cit. CORRAL-BROTO, P. **Protesta y ciudadanía**. Conflictos ambientales durante el franquismo en Zaragoza (1939-1979). [S.I.]. Publicaciones de Rolde de Estudios Aragoneses, 2015. Colección Aragón Contemporáneo.

10 BARCA, S. Labour and the ecological crisis: The eco-modernist dilemma in western Marxism(s) (1970s-2000s). **Geoforum**, [S.I.], v. 98, p. 226-235, 2019.

11 BARCA, S. **Workers of the Earth**: Labour, Ecology and Reproduction in the Age of Climate Change. London: Pluto Press, 2024.

12 BARCA, S. Sur l'écologie de la classe ouvrière: un aperçu historique et transnational. **Écologie & Politique**, [S.I.], v. 50, n. 1, p. 23-40, 2015.

13 BÉCOT, R. ; LE NAOUR, G. **Vivre et lutter dans un monde toxique**: violence environnementale et santé à l'âge du pétrole. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2023.

14 CHASTAGNARET, G. **De fumées et de sang**. Pollution minière et massacre de masse, Andalousie - XIXe siècle. Casa de Velázquez. Madrid: [s.n.], 2017. 2017 and DEWEY, S. Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970. **Environmental History**, [S.I.], v. 3, n. 1, p. 45-63, 1998.

15 FOLCHI, M. Conflictos de contenido ambiental y ecologismo de los pobres: no siempre pobres, ni siempre ecologistas. **Ecología Política**, [S.I.], n. 22, p. 79-100, 2001. GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M.; HERRERA, A.; ORTEGA SANTOS, A.; SOTO, D. Peasant Protest as Environmental Protest. Some Cases from the 18th to the 20th Century. **Global Environment**, [S.I.], n. 4, p. 48-77, 2009. MARTÍNEZ ALIER, J. **El ecologismo de los pobres**. Conflictos ambientales y lenguajes de valoración. Barcelona: Icaria, 2004. SOTO, D.; HERRERA, A.; GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA, M.; ORTEGA, A. La protesta campesina como protesta ambiental, siglos XVIII-XX. **Historia Agraria**, [S.I.], n. 42, p. 277-301, 2007.

already focusing on degrowth and the critique of industrialization. Trade unionism falls into the former category, whilst the environmental movement fits into the latter.

With a view to analyzing environmental conflicts and their languages of valuation, our research is based on a regional approach, centered on Aragon, for three methodological reasons. The first is on account of the persistence of censorship in national archives regarding access to political and police records: in this respect, Aragon's regional archives enabled consideration of these data sources from the local to the regional scale. The second reason is that local struggles generated a greater amount of data and important details than struggles at national levels, as local reports were simplified and blurred as documentation moved up the chain of command and hierarchical scales. Thirdly, certain centralized political organizations and institutions downplayed or rejected views that opposed their central directives. Geographically, the context of Aragon, the Ebro River and the Pyrenees has allowed industries, energy projects and urban growth to be planned and developed. Aragon's environmental conflicts essentially revolved around industrial pollution, first rural and then urban, subsequent to development policies, and around energy, such as coal-fired, hydroelectric and nuclear power stations, and the environmental damage they cause. However, new environmental history studies have already generated a more regional approach for the Basque Country, the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands and Catalonia.¹⁶ In all of these cases, a similarity can be observed in the patterns of environmental protest against pollution under Francoism.

In terms of data sources, we have only collected written records, which could be supplemented in the future with oral history approaches, together with sociological studies such as environmental labor studies.¹⁷ We have included primary sources from clandestine surveillance carried out by the regime's intelligence services. We have also incorporated secondary sources such as propaganda, newsletters and publications from legal Christian labor organizations (HOAC and JOC)¹⁸, the legal critical press against the regime, and clandestine newsletters and publications from communist, socialist, and anarchist political organizations. Primary and secondary written sources put an end to the notion in historiographical debates that the records are "silent";¹⁹ they actually demonstrate public environmental concern and gains in environmental awareness.²⁰ Some of these sources

16 BRITO DÍAZ, J. M. *Dinámicas de la contienda ambiental: un análisis de las protestas ecologistas en las Islas Canarias (1969-1992)*. *Historia Contemporánea*, [S.I.], n. 75, p. 729-772, 2024. GIL-FARRERO, J. *Natura en conflicte. La construcció del patrimoni natural a Catalunya, del franquisme a la democràcia (1955-1992)*. 2018. 274 f. (Tese) – Centre d'Història de la Ciència (CEHIC), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Barcelona 2018. SERRA RIERA, M. *The making of the environmentalist movement in Majorca and the Basque Country in its European context (1972-1988)*. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco/Eukal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 2023. 344 f.

17 RÄTHZEL, N.; STEVIS, D.; UZZELL, D. L. (org.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

18 Hermandad Obrera de Acción Católica and Juventud Obrera Cristianas, both pro-socialist Christian organizations.

19 MASSARD-GUILBAUD, G. *Histoire de la pollution industrielle*. France, 1789-1914. Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2010.

20 Online open access to our data sources at the Aragonese Environmental History Archive: <https://www.>

were collected by Franco's repressors and are therefore of exceptional value. Others have been collected from specialist libraries containing isolated, unserialized volumes. Many of the sources in working-class neighborhoods come from neighborhood associations; the link between the environment and neighborhood grievances was intrinsic to the forming of these neighborhood associations, all the more so because these districts were all working class, i.e., they housed industrial workers, and they all had environmental deficiencies (lack of green spaces, drinking water, and clean air).²¹

Yet how could the working-class approach be distinguished from the myriad political groups of strikers, trade unionists, anarchists, communists and socialists? The complexity of working-class identity and structures is clear for all to see. We cannot expand on what is defined here as the working class; we can say, however, that we use the term to refer to industrial and commercial workers who did not own the means of production and who were in some cases associated in underground socialist and Marxist trade unions. We consider a group to be underground if it acted against the dictatorship and in the name of the defense and progress of workers, from peasants to industrial employees, and their livelihoods, in terms of their economic, social, political, environmental and cultural conditions, even if the association between peasant unions and industrial workers' unions was unusual. Debates about how working class the Socialist Party was, for example, or whether the Communist Party neglected the peasant unions, remain wide open. They need to be analyzed, using local, regional and national records and combining them with oral history approaches.

As indicated briefly above, we examine the first legal Christian workers' organizations, Juventudes Obreras Cristianas (JOC) and Hermandad Obrera de Acción Católica (HOAC), whose specificities are due to the Catholic idiosyncrasy of Franco's regime and the influence of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. We also study clandestine trade unions, such as the peasant union Comisiones Campesinas (CC.CC), the main union Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO), the Christian union Unión Sindical Obrera (USO) and, after 1976, the anarchist union Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and the socialist union Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT). Our research also includes underground working-class parties, essentially the Communist Party (PCE), and others that were less organized such as the Trotskyist, Maoist or Leninist Movimiento Comunista (MC), Larga Marcha hacia la Revolución Socialista and Partido del Trabajo de España (PTE), and after 1976, the self-governing Aragonese Socialist Party, Partido Socialista de Aragón (PSA), and the Socialist Party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE). Lastly, we also analyze the armed opposition Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriótico (FRAP) and certain smaller

roldedeestudiosaragoneses.org/archivo-historia-ambiental-aragon-2. Accessed on July 15, 2024.

21 CORRAL-BROTO, op. cit. ESCUDERO ANDÚJAR, F. La lucha por el barrio y el medio ambiente. Movimientos vecinales y ecologistas: la otra cara de la lucha contra la dictadura (1970-1980). **Historia Actual Online**, [S.I.], n. 52, p. 113-128, 2020.

Trotskyist, Maoist or Leninist trade unions such as the Confederación de Sindicatos Unitarios de Trabajadores (CSUT), Sindicato Unitario (SU) and others.

All these organizations supported the environmental actions of ordinary people and local powers, which appeared legally from the 1950s and became increasingly subversive in the 1960s. However, from Christian to anarchist groups, we can observe an attempt to manage sacred society, which was also embodied in their own ways of conducting national or central, regional and local decision-making processes. Because of our regional approach, we cannot assess here whether there were contradictions between central directives and regional bodies and how far they extended. Yet we do know, for example, that the Communist Party did not condemn nuclear power at the Central Bureau, following the USSR's energy autonomy based on nuclear technology. Some scholars recognize the PCE's opposition to nuclear protest,²² but at the local and regional levels, however, these directives were not strictly followed. Central orders never prevented local political committees from promoting local actions against nuclear, industrial or hydroelectric projects. In this study our aim is not to analyze the hegemony of Marxist trade unions and parties, hence our decision to focus on this particular case of the link between trade unionism and environmentalism. This choice is further reinforced by the contradictions that are brought forth through the use of a regional approach in our study, with the contradictions observed also serving to emphasize the need to , to root environmental history in locations, as suggested by Arturo Escobar.²³ At the very least, local-to-national contradictions and a local method allow us to consider reality and its relationship with human actions and reasoning at all levels.

Working-class environmental actions: the defense of living conditions and the birth of environmental public opinion

IN THE 1960s, clandestine groups, mainly around the Communist Party, and also legal Christian workers' organizations (JOC and HOAC) took note of local environmental actions by rural peasants against large dams. In eastern Aragon, the national electricity company ENHER was building a large dam,²⁴ which at the time aspired to be the biggest in Europe, along with Italy's Vajont dam. The system consisted of two large dams, in Mequinenza and Fayon (Lower Aragon). During the Civil War, the Lower Aragon region was made up of collectivized

22 LÓPEZ ROMO, R. **Años en claroscuro**. Nuevos movimientos sociales y democratización en Euskadi (1975-1980). Bilbao: Servicio Editorial de la UPV, 2011. SOTO FERNÁNDEZ, D. Del conservacionismo al ecologismo social. *El ecologismo en España: De los orígenes en el antifranquismo a la democracia (1960-1998)*. In: CHAPUT, Marie-Claude; PÉREZ SERRANO, Julio (org.). **Transición y democracia en España**: ciudadanía, opinión pública y movilización social en el cambio de régimen. Barcelona: Biblioteca Nueva, 2021. (Minerva. Monografías). p. 287-310.

23 ESCOBAR, A. El lugar de la naturaleza y la naturaleza del lugar: ¿globalización o postdesarrollo? In: LANDER, Edgardo (org.). **La colonialidad del saber**: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000. p. 113-145. ESCOBAR, A. **Territories of difference**. Place, movements, life, *redes*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008. ESCOBAR, A. **Encountering Development**: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World. [S.I.]: Princeton University Press, 2011.

24 CAMPRUBÍ, L. **Engineers and the Making of the Francoist Regime**. [S.I.]: The MIT Press, 2014.

villages, and Caspe, its largest town, was the center of the eminently anarchist Consejo de Aragón, which ruled in the Republican zone of Aragon. On 15 May 1962, the Mina Petra and Mina Eugenia mines, located in Mequinenza and then flooded under the dam, were the focus of the first work stoppages and strikes of the Francoist period. This was followed by the first strike in Asturias in April 1962.²⁵ A week later, 1,200 miners and 700 workers from the electricity company ENHER met at the local town hall to demand a pay rise. They asserted that “to strike for high salaries, to be like the Asturian people, is to be Catholic”. Then the intelligence service of Franco’s Civil Guard reported the influence of a local priest, graffiti calling for strikes, and the influence of the Pirenaica underground communist radio in the area.²⁶ Therefore, between 1964 and 1967, women, children and men assembled twice to demonstrate against the risk of the large dam project, constructed upon the flooded mines. They challenged Franco’s Twenty-Five Years of Peace celebration in 1964 by chanting “25 years of peace and 7 years of war against ENHER”. Immediately, the Communist Party, HOAC and certain youth organizations (such as JOC) published a number of articles about this new dam struggle in Mequinenza. In contrast, we found no article supporting local and legal environmental actions led by landowners during the 1950s against the industrial pollution of the coal-fired power station of Escatron (close to Mequinenza and Caspe).²⁷ In the 1960s, therefore, for the first time, underground labor organizations disseminated these kinds of actions beyond the local, promoting meetings and protests, targeting national public opinion and linking them with similar events nationwide, such as Castrelo de Minho.²⁸

Figure 1 – Anti-Francoist and clandestine press related to the dam struggle in Mequinenza



Source: AMZ, Communist Party Historical Archives, 1965 and Nuestra Bandera, 1977.

25 MOLINERO, C.; YSAS, P. **Productores disciplinados y minorías subversivas**. Clase obrera y conflictividad laboral en la España franquista. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998.

26 ADELGA (Aragonese Governmental Delegation Archives). **Trabajo. Sindicatos**. Historical Archives, box 24, 1962. The Spanish record says: “hacer huelga por aumento de salario, y ser como los de Asturias, es ser católicos.”

27 CORRAL-BROTO, P. El precio del progreso o l’andalán de las chamineras d’Escatrón: un conflicto ambiental durante el Franquismo y la Transición (1945-1979). **Cuadernos de Estudios Caspolinos**, [S.I.], n. 28, p. 159-181, 2009.

28 CABANA; LANERO, op. cit. GAVIRIA LABARTA, M. **El Bajo Aragón exploliado**: un informe. Zaragoza: DEIBA, 1977.

Hydraulic and water struggles then began formally. Between 1971 and 1972, hydraulic projects forming part of the Francoist technonatural revolution according to Swyngedouw's analysis of Francoist development projects led by national engineers and benefiting the private interests of builders, highlighted another venture with a high environmental impact: the rural-urban transfer of the Ebro River.²⁹ Hydraulic-engineering companies, supported by international development aid funds, were waiting to implement the transfer of the water from the Ebro River stored in Aragon. According to opposition articles in the press, this region suffered from the social and economic costs of storage in order to industrialize and urbanize the neighboring region of Catalonia. The water was to be stored in Mequinenza and other reservoirs would be built in northern Aragon along the Pyrenees. The objectives were to supply water to the chemical-industrial centers of Tarragona (Catalonia) and Sagunto (Valencia), and to supply urban water to the Barcelona metropolitan area.³⁰

Between 1972 and 1977, the Regional Council of the Communist Party published the plans of Franco's engineers and private developers for a river transfer from the countryside to the city. Self-determination, socialist and communist groups in turn published a "paper parliament", i.e., counter-propaganda capable of generating a discourse based on inequality, analyzing and promoting actions against the river transfer. This method of critiquing (aiming at gradually destroying) the regime through an opposition press was also used in the environmental justice movements against dams.³¹ The campaign lasted from 1972 to 1977, when the dictator died; it was echoed by Franco's local authorities, who were forced to defend complaints from Aragon's country-dwellers, as the irrigation systems were at risk, and also to slow down rural-urban migration. The irrigation systems, produced by the industrialism, development and modernization central to Franco's policies, was in line with the institutions of Bretton Woods and the prescriptions of the OCDE.³²

In the two years following Franco's death in November 1975, the trade unions and workers' parties promoted and participated in demonstrations, strikes and campaigns against the Ebro transfer and nuclear projects. The latter had been launched in 1974 in an ambitious National Energy Plan (PEN). Both of these major projects were heavily criticized

29 SWYNGEDOUW, E. Technonatural Revolutions: the Scalar Politics of Franco's Hydro-Social Dream for Spain, 1939-1975. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, [S.I.], v. 32, n. 1, p. 9-28, 2007.

30 CLARIMONT, S. *Les conflits pour l'eau en Europe méditerranéenne: le cas du bassin de l'Ebre (Espagne)*. 1999. Thèse (Doctorat) – Université Paul Valéry - Montpellier III, [S.I.], 1999. CLARIMONT, S. Partager les eaux de l'Èbre. La presse régionale aragonaise contre les projets de transfert. *Mélanges de la Casa Velázquez*, [S.I.], v. 36, n. 2, p. 149-170, 2006. CORRAL-BROTO, P. De la plainte légale à la subversion environnementale : l'aménagement des rivières dans l'Espagne franquiste (Aragón, 1945-1979). *Vingtième Siècle*, [S.I.], n. 113, p. 95-106, 2012b.

31 RENAUDET, I. *Un parlement de papier*. La presse d'opposition au franquisme durant la dernière décennie de la dictature et la transition démocratique. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2003.

32 **Ofensiva**, May 1972. AMZ, Communist Party Historical Archives, file "Política General del PCE. 1950-1977", box 42505. AGA (General Administration Archives), "Interior" Historical Archives, Files "Memorias de los Gobiernos Civiles", box 52/475, Memoria del Gobierno Civil de Huesca de 1972, 1973. **Mundo Obrero**, año XLIV, nº 9, 8th May 1974. ADELGA, section "Notas Informativas de la JSP", box 9, *Propaganda subversiva*, May 1974. DOMINGUEZ LASIERRA, Juan (ed.). **Aragón tiene sed**. El trasvase del Ebro en la prensa. Zaragoza: IFC-DPZ, 1976.

by militants involved in the anti-imperialist struggles and linked to each other because of US capital and support (see Figures 2 and 3). In March 1976 the Democratic Coordination, made up of all the opposition parties, called for a demonstration, which the dictatorship had declared illegal, against these technonatural machines, i.e., the Ebro transfer and the nuclear plants. A few months later, on 30 June 1976, they launched the Aragonese Day of Action. On this Action Day, 1,500 workers went on strike, followed by spontaneous demonstrations by 150 people in certain multinational factories. In addition, major companies linked to industrial valves used in nuclear and hydroelectric power stations, such as Walthon Weir Pacific and Indasa, were also affected. The anarcho-syndicalist CNT also called for demonstrations against industrial risks, which were illustrated by the six deaths and thirty-two injured in an explosion at a gas depot in Butano on June 1976.³³ From 1975 to 1977, rural actions against nuclear projects were also supported by the underground peasant union, Comisiones Campesinas. On 27 June, 1976, the Democratic Coordination, the opposition coalition, also organized a demonstration of 3,000 people in Huesca for a "democratic management of natural resources."³⁴

**Figure 2 – Antinuclear fresco by the Colectivo de Artistas Plásticos de Zaragoza.
Sástago, August 1976**



Source: ADELGA, NiSIGC Archive Collection, box 4, 1976.

33 ADELGA, "Police" Historical Archives, box 24, July 1976. ADELGA, "Civil Guard" Historical Archives, box 4, Sindicato de la construcción de CNT de Zaragoza, 25 June 1976. **Andalán**, n. 92, p. 5, 1st July 1976.

34 **Andalán**, n. 92, p. 5, 1 July 1976. ADELGA, section "Derecho de Reunión. Conferencias y actos públicos denegadas", box 167, Solicitud de Miguel Ángel Guiú de Montañeros de Aragón, de Jesús Domínguez Longás de Jóvenes de Acción Católica y de otros dos más para realizar un Congreso de la Juventud, 9th November 1976. II Asamblea de Aragón, Juventudes Comunistas de Unificación de Aragón, March 1977. ADELGA, section "Police", box 27, Propaganda incautada.

Figure 3 – Poster by AEORMA against nuclear plants and the Ebro River transfer



Source: ADELGA, JSP Archive Collection, box 26, 1975.

At the same time, since 1973, the priest of Mequinenza and some of his neighbors had been resisting the expropriation of church buildings and their homes. The priest of the nearby communities, Fabara, Nonaspe and Maella, the Christian union Unidad Sindical Obrera and the peasant union Comisiones Campesinas all supported the disobedience, as did the major anti-Franco and pro-self-determination press, Andalán. Throughout the region, they spread the reasons for being aware of what these struggles against private and dictatorial interests meant. For several months, the electricity company ENHER had to stop filling the large dam because of this action of civil disobedience.³⁵

The essential role of critical members of the Church must be highlighted. In general, it can be said that many figures of Christian liberation theology emerged from the Aragon's Catholic seminaries during the Franco regime. Among them was the left-wing Manuel Pérez Martínez, also known as Poliarco or El Cura Pérez, who was the guerrilla leader of the Colombian National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) for more than three decades. Before the Guerrilla period, in the 1960s, he also supported the main anti-Francoist underground union, Comisiones Obreras, and the Communist Party in the Madrid suburb of Getafe. In Huesca, in northern Aragon, Bishop Javier Osés supported Christian workers'

35 **A nuestra clase** (Unión Sindical Obrera propaganda), April-May 1973. ADELGA, "Police" Historical Archives, box 4, *Propaganda subversiva*, April 1973.

groups and unions such as HOAC, USO and JOC. Bishop Osés wrote a pamphlet entitled *Working Class and Evangelization*.³⁶ In Fabara, Wilberto Delso's acts of disobedience forced the Catholic hierarchy and the regime to accuse him of being a communist. They all led campaigns with self-determined socialists and communists against large dams, the transfer of the Ebro River and a nuclear project in this province. In any case, after November 1975, the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT was re-established in Aragon with the help of the Christian Workers' Brotherhood of Aragon (HOAC), after decades of brutal repression.³⁷ Together they developed propaganda against the plunder of natural resources and forced rural migration.³⁸

Meanwhile, working-class neighborhoods in the capital of Aragon, Saragossa, suffered from overcrowding and a lack of decent living conditions after the 1964 classification of development poles.³⁹ All these industrial neighborhoods were overpopulated by the rural-urban migration process that accelerated during the industrial pollution of the dictatorship.⁴⁰ Three peripheral and working-class districts, La Almozara, El Picarral and Las Fuentes, began campaigns against industrial and urban pollution in 1972. Also, residents of the Utebo and Las Fuentes suburbs, and workers from those neighborhoods, initiated campaigns against industrial risk in response to work accidents, such as a factory fire in Las Fuentes, and explosions of petrol stations in Utebo, that caused ten deaths between 1973 and 1976. Between 1976 and 1979, all the working-class neighborhoods regained green spaces and better environmental conditions through their activism. This demonstrates the link between environmental security inside and outside the factories, which were located close to workers' homes. Residents said that Francoist urban planning "did not take into account that workers would grow old"; the city and the savings banks built projects quickly and cheaply, without guaranteeing living conditions such as green spaces, hospitals or schools. As a result, after many years of pollution, workers living in the projects understood "why people leave the city in a frenzy, looking for pine trees every week, every long weekend". As for the underground workers' groups, the pro-Communist Comisiones Obreras first recognized actions in 1972 calling for "the defense of living conditions and housing" and "green spaces" in the workers' districts, among other demands. Then, in 1974, the Trotskyist Movimiento Comunista also spread underground propaganda to defend better living conditions in the workers' suburbs.⁴¹

36 OSÉS, J. *Clase obrera y evangelización*. Madrid: Edic. HOAC, 1980.

37 DÍAZ-SALAZAR, R. *Iglesia, dictadura y democracia*. Madrid: Ediciones HOAC, 1981. MARTÍN DE SANTA OLALLA SALUDES, P. El clero contestatario de finales del franquismo. El caso fabara. *Historia Sacra*, [S.I.], n. 58, p. 223-260, 2006.

38 ADELGA. "SIGC intelligence services". Historical Archives, boxes 2 and 4, Remisión copia de una carta suscrita por sacerdotes de Mequinenza y publicada en la prensa, March 1973; Asunto: celebración conferencia sobre el medio ambiente en la localidad de Fabara, esta provincia, 1st June, 1976. *AIT-CNT órgano de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, n. 9, IV time, p. 3, Dec. 1976.

39 HORMIGÓN, M. *La historia de la industrialización de Zaragoza*. Zaragoza: Cámara de Comercio e Industria, 1999.

40 **Especial Camo Ebro**, ACF del Picarral, July 1976. ADELGA, section "Police", box 26, Asunto: asociación de cabezas de familia del barrio del Picarral, 15th November 1976.

41 ADELGA, section "SIGC intelligence services", box 1, Asunto: hojas clandestinas editadas por "intercomisión de las CC.OO. de Zaragoza", 8th January 1972. ADELGA, section "SIGC intelligence services", box 3, Asunto: remisión de propaganda subversiva alusiva a la muerte de un manifestante en Carmona (Sevilla), 7th August

On the other hand, industrial pollution in the countryside affected chemical firms such as Monsanto and Hidro-Mitro (both in Monzón) and the Pechiney-Ugine-Kulhmann aluminium smelter (Sabiñánigo), as well as pulp and cement factories. Comisiones Campesinas, a peasant and underground union, began to mobilize public opinion in 1972. In Monzón, in north-eastern Aragon, a socialist member of the PSOE led legal action against air and water pollution from Monsanto and other chemical industries based there. After the rebuilding of the Unión General de Trabajadores in 1976, they linked public concerns about urban pollution and speculation in the workers' districts of Saragossa to rural pollution in Monzón. They asked: "When did [the dictatorship's press and media] speak out loudly against pollution? When did they put a stop to urban ignominies? Never. This, and all the above, is the result of a government, a form of state, that disregards the will of the people and serves the few."⁴²

In sum, the workers' unions, peasants' unions, labor parties (pro-communist parties, from the Communist Party to the Maoists, Leninist and Trotskyist parties, socialist and self-determination socialist parties) and the Anti-Fascist and Patriotic Revolutionary Front (a people's army) considered environmental action as an important issue in their fight against the dictatorship. They included urban and rural environmental struggles in their own popular democratic agendas. Beyond that, they supported self-organization, meetings, public information and political mobilization for rural and urban environmental actions. The political feedback was thus mutual. However, they never encouraged violent actions against a project that threatened environmental damage, which stands in contrast to other contexts such as the Basque Country, where the armed opposition of ETA killed two engineers working on a nuclear project.⁴³ Nevertheless, the underground organizations of the industrial working class in Aragon were able to carry out environmental actions with neighborhood associations and political parties, such as the one-day strike and the resulting first demonstration in the capital against the transfer of the Ebro River in March 1976, which was harshly repressed. As for the farmers' union, they initiated meetings and the first rural march with tractors against nuclear power stations in November 1975. Only Christian workers' groups were legal and had the resources to act, and these factors allowed local priests to carry out civil disobedience actions against large dams.

The reasons for environmental actions: environmental coloniality, environmental justice and environmental rights

WE HAVE NOT YET considered environmental thinking independent of environmental action. They are linked, as the data sources show. All the underground and legal working-class organizations developed arguments to justify environmental action, from bringing it into the public sphere to

42 1974. "Especial Campo Ebro", Boletín Informativo de la A.C.F. del Picarral, n° extra, July 1976, p. 5-7.

43 Órgano de las Federaciones Aragonesas UGT y PSOE, El Socialista aragonés, n° 3, March 1976. ADELGA, section "Police", box 23, Resumen informativo: 1-15 June, 1976.

44 LÓPEZ ROMO, R.; LANERO TÁBOAS, D. Antinucleares y nacionalistas. Conflictividad socioambiental en el País Vasco y la Galicia rurales de la Transición. *Historia Contemporánea*, [S.I.], n. 43, p. 749-777, 2011.

holding meetings or demonstrations. What did they argue? What intellectual or conceptual tools did they mobilize and associate with the environment? In terms of environmental safety inside and outside the factory, the working-class organizations understood the need for healthy and pleasant access to the environment, not only in the city. They defended jobs but also environmental security, both in the workers' districts of Saragossa and in the rural areas of Aragon, such as Monzón, Escatrón or Sabiñánigo.

In essence, nonetheless, these environmental struggles were about colonization, justice, inequalities, and the people's control over natural resources. In this sense, the clandestine *Ebro* propaganda qualified the expropriation of Mequinenza as "deliberate and authorized abuse" and a "plunder, an impudent and brutal pillage". Against large dams, they argued that "public investments should be made according to the criteria of social profitability and ensuring the development of the most backward areas".⁴⁴ Concerning the Ebro River transfer, Comisiones Campesinas pitted "regional solidarity" against "regional inequalities".⁴⁵ Since 1971, the Communist Party had been calling for regional justice and challenging the abuses of powerful regions.⁴⁶ In addition, the press agency of the FRAP (the Revolutionary Patriotic Antifascist Front) explained environmental injustice as follows: "they [the regional elites and bourgeoisie] have never been affected by emigration, nor have they been concerned about environmental degradation, nor have they felt the need to regain development or regional balance."⁴⁷

In terms of justifying and legitimizing arguments related to inequalities, the anti-Francoist parties, unions and citizens themselves claimed that citizens were able to understand the struggles they were facing by using their own tools, even influencing the regional pro-regime media. These organizations interpreted projects with significant environmental impacts in terms of development and underdevelopment, and also leaned on the center-periphery theory. These theories placed particular emphasis on regional inequalities in Franco's Spain. A notable innovation was the introduction of the colonial factor. Francoism was thus interpreted as a regime that colonized different regions, some with more resources than others, in order to serve its own interests. The regime was supported by multinational capital and based on private interests. Discussions of common goods, including environmental resources such as water, air and landscape, were linked to the broader concept of workers' rest and leisure. This led to the concept of "internal colonization", which sought to understand the management of natural resources through privatization and economically profitable processes. In 1972, the Manifesto of the Communist Party of Aragon stated:

44 "Pemeditado y autorizado atropello", "despojo, descarado y brutal expolio". ADELGA, "Police" Historical Archives, box 5, subversive propaganda **Ebro**, n. 30, May-June 1973; and box 8, subversive propaganda **Ebro**, n. 35, March-April 1974.

45 "Desigualdades regionales", *ibidem*.

46 **Ofensiva**, January 1972. ADELGA, section "Police", box 2, *Propaganda subversiva*, Feb. 1972.

47 APEP (FRAP), **Informe sobre el Trasvase**, April 1976. ADELGA, section "Police", box 23, Asunto: panfleto incautado APEP, 24th Apr. 1976.

In Spain, Aragon is definitely in what could be called, without any exaggeration, a situation of internal colonization, which is leading inexorably to the economic, social and political degradation and decline of our region.⁴⁸

These analyses have also been enriched by the perspective of the hegemony of one class, place and economic activity over the others, that is, between city and countryside, between city center and neighborhood, or between industry and agriculture.⁴⁹ Extracts from the archives analyzed show how environmental justice emerged. In 1977, the Communist Party analyzed environmental issues under the heading of the “unfair distribution of ecological sacrifices” as follows:

Unequal development let monopolies exploit vital raw materials at lower prices (agrarian products, minerals, water and energy), to exploit manpower (essentially by underemployment in the rural areas, thus forcing people to emigrate without any requirements in terms of wage, security and working conditions), and led to an unfair distribution of ecological sacrifices (polluting industries, nuclear power stations, experimental military camps). If these kinds of exploitation were to disappear, monopolist capitalism would disappear as well.⁵⁰

The Communist Party also established a link between the forms of struggle and the demands made on them, thus placing the environment on the agenda of rights. As a result, the concept of environmental citizenship was developed to include women, young people and the elderly as well as workers and men. The above developments were not possible without the simultaneous promotion of a change in the information regime, i.e., a free press. This information regime, they believed, should be characterized by transparency, democratic processes, openness and bottom-up participation, as opposed to a technocratic or top-down approach. A variety of tactics were used to achieve the new conditions, including the use of clandestine propaganda, meetings, concerts and openings, as well as demonstrations and press articles.

To sum up, despite a clandestine trade union structure with some weaknesses, the workers' underground organizations were effective in justifying and conceptualizing environmental actions, linking them to anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and liberation struggles in order to explain the reality of Franco's regime. In this sense, they followed the actions of the inhabitants and the people. Working-class organizations such as the

48 **Ofensiva**, May 1972. AMZ, section “Fundo del Partido Comunista”, series “Política General del PCE. 1950-1977”, box 42505.

49 “Aragón, región catastrófica”, **Ebro**, nº 46, Nov. 1975, p. 4, in ADELGA, section “SIGC intelligence services”, box 4, Documentación subversiva, 10th Dec. 1975.

50 AMZ, section “Fundo del Partido Comunista”, series “Política General del PCE. Antes de 1977”, box 42505, **La ordenación del territorio en Aragón**, 1976. In Spanish: “El desarrollo desigual permite a los monopolios la explotación a bajo precio de materias primas fundamentales (productos agrarios, minerales, agua y energía), la explotación del sector trabajo (fundamentalmente mediante el subempleo en las zonas rurales que fuerza a una emigración poco exigente en materia salarial, de seguridad y de condiciones de trabajo), y a un injusto reparto de los sacrificios ecológicos (industrias contaminantes, centrales nucleares, polígonos de bombardeos militares experimentales). Estos tipos de explotación, si desaparecieran, desaparecería también el capitalismo monopolista.”

Communist Party, the main communist and socialist trade unions (Comisiones Obreras and, later, the UGT) and the Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (PSOE) always supported environmental actions and arguments, at least until the monarchist and parliamentary consensus of September 1977, known as the Pact of Moncloa, which forced the left, the right, the employers and the trade unions to reach a mutual consensus and, in an economic crisis, to accept the abandonment of many workers' demands. However, thanks to the possibilities offered by the press and propaganda, a new environmental intellectuality based on Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals emerged in the organization of the working class, renewed by local, regional and environmental campaigns.

The limits of the trade union-environmentalism nexus

THE PROTESTING AGAINST a chemical company in the working-class neighborhood of La Almozara in Zaragoza is a good example of the limits of this nexus. Residents, Christians, women, children and the elderly protested between 1972 and 1979. The workers and trade unions at the sulfuric acid factory, the CC.OO and, after 1977, the UGT, joined in the demands to prevent pollution. The factory was forced to stop production in 1975, and from 1977 onwards, following the Moncloa agreements, the employer threatened to close down the plant. It was then that the CC.OO put an end to the link between trade unionism and ecology. From then on, the neighborhood's residents had to develop a suitable workers' discourse to prevent the closure of the factory, but the anti-Francoist nexus was no longer useful.

The same happened when the General Motors car factory was built in Figueruela (Zaragoza). Ecologists and farmers, led by Mario Gaviria through the platform Radical Alternatives to the Ebro Bank, preferred to maintain traditional agriculture in the area. In 1980, however, the ecologists realized that the UGT union was more concerned with wages and jobs than with preserving the ecology of the area. As noted by Varillas and Cruz, the first ecologists to write a history of the environmental movement in Spain, it is true that there was a nexus between trade unionism and environmentalism under Franco. They are also right in saying that this link was broken after the advent of democracy, giving rise to a less popular environmental movement with many dispersed sub-groups.⁵¹

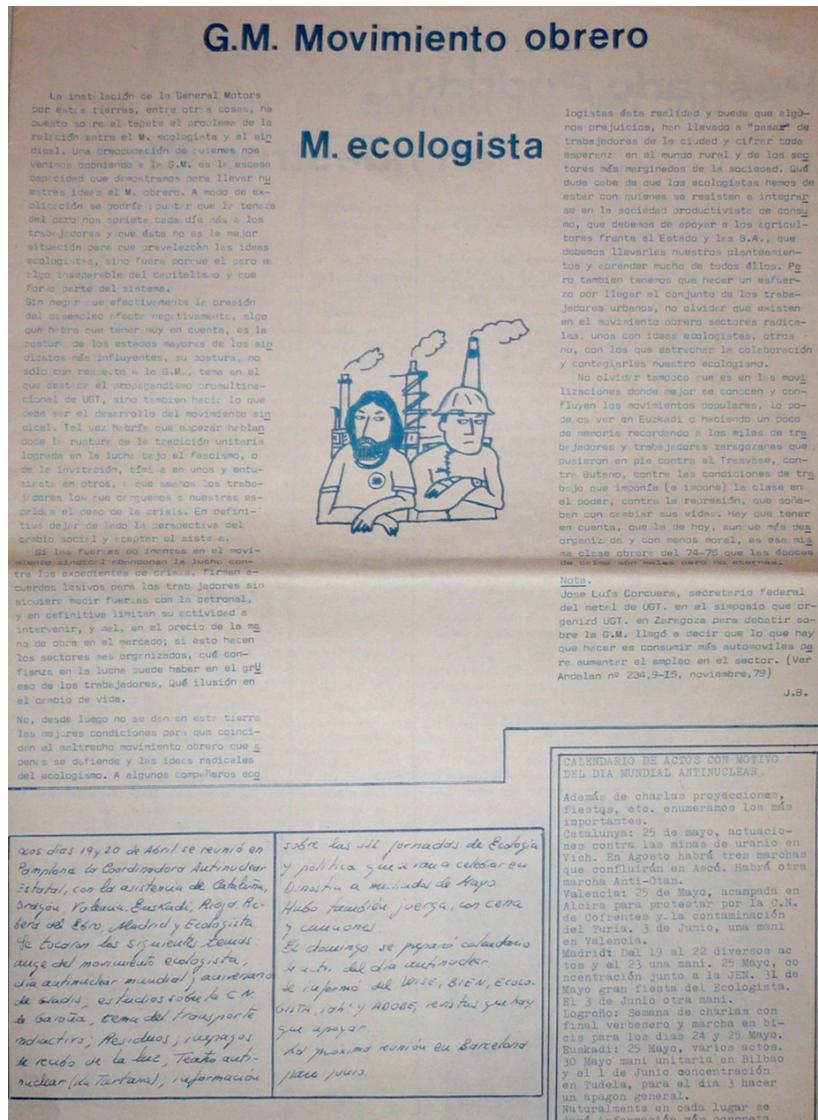
In 1998 Jorge Riechman and Fernández Buey wrote, in HOAC's still-existing publication: "the eco-socialist protests in Erandio [1968-1989] and Avilés [1976-1978] against pollution were part of the workers' protest tradition, perhaps more so than in other European countries".⁵² They themselves felt that the link between environmentalism and trade unionism had deteriorated since the early 1980s, especially after the Moncloa agreements and with the established consensus on the left and right. This is exactly what happened in Aragon. The material

51 VARILLAS, B.; CRUZ, H. da. **Para una historia del movimiento ecologista en España**. Madrid: Miraguano, 1981.

52 RIECHMANN, J.; FERNÁNDEZ BUEY, F. **Trabajar sin destruir**. Trabajadores, sindicatos y ecologismo. Madrid: Ediciones HOAC, 1998. p. 151.

found shows that after the creation of a trade union electoral area, the majority unions UGT and CC.OO stopped fighting over the issue of pollution of working-class neighborhoods, considering that to be the purpose of civic associations. The links were gradually broken because there were different electoral means of participating in the new democratic regime. From then on, the ties were very difficult to forge and, in the case of Aragon, they did not return until the struggle against water transfer in the year 2000. In the 1990s, the majority of trade unions and agricultural unions became opposed once again to this kind of technonature.⁵³

Figure 4 – Pamphlet against General Motors and break-up between the trade union UGT and the environmental movement (1981)



Source: Centro de Documentación del Agua, Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza UNEP, Fondo del Movimiento Ecologista de Zaragoza donado por Javier Celma.

53 SWYNGEDOUW, E. *Liquid Power: Contested Hydro-Modernities in Twentieth-Century Spain*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015. Idem, 2007, op. cit.

Conclusions

FROM THESE DATA we can conclude that the environmentalism of the workers' organizations was determined by local struggles, which were able to attack the economic foundations of the regime. In addition, these labor organizations provided the popular struggles with rational tools to understand the phenomena of exploitation, colonization of power, inequality and injustice. This link remained unchanged until the parliamentary consensus of 1977. Working-class organizations helped to define environmental justice, rights and citizenship against Franco's environmental colonialism; they also attacked secrecy and private environmental policies by promoting a democratic environmental public sphere. Last but not least, they linked internal risks and disasters inside and outside the factory, such as fires and explosions. In this way, they imagined workplaces integrated into better environmental conditions.

After that, when certain labor organizations came to power, there was a major split in strategy. Until then, every meeting, demonstration or solidarity strike had been supported, but from then on there were limits and strategic questions that delayed radical environmental actions. The radical paths of those workers' organizations that did not win seats in parliament allowed them to move into a new political ecology, out of pacts and deals, through chairmanships on the boards of national electricity companies and parliamentary commissions. Many of these workers' groups continued to fight, for example, in the anti-nuclear struggle. Another step began as a result of a "gentlemen's agreement" to democratize the Franco regime.

In the Western world, the core of the metropolis and environmental coloniality, especially internal colonization frameworks related to the environment, appear as one of the keys to understanding popular environmental actions.⁵⁴ Moreover, if we consider the environmental world system, it emerged at the same time in different places, such as Hawaii, California, Arctic Canada or Quebec, all of which are governed by democratic systems.⁵⁵

Received: 08/17/2024

Approved: 11/21/2024

54 CORRAL-BROTO; ORTEGA SANTOS, op. cit.

55 BLACKFORD, Mansel G. Environmental Justice, Native Rights, Tourism, and Opposition to Military Control: The Case of Kaho'olawe, *The Journal of American History*, 91 (2), p. 544-571, 2004. LIBECAP, G. D. **Owens Valley Revisited**. A Reassessment of the West's First Great Water Transfer. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. SANDLOSS, J.; KEELING, A. Claiming the New North: Development and Colonialism at the Pine Point Mine, Northwest Territories, Canada. *Environment and History*, [S.I.], v. 16, n. 1, p. 5-35, Feb. 2012.