

*Social Structure and The Persistence of Rural Domestic Industry in Nineteenth Century Portugal **

Jorge Miguel Pedreira
University of Lisbon

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From the beginning of my essay, I shall try to identify some specific problems arising from the handling of the concept of proto-industrialization when processes taking place in slow and late industrializing countries are brought under consideration. The best approach is to pursue the unfolding of the concept from its genesis. For ten years, after Franklin Mendels coined it back in 1972,¹ this concept was one of the most productive tools for research in social and economic history. Guided by this notion, a new approach to the study of rural domestic industries did develop, attracting the interest of many scholars throughout Europe. Very soon it became one of the most popular topics for investigation. International meetings were held to discuss theoretical guidelines and to compare the first results from research, and prestigious scientific journals devoted monographic issues to the subject.²

In becoming so fashionable, the new concept immediately ran some obvious risks. In fact, different processes, taking place

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I would like to thank my friend and colleague Rui Santos for his valuable comments on the first version of this paper.

¹ FRANKLIN MENDELS, "Proto-industrialization: the first phase of the process of industrialization", *Journal of Economic History*, xxxii, 1972.

in historically as well as geographically dissimilar societies, came to be studied under the very same notion. This widespread use often obscured the original purpose of the concept which sought to shed light on a particular phase in the path to modern industrialization,³ so that the connection between proto-industrialization and industrial revolution was gradually lost.

Paradoxically, just as it reached its fullest scientific recognition — having been chosen as one of the main themes for the International Congress of Economic History, held at Budapest in 1982 —, the concept of proto-industrialization came under severe criticism, to the point of being considered redundant.⁴ In fact, D.C. Coleman was not at all enamoured by the endeavour to accurately establish its theoretical as well as heuristic scope. He thought its misuse had gone too far, and to retain the notion, no matter how it was revised, would do more harm than good. Mendels and Pierre Deyon,⁵ on the other hand, continued to try to draw a precise and widely acceptable definition from which they could derive a set of hypotheses, to be tested in future studies. However, they did not feel it necessary to restrict the potential scope of the concept. Mendels openly admitted that in some cases proto-industrialization processes had never led on to modern industrialization and, conversely, that industrial revolutions⁶ had taken place without a preceding growth of industrial labour in the countryside. Thus, although the set of hypotheses put forward by Mendels explicitly focussed on the

² The *Revue du Nord*, vol. LXI, 240, 1979 and LXIII, 248, 1981; the *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, xxx, 1, 1982; the *Quaderni Storici*, 52, 1983; the *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 39 (5), 1984; for instance.

³ The title of Mendel's original article is perfectly clear in this respect.

⁴ D.C. COLEMAN, "Proto-industrialization: a concept too many?", *Economic History Review*, xxxvi, 1983.

⁵ F. MENDELS and P. DEYON, "Proto-industrialization. Theory and reality", *Eighth International Congress of Economic History*, Section A-2 proto-industrialization, Budapest 1982.

⁶ I am using the term in the broad sense of industrialization processes leading to economic and social change.

link between proto-industrialization and industrial revolutions, the concept itself was dissociated from the perspective which had brought it forth in the first place, which had established it as *the first phase of the process of industrialization*.⁷ This shift must of course be related to the demise of the idea of transition as a paradigm for the historical study of social change.

This direction surrendered semantic accuracy in order to preserve the notion of proto-industrialization. The prefix "pro-to" lost its meaning altogether, and one cannot help but have second thoughts about keeping the same word for such a revised version of the concept: all the more since doubts as to its precise breadth are far from being stilled. Efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, it generally still brings to mind the connection between the spread of industrial labour in the countryside and modern industrialization. So, as is often the case, conceptual disarray followed terminological inexactitude.

Where do we now stand? Mendels and Deyon proposed a useful definition and a stimulating group of hypotheses, but a new term needs to be coined because the old one will always be reminiscent of the transition paradigm, when in fact proto-industrialization — as it is now conceived — may or may not be a step in the way to modern economic growth. This of course could be somewhat confusing as to the very nature of the processes that are to be explored, specially if they have taken place in societies which experienced only slow, late and incomplete industrialization in the course of the nineteenth century, such as the so-called Mediterranean countries. Special cautions are therefore needed in these cases, and that is the message of this brief outline of the vicissitudes of the concept.

Before we can move to another stage, there are other problems to be tackled at the conceptual level. In fact, by proto-

⁷ These issues have also been discussed by ECKART SCHREMMER in "Proto-industrialization: a step towards industrialization?" *Journal of European Economic History*, vol. 10, 3, 1981, pp. 653-670.

industrialization the spread of a new type of rural domestic production is usually meant. These industries, connected through the cities to supra-regional and even international markets, are not to be confused with traditional crafts which had never really left the smaller hamlets, such as shoe-making, black-smithing, tailoring, milling, and so on. They are also very different from the part-time production of peasant families to fulfill their own consumption needs.

Conspicuous as they seem, these distinctions may not be all that clear-cut after all. In the first place, the spread of industrial labour in the countryside — which is not always easy to assess, for production units are diminutive to the point of being elusive — generally took place in regions where industrial occupations had long been rooted. Then, there is some continuity, at least geographically, between the old traditional crafts and the more modern, market-orientated, industries. Secondly, our sources and observation procedures may not be the most adequate to identify the routes and modes of marketing which are supposed to be at the heart of the process of change. By means of a combination and consecutive integration of humble circuits, the smallest forms of production could find their way into quite distant fairs and markets. The magnetic field of these fairs and the inflow of townsmen and urban merchants could lead to the development of trading itineraries which were very important indeed, although not very visible.⁸ Hence, discontinuity may sometimes be more in the researcher's eye than in the things he is examining. We risk forcing upon reality a *changement de perspective*⁹ that has been suggested to us by the novelty of theoretical guidelines.

It is not my wish to contend that proto-industry is not dis-

⁸ DAVID JUSTINO and MAFALDA SOARES DA CUNHA, 'As feiras de Estremoz: uma primeira contribuição para o estudo dos mercados regionais no Antigo Regime', *Revista de Historia Económica e Social*, 7, 1981.

⁹ F. MENDELS, 'Des industries rurales à la protoindustrialisation: historique d'un changement de perspective', *Annales E.S.C.*, 39 (5), 1984.

similar from ancestral rural crafts. In truth, if a shift in industrial geography is taken into consideration and new industrial settings can be found, then a change in the economic structure is to be accounted for. However, in Portugal — and let us now look into the particular case which will be the focus of our attention — patterns of industrial location displayed an outstanding stability for a very long time. After the mid-eighteenth century, there was a shift to the coast, but it mostly affected the larger mills, manufactories and proto-factories, which had to be situated near the major towns and exporting harbours. Afterwards, during the nineteenth century, only minor displacements occurred.

The preceding discussion is meant as a warning that we should take account not only of the general problems inherent in the definition of the concept of proto-industrialization, but also of the specific difficulties which may arise in operating with it when contemplating late developers such as Mediterranean societies. Theoretical guidelines, when they allude to a phase on the way to modern economic growth, may not be altogether suitable, and disorientation is bound to occur if we do not specify in what sense the concept of proto-industrialization is to be understood. It is certainly not reasonable to interpret a historical process from its outcome: should we take advantage from hindsight and infer from already known results the background conditions we are to explore? But, on the other hand, we risk reifying the notion of proto-industrialization, and separating the processes — because we are analysing processes in the first place — from their social and historical frameworks. For the time being, we must look into the processes themselves and detect their typical features.

2

Theory and evidence may nonetheless display quite a number of points in common and, starting in the seventeenth cen-

tury, some transformations took place in Portugal which are reminiscent of a proto-industrial process. Changes in the production and marketing patterns in the woollen industries of Serra da Estrela — the highlands of interior central Portugal — and the slow but steady expansion of the traditional linen and lace manufacture in the Northwest (Minho) districts, the two regions where industrial occupations were most important, conform to this pattern.

Inspired by mercantilism and the pressures arising from the late seventeenth-century colonial trade crisis, a new industrial policy promoted manufactories and so added novel organization patterns and techniques to domestic labour and the small workshop. Manufactories were not conceived as a replacement for the established modes of production; they were a means for increasing output and enhancing quality.

But then political trends were reversed. Colonial trade began to thrive again, the famous Methuen treaties were signed and industrial protection became very much a secondary matter, all the more since gold had started to flow from Brazilian mines. Only after a fifty year gap did the Marquis of Pombal's *neocolbertism* revive the promotion of manufactories, which meant the woollen trades in the first place.

The linen and lace industries, although widespread, had become traditional, purely domestic occupations after the momentum had been lost in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁰ But a new revival then began. Writing in 1680, the renowned economist Duarte Ribeiro de Macedo could therefore claim enthusiastically that national production — which was largely concentrated in Minho — not only supplied domestic and colonial demand but also allowed for valuable exports to Castile.¹¹

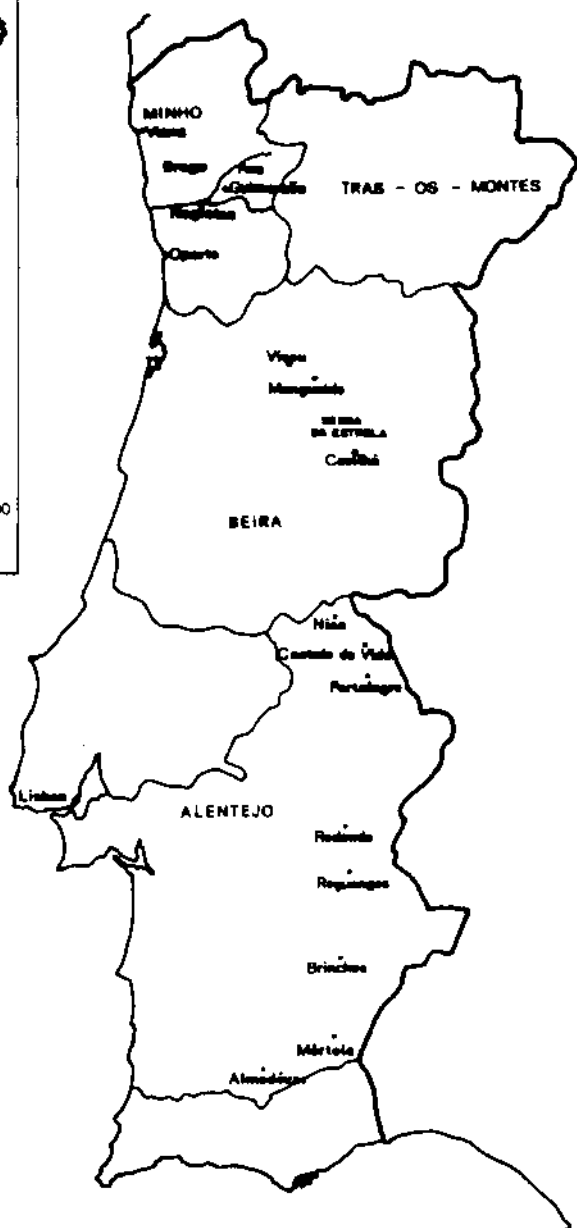
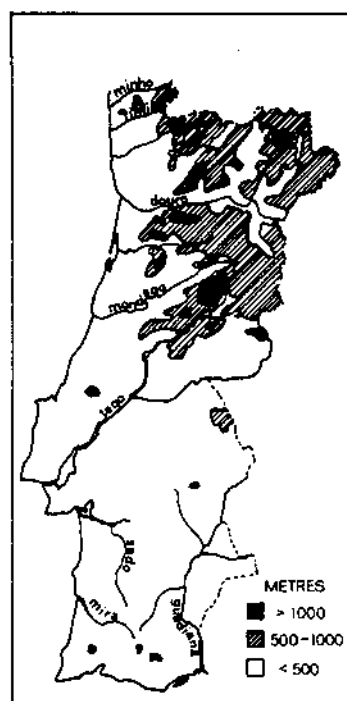
This surge of household industrial trades whose products be-

¹⁰ LÚCIO DE AZEVEDO in the *História de Portugal*, vol. V (Barcelos, 1933).

¹¹ DUARTE RIBEIRO DE MACEDO, *Obras Inéditas* (Lisbon, 1817), p.42.

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PORTUGAL'S PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY



gan to reach quite distant markets, took place in Minho and Serra da Estrela and also in other regions, such as Alentejo and Trás-os-Montes. Why did industrial occupations develop in these areas and not in others? This is one of the questions this essay will try to answer.

Some authors have discarded production requirements as a determining condition for industrial location in pre-industrial economies.¹² However, diminutive as the scale of operations of the individual unit of production certainly was, resources endowment — in raw-materials, water and wood — played an important part in determining the regional settlements of rural household industries. The proximity of the source for raw material supplies, for instance, is an attribute that all proto-industrial regions have in common.

Nevertheless, easy and immediate access to raw materials and other favourable natural conditions alone cannot provide a suitable explanation for the spread of cottage industry in a particular territory. Some areas seemed the ideal place for industrial trades to be located. They had plenty of water, wood and even labour, and yet they never accommodated a proto-industrialization process, much to the bewilderment of some eighteenth-century observers.¹³ Social structures — which were effectively based on agrarian structures — may bear the key to the explanation of such different regional patterns of growth, and many scholars have strongly stressed their paramount relevance.¹⁴ This does not mean, however, that there is a simple one-way relationship, in which social structures determined the

¹² DAVID LANDES, *The Unbound Prometheus* (Cambridge, 1969), p.133.

¹³ "Sobre o estado actual da do comércio das lãs na província do Alentejo", in LUIS CARVALHO DIAS, *História dos Lanifícios. Documentos (1750-1834)*, vols. IV-V, pp. 1256-63 (Lisbon, 1962).

¹⁴ JOAN THIRSK, "Industries in the countryside", in F.J. FISHER, ed., *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1961) and M. BERG, P. HUDSON and M. SONENENSCHER, eds., *Manufacture in Town and Country Before the Factory* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.22-23.

chances for industrial development or that we can identify what was the most appropriate social structure.

Very intricate relations must be disentangled if we are to understand the process of proto-industrialization. The region is, of course, the most adequate unit for analysis, not only because such an analysis cannot be done if larger areas are brought under examination, but also because we must not forget that proto-industrialization is above all a regional process, as Mendels so often stressed.¹⁵

In this particular essay, I have chosen to survey three Portuguese regions — Minho, Serra da Estrela and Alentejo — for they are the best known, or rather the least unknown, and they also illustrate quite dissimilar situations. The first two regions do not raise any special problems as to the interpretation of the association between social structure and the development of petty industrial production in the countryside. This relationship is shaped by the classical "structure" — in as much as the use of the term "classical" may be reasonable in so recent a field of research — which can be found in many other proto-industrial areas. But, on the other hand, Alentejo displays quite a few peculiarities which require further elucidation.

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In the Northwest districts, the pattern of growth was very similar to the one described by Franklin Mendels for Flanders.¹⁶ The region had long been densely populated when the introduction of corn cultivation in the sixteenth century allowed for still greater demographic concentration. High population density supported and was in turn supported by intensive agriculture, which nonetheless could not supply all the peasants' needs. Direct manorial exactions were not too heavy a burden, but

¹⁵ See, for instance, "Des industries rurales..", pp. 990-991

¹⁶ FRANKLIN MENDELS, *Industrialization and Population Pressure in Eighteenth Century Flanders* (Michigan, 1970).

rents and interloper's rights, together with the small size of farms, much restricted the agricultural basis for subsistence.¹⁷ Cattle breeding partly made up for the deficiencies of agricultural production, but linen and lace manufacture very often complemented the income of peasant families. Flax and hemp cultivation was traditional and fitted well into the local crop rotation system, supplying many handlooms scattered in the countryside. Native raw material supplies were soon insufficient and, at least in the eighteenth century, large shipments of flax to be spun and woven in Minho arrived in Oporto and in Viana from the Baltic.

The spread of household linen manufacture in Minho is related to changes in the modes of production and marketing. Never altogether relinquishing their autonomy, for they directly sold their cloth in local fairs, and especially in Guimarães, many peasants came, at least in part, under the control of merchants and their middlemen. These dealers provided the imported raw material to which only they had access and then they bought the cloth, paying the producers small amounts for each piece. By the end of the eighteenth century, merchants' control over marketing procedures had become so complete that any reduction of duties on flax imports was thought to be of no benefit to the producers at all, for the gain would go entirely to the merchants and dealers.¹⁸

The growth in linen manufacture in the eighteenth century must also be explained by the expansion of colonial markets, just as happened throughout Europe. National production did not thoroughly replace linen textiles which came from Hamburg and were then re-exported to Brazil but, at the end of the eight-

¹⁷ NUNO GONCALO MONTEIRO, "Revolução liberal e regime senhorial: a 'questão dos forais' na conjuntura vintista", *Revista Portuguesa de História*, t. xxiii, 1988, pp.177-179.

¹⁸ DOMINGO VANDELLI, "Parecer acerca da abolição dos direitos sobre os linhos", in GEORGE MIGUEL PEDREIRA, *Indústria e Atrazo Económico em Portugal (1800-1825)*, unpublished M.A. thesis (Lisbon, 1986), pp.455-459.

eenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, linen and lace shipments overseas were very important indeed, and there were significant exports to Castile too. The Northwestern districts of Portugal had a far greater production than neighbouring Galicia, which has been regarded as one of the major examples of proto-industrialization in Spain.¹⁹

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In the highlands of inland Beria, woollen trades were rooted in a very ancient tradition and were firmly embedded in the local population's way of life. A land blessed with abundant summer herbage, the Serra da Estrela was situated on the route of the major transhumance movements, as a western *canada* from the Mesta reached its high pastures. Wool was plentiful and it supplied the domestic looms on which coarse cloth had long been woven. On the other hand, generous water resources and the steep slopes of the mountains facilitated other phases of production such as wool and cloth bleaching and especially fulling.

This region was an obvious site for manufactories to develop and, with support from the industrial promotion policy of the late seventeenth century, the first concentrated modes of production were established in Covilhã, a town in the mountains. However, these manufactories were concerned mainly with the coordination of dispersed labour and carrying out finishing processes. Concentration of the whole production process in the same building was still uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century, and the predominant pattern of labour organization continued to be what has been confusingly called de-centralized manufacture.

¹⁹ XAN CARMONA BADIA, "L'Industria rurale domestica in Galizia (secoli XVIII e XIX)", *Quaderni Storici*, 52, 1983. RAFAEL ARACIL and MARIUS GARCIA BONAFE "La protoindustrializació i la indústria rural espanyola al segle XVIII", *Recerques*, 13, 1983, pp.91-92 and 97: the estimated linen production based on Larruga's figures was inferior to the Portuguese Northwest exports to Brazil.

Often it was the merchants and cloth dealers, and not the factories, that provided the raw materials and intermediate goods among domestic workers and workshops, from carding and spinning to dyeing and cutting, until they had got the final product which they sold in the local markets. The fairs of Mangualde and Viseu were the two major distribution centres. Businessmen from Lisbon and Oporto would come and buy the cloth to be placed in the domestic market and also exported to Brazil, although woollen exports were much smaller than the linen ones.

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So far we have studied two regions which display, in their own particular way, some of the typical characteristics that are supposed to have fostered proto-industrialization. On the one hand, in Minho, the chief attributes are high population density, extreme land fragmentation, insufficient subsistence polycultivation (with flax being part of the rotation system). On the other hand, in interior Beira, we have found a mountainous region, where stock-breeding and transhumance played a determinant part, leading to under-employment of labour and compelling segments of the population to supplement their income through domestic work. In some villages and small towns woollen manufacture became the leading occupation. These are both familiar situations.

But if we go on to the case of Alentejo, the relation between agrarian social structures and household industry are not that clear, and not surprisingly this has given rise to some controversy.²⁰ In fact, sparse population, large farms and commercial agriculture do not seem the most appropriate conditions

²⁰ ALBERT SILBERT, *Le Portugal Méditerranéen à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime*, 2nd ed. (Lisbon, 1978), vol. II, p. 677, JORGE DE MACEDO, *A Situação Económica no Tempo de Pombal* (Porto, 1951), pp.231-232, RUI SANTOS, *Configurações Espaciais da Economia (Mérida, segunda metade do século XVIII)*, unpublished M.A. thesis (Lisbon, 1986), pp.51-57.

for domestic industry to develop. The enquiry must now be more penetrating, if the woollen trades of Alentejo are to be understood.

After the mid-eighteenth century, relative prices changed in favour of meat and wool,²¹ giving greater economic importance to cattle-breeding. Alentejo had long been a great producer of wool and of a better kind than that available in the highlands. The bigger farms — which weighed heavily in the agrarian structure — were responsible for this expansion, since sharecroppers, the *seareiros*, could not go along this path because they were primarily engaged in providing for household subsistence and their participation in market-oriented enterprise was much more limited.

There has been some discussion about the extent of household industrial production that came into the markets. Drawing on long-familiar sources, historians have claimed that woollen production was centred in seventeen cities and large villages. Dispersion seemed less in Alentejo than in Serra da Estrela, and a trend towards concentration apparently developed. According to Jorge de Macedo, this impression arises from the distorting nature of the sources, which do not allow us reach rural domestic industries, since they were scattered and hard to identify. But Albert Silbert contended that it was not surprising that rural manufacture did not show up in the sources, because the social structure did not allow the development of industrial by - employments in the country. Townsmen could specialize in woollen cloth production — as it happened in Castelo de Vide, Portalegre, Reguengos, Redondo, Brinches — but hand-loom dissemination in the countryside was virtually impossible because of the agrarian social structure. Small landowners and farmers were squeezed out by the large farms and outnumbered by rural

²¹ DAVID JUSTINO, "Crises e 'decadência' da economia cerealífera alentejana do século XVIII", *Revista de História Económica e Social*, 7, 1981.

workmen, and had neither the means nor the time to take to industrial work.²²

It may be true that most of the goods which entered the market came from the towns and bigger villages, some of which depended on the woollen trades. In 1788, it was estimated that only 10 per cent of the 2,000 inhabitants of Redondo did not work in the woollen manufactures and that a third of the 1,200 people living in the neighbourhood usually took part in the primary operations too.²³ But the social mode of production is not easy to assess. Masters and subordinates generally worked in their own homes, and factories only existed in Portalegre, where domestic weaving had collapsed both in the city and also in nearby Nisa.²⁴ Some manufacturers which rose above the general level of mediocrity could, nevertheless, given their "greater faculties," come to control marketing procedures and build a kind of "monopoly" to subordinate the other producers; at least that is what happened in Redondo.²⁵

However, the evidence that domestic industry was concentrated in the major population centres — towns and larger villages — does not imply that they contained all the manufacturing activities in the region. After the mid-nineteenth century, many looms still survived in the countryside²⁶ and recent research has shown that in some areas numerous female weavers kept tenaciously to the tradition of moorish textiles, similar to those produced in Morocco, in the Rif.²⁷ The arguments concerning the obstacles imposed by agrarian structures must therefore be re-examined.

²² A. SILBERT, *Le Portugal...*, Vol. II, p.682

²³ JORGE MIGUEL PEDREIRA, *Indústria e Atraso Económico...*, p. 67

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 66

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 135-136

²⁶ J.H. FRADESSO DE SILVEIRA, *Indicações relativas aos Tecidos de Lã* (Lisbon, 1864).

²⁷ ANGELA LUZIA, ISABEL MEGALHÃES and CLAUDIO TORRES, *Mantas Tradicionais do Baixo Alentejo* (Mértola, 1984).

In the first place, it must be stressed that the striking dichotomy between large farms and farm labourers does not accurately depict the reality of the agrarian structure in Alentejo. Small properties and farms also had a place in the agrarian structure, specially, but by no means exclusively, in "suburban" areas. Secondly, the hand loom was not so expensive as to make its purchase dependent on the peasants' economic condition. As a rule, it was the poorer families who could not subsist by tilling their small plots of land who turned to household manufacture. The landless labourer himself, as long as he had a house of his own, might also undertake some handicraft production. Finally, constraints arising from agrarian structures and patterns of cultivation must be reconsidered in the light of the ways in which work was divided across various occupations and also of the division of labour within the household: the woman's role, for instance, has not been properly assessed, and only recently has this been brought into the debate.²⁸

The simple fact that the small holdings existed, albeit in relatively small numbers, could provide the basis for domestic industry to develop. Besides, agriculture and grain cultivation did not consume all the energies of the peasant families. If well-to-do farmers could concentrate on commercial livestock and food-stuff production, when cereal yield-price relations were unfavourable, others had to find compensation in cash-crops like wine and in industrial by employment. It is worth pointing out that in Reguengos de Monsaraz many weavers also kept vineyards. Household occupations were manifold and, contrary to the general understanding of the concept of proto-industrialization,²⁹ wine production and petty industry might go arm in arm. In fact, in the second half of the eighteenth century

²⁸ The merit goes to RUI SANTOS, *Configurações Espaciais...*, pp.51-53

²⁹ An intensive cash-crop like wine certainly does not fit in the model of proto-industrialization; see P. KRIEDTE, "The origins, the agrarian context and the conditions in the world market", in *Industrialization before industrialization*, (Cambridge and Paris, 1981).

the expansion of cattle-raising much reduced the opportunities for casual paid employment in agriculture and made domestic manufacture an important means of subsistence.

In any case, the seasonal rhythms of agriculture left plenty of time for industrial work. Recently, Manuela Rocha has demonstrated the perfectly complementary nature of cultivation and domestic weaving, which is unequivocally illustrated by the seasonal variations in woollen cloth output and by the alternation between agricultural and industrial occupations. In early nineteenth-century Reguengos de Monsaraz, less than 10 per cent of the weavers — craftsmen, farmers and farm labourers with low income levels and scarce assets — produced cloth at the same level throughout the year, although this minority had the greatest share in the local output.³⁰

Subordination of industrial production to agricultural and stock-breeding cycles is most obvious, but might be off-set by the division of labour in the community and possibly by the employment of transient migrants. As to non-family workers, servants and wage labourers, the alternation between agriculture and industry proceeded along somewhat different lines and longer periods. The exemption from military conscription for farm labourers kept apprentices away from the workshops, but cyclical adversities in agriculture would make them go back to their earlier jobs.³¹

Seasonal rhythms and cyclical swings produced a complex partition of work time between agriculture and industry. But we must not overlook another important condition for the development of rural handicraft production, that is the division of labour within the community and within the household itself. Albert Silbert admitted that there were some weavers who sup-

³⁰ MANUELA ROCHA, *Propriedade e Níveis de Riqueza. Formas de Estruturação Social em Monsaraz na Primeira Metade do Século XIX*, unpublished M.A. thesis (Lisbon, 1988), pp.93-94.

³¹ MANUELA ROCHA, *Propriedade...*, p.101 and J.M. PEDREIRA, *Indústria e Atraso...*, p.368.

plied their neighbours³² and, in fact, some did just so, working to their individual orders. That explains why some isolated female weavers can be found in certain localities.³³

This was, however, part of a more complex situation, which was related to the division of productive roles in the household. If men took care of the land, the distaff, the spindle and the loom kept women and children busy. Obviously, when cultivation demands were not acute, men might also be kept at the loom but, in Alentejo, cloth production was a female task in the first place, although this may contradict the general assumption that, in the Mediterranean, women took a lesser part in household work before marriage.³⁴ In fact, numerous female weavers were registered since municipalities tried to control their activity, by demanding that they pledge sureties to obtain a licence to work. This suggests that the output of this dispersed industry found its way onto the market, most probably at the local fairs where the merchants would gather. But the peasants themselves could divide their time between working the land and peddling: in Reguengos, for example, some sharecropper-pedlars engaged in this kind of petty trade³⁵ which, by means of consecutive transactions, could become incorporated into much larger markets. After all, this was one of the usual routes from the *civilisation matérielle* to the *marché*.³⁶

At this stage, the role of the institutional demand must be reconsidered. In fact, direct orders from the state or from institutions like the army could strengthen the marketing capacities of certain industrial areas. In the early nineteenth century, the factories of Serra da Estrela came to be largely dependent on army

³² A. SILBERT, *Le Portugal Méditerranéen...*, II, p.681

³³ R. SANTOS, *Configurações...*, pp.51-53.

³⁴ ALVARO FERREIRA DA SILVA, "Família e trabalho doméstico no hinterland de Lisboa: Oeiras, 1763-1810", in *Análise Social*, vol. xxxiii (97), 1987, pp.548-549.

³⁵ M. ROCHA, *Propriedade...*, p. 105.

³⁶ FERNAND BRAUDEL, *Civilisation matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme XV-XVIII Siècles*, vol. II *Les Jeux de l'Echange* (Paris, 1979).

orders to the point that payment delays threatened their economic subsistence. In the Alentejo, where marketing circuits were more confined, institutional demand could still be more important, for it opened channels outside the region and introduced some production areas to another, more extensive, kind of market. The woollen trades of Redondo, for instance, thrived when they supplied army uniforms. Institutional demand might then have important consequences for local and regional trades and give proto-industrial enterprises a new scale.

I have dwelt on the case of Alentejo because its peculiarities make it more interesting. A region with low population pressure, living on commercial agriculture and stock-breeding, a wool exporter, where large farms and vast, if insufficient, numbers of landless labourers predominate, Alentejo does not seem the most suitable environment for the growth of dispersed industrial labour in the country. Nevertheless, in the interstices of this dominant structure, small farms, the partition of time between occupations and the division of labour allowed for the proliferation of hand-loom. It may never have reached the dimension or the dispersion it achieved in the highlands, but it was still far from negligible.³⁷

3

Different types of social structures provided the conditions for rural domestic industries to develop. In some regions, producers did not work to supply their own or their family's needs alone, and consumers were not confined to the local community. Commodities manufactured in peasant households found their way into several and some quite distant markets. But now that the structural foundations of proto-industrialization in Por-

³⁷ Assertions regarding Alentejo are still difficult to make because a comprehensive study is still lacking. The work of Silbert clearly underestimates the significance of domestic industry and the recent local approaches of Rui Santos and Manuela Rocha produce valuable clues but cannot provide a global perspective, given their confined units of analysis.

tugal has been largely explored, we should move to another question. How did these proto-industrial areas, that had become established up to the eighteenth century, evolve? We must try to establish what changes they could accommodate and the ways they assimilated the social and economic transformations of the nineteenth century, most of all modern industrialization.

Although they admit other possibilities,³⁸ historians generally point out that the two most likely prospects for proto-industrial regions were modernization or de-industrialization. Confronted with pressure from growing consumption and with home and foreign competition, they could either progress to modernity, thus establishing the continuity between the old craft traditions and the new industrial structures, or else they must experience industrial decline.

In Portugal, industrial modernization was slow, erratic, late and incomplete during the nineteenth century. Few sectors were involved and, at the end of the century, there was still only a small number of industrial trades where modern centres — composed of technologically updated factories — had attained any real significance. Modernization was difficult to achieve, even for those areas where proto-industrialization was more solid and extensive. De-industrialization, instead, seemed the most probable future for most of them. But did they escape this fate?

Although Miriam Halpern Pereira has talked, in somewhat vague terms, about a process of de-industrialization taking place in Portugal,³⁹ the fact remains that this anticipated fate contrasts with the actual development of the regional economies. Continuity, change and adjustment need to be evaluated, while growth and decline must be reassessed.

The first feature to be noted has already been mentioned; the overwhelming stability of regional location patterns for indust-

³⁸ F. MENDELS, "General Report", in *Eighth International Congress...*, pp. 20 ff.

³⁹ MIRIAM HALPERN PEREIRA, *Política e Economia (Portugal nos Séculos XIX e XX)* (Lisbon, 1979), p.72.

rial activities. Some new centres inevitably emerged during the nineteenth century, but most areas which had specialized in certain trades more or less preserved their manufactures and modes of production for the whole century. Examples of this continuity are if anything too many: ceramics in Mafra, leather-goods in Carção and Arcozelo (Trás-os-Montes), in Alcanena and Guimarães, smiths' shops and nail making in the lower Vouga valley, cutlers' shops in Guimarães, hat making in Braga, silk spinning and weaving in Freixo de Espada à Cinta, woollen cloth production in Beira, and linen and lace manufacture in the Northwestern districts. Let us now return to the three cases we have previously considered.

In the Northwest, linen and lace production remained one of the most important occupations for the peasant families. In the aftermath of the French invasions and the ensuing collapse of the Colonial System, local populations endured the consequences of falling exports, which never really recovered, although towels, table-cloths and lace from Guimarães were still sold on the Brazilian market until the end of the nineteenth century. But, detachment from agriculture, despite the growing influence of putting-out, had not yet reached a point where foreign trade fluctuations could generate more than temporary distress.⁴⁰ Moreover, this dispersed industry continued to supply the home market, particularly the in-land districts. It may be true that after 1810 British cotton fabrics came to Portugal in very large shipments, but these huge imports did not find immediate consumption and re-exporting to Spain soon developed into a thriving commerce. In any case, it has been estimated that national consumption of cotton goods was still lagging behind the demand for linen in mid-nineteenth century.⁴¹

⁴⁰ For a conceptualization of a similar situation see MAXINE BERG, *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820* (London, 1985), pp. 130-131.

⁴¹ DAVID JUSTINO, *A Formação do Espaço Económico Nacional. Portugal 1810-1913* (Lisbon, 1987), I, pp.160-163.

The endurance of these rural domestic industries does not portray any push for modernization whatsoever, since no pressure from demand was forthcoming. Market stagnation and rigid consumption did not create incentives for technical improvement or industrial concentration: before the twentieth century only two linen factories were established (one of them very small indeed), whereas domestic spinning and weaving, using the distaff, the spindle and the hand-loom persisted, and provided employment for many people, mainly women and children, in Minho and Beira.

The tenacity of these traditional rural crafts does not imply absolute immobility. Some explicit changes occurred after the mid-century. Following the decline of overseas markets, cotton, as had already hapened with the silk industry in Oporto, gradually replaced flax. Cotton yarn imports increased from the late 1830s. They primarily supplied the workshops and domestic looms in Oporto, though flax and hemp started to be partly but irreversibly substituted for cotton in the countryside. At the end of the nineteenth century, this change was already obvious. Guimarães, once a primary centre for linen production and marketing, and Famalicão had by that time switched to cotton, amplifying the putting-out mode of production. After the cities and towns it was the time for the countryside to undergo a similar shift.

Domestic industry progressed, because the other alternative source for income, cattle rearing, ceased to be feasible. Thus, the growth of dispersed cotton weaving was so important that it began to damage domestic urban industry, since the peasants' lower pay depressed general earnings. On the other hand, after a spinning mill — one of the largest in the country — had been founded in Negrelos in the 1840s, other similar plants came to be established in Minho, and especially in the Ave valley. Therefore, the cotton industry grew much faster, although it did not altogether replace linen manufacture: in the beginning of the twentieth century, despite the consecutive contraction of flax

cultivation, linen production still employed some 42,000 people in the district of Braga alone.⁴²

The general industrial organization was still very similar to the old modes of production and marketing. The *verlagssystem* persisted, even if, for instance in Oporto, some factories now played the part that used to pertain to merchants and their middlemen. The combination between industrial and agricultural work continued to be one of the most distinctive traits of the Northwestern region, albeit, in some cases, industry attained a determining position and agriculture became the second, sometimes complementary, occupation. Work-time partition between manufacture and cultivation may have been altered but the core of the old structure was sustained: construction workmen in Oporto were really small peasants from the surroundings who spent their working-days in the city only to return in the weekends to their families who had meanwhile cared for their small plots.

Industrial concentration, with the advent of some large factories, achieved growing significance in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but changes to the old structure did not distort it altogether. Weaving, for instance, continued to be a task for small workshops and households, in Oporto as much as in the Minho districts. The traditional structures could assimilate and adjust to the innovations: in the Northwest we have found a *neoarchaic* economy, to use the concept coined by Spanish historian Nicolás Sánchez-Albornoz.⁴³

Let us now return to the highlands of Serra da Estrela and to their woollen trades. Their historical course was not very different but, as the concentration of production had far deeper foundations in these areas, factories and workshops came to

⁴² Especially old people; see for the conceptualization of the association between the preservation of traditional technologies and employment of the elderly M. BERG, *The age of Manufactures...*, p. 135.

⁴³ *Jalones en la Modernización de España* (Barcelona, 1975).

play the central role. In the 1840s several new mills were added to the small group which went back to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and, in 1890, plants with more than 50 workers already employed 46 per cent of the weaving labour force. Domestic demand, which was largely met by national production, and regional specialization in woollen manufacture were the driving forces behind this concentration trend.

Nevertheless, the larger mills underwent quite a number of problems, due to inadequate technical systems and faltering power supplies, and so they were outclassed by the new factories established around Lisbon and Oporto. Thus, it is not at all surprising that petty production was still very important at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1890, there were 1012 people working in 577 units with 626 looms in Covilhã alone, some 25 per cent of the manpower engaged in weaving. Putting-out continued to be one of the modes of labour control and manual spinning, a domestic and dispersed occupation, had not yet disappeared. Therefore, the old organization did not collapse.

In Alentejo, the situation was different. On the one hand, woollen trades sharply declined in the towns and this process could justly be described as a case of de-industrialization. But, on the other hand, the scattered domestic industry in the southern district of Beja survived well into the twentieth century. In the municipalities of Almodôvar and Mértola, in 1890, more than 650 women weavers were registered. Handicraft production survived precisely in those areas where marketing was more informal, producers themselves carrying the goods to the nearby fairs, and where the part of the professional merchant was accordingly less significant. In Castelo de Vide, Redondo and Reguengos de Monsaraz, on the contrary, the density and the regularity of woollen cloth production entailed an integration into far larger commercial areas. Given the competition from regions where the combination between the factory-system and the smaller units was most useful with the loss of institutional markets, de-industrialization was the destiny to be fulfilled by

these small towns, all the more since new opportunities opened in commercial agriculture, namely wine production.

4

Three different regions had three separate paths to the twentieth century. In the Northwest, a *neoarchaic* structure emerged. The old modes of production survived, although more and more withdrawn from the larger markets, and they could even assimilate some changes: the substitution of cotton for linen and a reworking of the organization patterns, spinning factories in Oporto and in the Ave valley filling in for the merchants. New industrial processes were cast in the traditional ways, and this is what *neoarchaism* is about. It should be further noted that to this day, and especially after the surge of textile industries from the late 1950s, this region is an industrial district, where a few modern factories combine with widespread small units, relying on backward techniques and cheap labour, to provide for very valuable exports. The so-called flexible specialization is not so much a new path of industrial growth as an adjustment and a revival of the old procedures to the realities of the post-oil crisis economy.

In the woollen trades of Serra da Estrela, small weaving workshops and domestic industry persisted, upholding their relationship with the larger factories, which in fact went back to the seventeenth century. Proto-industrialization gave rise to industrialization, but modernization was no conquering tide. Modern plants were only a handful and for some time they encountered both technical and economic obstacles. Concentration, which had progressed from the mid-nineteenth century, slowed down and almost drew to a halt. Electric power and the late but eagerly awaited arrival of the railway brought the chance for survival and then for new periods of growth. The highlands of Beira are today still the chief site for woollen manufactures in Portugal, and the factories and small workshops

remain dependent on the low cost of labour.

Finally, in Alentejo, some rural crafts persisted whereas small industry almost vanished from the town, without giving way to new, more integrated, modes of production, except in Portalegre. It is interesting to note that industrial concentration was most tenacious and consistent in the two woollen manufacturing centres where manufactories had been precociously deployed and revived, at the time of the industrial mercantilist policies: Portalegre and Covilhã.

The movement towards modern centralized patterns of industrial production spontaneously stemming from dispersed rural domestic manufacture was both limited and protracted. Although the different regions followed separate paths, words like survival, persistence, endurance have been useful to describe characteristics they all shared, bringing to mind a general idea of lethargy, despite some obvious changes. The circumstances that had originally supported the spread of rural domestic industry did not disappear, but local society did not generate spontaneous transformations and there was no strong external pressure for the old traditional structures to be displaced.

The combination of agriculture and domestic industry conserved clear advantages, as can be seen in the case of development of cotton weaving on the outskirts of Oporto. Since home demand did not increase rapidly, given that national income growth was sluggish, and foreign competition was partially avoided after protectionist tariffs were adopted in 1837, the path towards modernization was a narrow one. The flexible nature of rural domestic industry, the persistence of the old inconspicuous marketing procedures, and the association with auto-consumption endowed the traditional structure with the power to assimilate these unavoidable social and economic changes without utterly distorting itself. When adjusting faculties were less strong, for instance in the woollen cloth-producing towns of Alentejo and in the silk manufacturing centres of Trás-os-Montes, de-industrialization was the inescapable result.

The old traditional regional economies could therefore produce stabilizing influences which absorbed the timid innovations arising from the attempts of a backward society to modernize. Sometimes they had to resort to more secluded environments, avoiding the larger and more aggressive markets, but they could also provide the framework for the growth of new trades, as occurred with the expansion of cotton weaving in the Northwest.

This now takes us back to the question I have tried to approach from the outset of this essay: the structural and historical position of the proto-industrialization process. At some stage, all three regions I have brought into consideration have met most of the stipulations inherent in the proto-industrialization concept: the spread of handicraft production for the market involving peasant households had definitely a regional basis, and demand came from outside the vicinity albeit only exceptionally from foreign consumers. The single, universally lacking, condition was the symbiosis with commercial agriculture, for even in Alentejo, where market-directed grain cultivation and stock-breeding did develop, there was not a true bond uniting the spread of domestic industries to the expansion of agricultural trade, although there was an association between household manufacture and wine production. As to the other conditions, there were some variations from one region to another. In Alentejo, for example, the towns provided incomplete marketing and finishing services, which had to be fulfilled by other merchants as well, but Minho and Serra da Estrela conformed rather well to the proto-industrial model as defined by Mendels and Deyon.

However, the set of hypotheses deduced from this model cannot be supported. Rural crafts may have generated the labour supply for the larger mills in Serra da Estrela and to some extent also in Minho, and the profits from petty industrial production mainly went to merchants and manufacturers, but this does not mean that the working and entrepreneurial classes for an indust-

rial revolution had been created. On the other hand, proto-industrialization in Portugal did not foster agricultural specialization. On the contrary, both the Minho and Serra da Estrela regions displayed a wide variety of agricultural resources which went on being exploited. In Alentejo, there were also some complementary activities, but these were clearly subordinated to wheat cultivation and stockbreeding. In any case, specialization may have stimulated the development of domestic industry — seasonal cycles being specially favourable — not the other way around. Finally, the absence of tension in the economy, which was very slow to grow, meant that diminishing returns from proto-industry were so slow to materialize that rural domestic industry was almost able to perpetuate itself. Naturally, there is evidence of new industrial firms springing from the traditional modes of production, but there is also evidence of *neoarchaism*, older procedures assimilating what seemed the most important innovations.

In view of these conclusions, it could be said that there was no proto-industrialization, but then, again, this would involve unsound teleological reasoning, inferring from known results the foregoing conditions. Unless, of course, we choose to approach the issue from an entirely different perspective and consider the process of industrialization as a whole. The notion of proto-industrialization should then be withdrawn as a tool for defining an abstract, transferable and specific structure of relations, which may in some cases have occurred. The notion should be returned to its original theoretical framework. This would of course mean placing proto-industrialization back into the general process of industrialization. In this sense proto-industrialization is virtually indistinguishable from the protracted and incomplete process of industrialization in certain Portuguese regions.

