From Larzac to the altermondialist mobilisation: space in environmental movements

Introduction

In recent years the altermondialist mobilisation has brought the analysis of contentious movements to the top of the agenda in the field of political science. The literature on environmental mobilisation provides many case studies, but one aspect remains little considered: the question of place. Most studies treat space as a mere background and not as a constituent element of collective action, when by definition environmental mobilisations activate a local configuration of actors on territorial issues, such as the defence of a particular land or protection of a natural area. We want here to give voice to the spatial dimension of environmental mobilisation in order to answer the problem of space in contentious movements. This “silence” is all the more “deafening” in France where a specific place (the Larzac) is perceived as the centre of the altermondialist protest. However, the question of resources that are supplied by a site remains broadly unknown. The reading of the scientific literature dealing with environmental mobilisation provides many studies based on individual

The expression quoted here refers to the title of a book which tries to highlight some of the notable silences in the study of contentious politics and which are the temporality in the study of social movements, the leadership dynamics, the question of emotion as an important component of collective action, and of course the problem of space in contentious movements (Aminzade et al 2001).
properties of actors linked to the notion of activist trajectory, on institutional opportunities, and on organisational structures. Framing theory also invested the field of environmental movements, and more recently we must note the attempt to conciliate the individualist and the collective approaches of collective action through the concept of militant career. Still in the field of environmental mobilisations, we can finally mention works highlighting action towards the media. But this reading remains quite silent on the analysis and the conceptualisation of space as a constituent element of these mobilisations. The goal of this paper is to remedy this surprising lack.

Drawing on a French case study, the Larzac mobilisations, we want to contribute to the theoretic work of William H. Sewell. In his work, he tries to theorise the concept of space in contentious mobilisations and “to provide a rudimentary theoretical vocabulary for thinking about space in contentious politics and to begin putting such a vocabulary to work” (Sewell, 2001:52). We wish here to complete this theoretic work with an empirical analysis, without renouncing to make some conceptual headway. Indeed, Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics is an interesting partial synthesis about contentious politics which lays out a number of new research agendas, and especially invites to empirical case studies. That is what we will argue in this paper. We particularly would like to show how a geographic and physical place can be changed into a rhetoric argument of mobilisation. More precisely, our concern is the understanding of what allow the actors of an environmental movement to use the argumentative resources provided by the geographic place for mobilisation purposes. This is especially interesting as far as the Larzac case is concerned because to some extent, we can recognise the same actors over more than thirty years, and because throughout this period, Larzac has been experiencing various types of mobilisation such as antimilitarist, pacifist and antinuclear action, but also peasants’ protests and finally altermondialist contention. So that the Larzac can be defined as an ideal type of the “iterative site” (McAdam 2001:30) where contention is a constituent of social reality. The conflict never disappears, but at the same time it is never exactly the same. What we have to study is neither continuity nor rupture in contention, but successive actualisations of contention. By using the term “actualisations” we aim at stressing two major elements. First, this term implies a temporal dimension. Contention is actualised and materialised under various and successive forms and the environmental protest is one of them. The term “actualisation” insists on the double and paradoxical aspect of Larzac contention, at the same time episodic, continuous and recurrent. Second, we refer here to the work of Stéphane Lupasco and especially to his antagonism principle. According to this principle, social phenomena can be understood through the contradictory couple actualisation/potentialisation. It means that each actualisation of a phenomenon goes together

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2 This sociology of green activists is represented in France for instance by Frédéric Sawicki (2001a, 2001b, 2003).
3 These studies, drawn from Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow’s work, especially concern electoral and party ecology. For instance, Sainteny (2000), Baisnée (2001), Kitschelt (1986).
4 Greenpeace is particularly analysed: Fréour (2004). Concerning our subject, and more precisely the Confédération Paysanne, see Martin (2005). Some studies particularly stress how various environment organisations work together and build a sociography of these associations. For France, see Maresca (2001), Micoud (2001).
6 For instance concerning French ecologists’ careers, see Ollitrault (2001).
8 Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly consider episodes of contention as part of their general dynamic framework for analysis of contentious politics and define them as “continuous streams of contention including collective claims making that bears on other parties’ interests” (McAdam et al 2001:24). These protest episodes are embedded in what they call an epoch of contention.
with the potentialisation of the anti-phenomenon (Lupasco, 1951). Our interest concerning this principle doesn’t consist in its contradictory aspect but rather in the fact that in social life various levels of reality, an actualised reality and a latent one can coexist side by side. We must precise that potentialisation does not equal disappearance; it is a process so it never happens totally. The potentialised event still exists under a virtual shape. For instance, as far Larzac is concerned, what made the specificity of the conflict in the seventies is potentialised for the benefit of new arguments, directly linked to the altermondialist contention. If we consider the Larzac discourse, the antimilitarist and the pacifist rhetoric are turned into latency, as the GMOs question is forced to the forefront of environmentalist movements’ agenda. But the former and latent mobilisations are not forgotten. Larzac people have experienced fight and victory, and above all Larzac territory has been built according to this mobilising rhetoric. Since the struggle against the enlargement of the military camp from 1972 to 1981 to the dismantling of the McDonald’s fast-food of Millau in 1999, the Larzac territory has been established as a sacred and emblematic place of contention. A symbol of the antimilitarist and of the pacifist movement in the seventies, the Larzac has kept its protest position, to such a point that this almost desert place can be considered today as the hotbed of the French altermondialist protest. This is so true that the toponym “Larzac” comes to mean “the Larzac contention”. We will bring up this territorial metonymy again in our first part.

Considering space as the key point of our study implies to forge a theoretical tool likely to give an account of this constituent dimension. That is the reason why talking about Larzac mobilisation, we won’t use the terms “contentious movement” or even “environmental mobilisation”, which are too general, but we will prefer the concept of socio-territorial mobilisation, which lays further on the question of place. We mean broadly by socio-territorial mobilisation the combined discursive productions embedded in a site which aims at creating or increasing the visibility of a localised cause. This general definition must be more tightly clarified in three directions.

- First, this kind of mobilisation is situated, that is to say rooted in a specific site. It usually confers to the socio-territorial mobilisation a defensive dimension, indeed corporative. We want here to stress the fact that space must not be considered as a mere background, which involves to treat all the geographic data not simply as contextual ones but deeply as constitutive elements of the mobilisation. Rooted in this place of reference, a loose network develops and engages in collective action in order to make its claims recognized.

- Second, we mean by discursive productions the collective acts directly related to the site, here the Larzac territory. We must give here two precisions: discursive productions can be either individual (for instance a book, or an interview in a newspaper) or collective (demonstrations), and they can take place in the site of reference (such as the major Larzac meetings in 2000 and 2003) or out of this site (e.g. for European or world social forums).

- Finally, we deal with social mobilisations because discursive practices are not exclusively directed towards the defence of the promotion of a specific place, but also aim at generalising claims or denunciations in a social and in a global direction.

Our assumption to explain why local environmental mobilisations such as the Larzac and broadly contentious movements succeed in their “struggle for recognition” (Honneth 2000) is

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9 Stéphane Lupasco is an unrecognised French philosopher who tried to elaborate a new world vision influenced by quantitative physics. This theory of knowledge is based on a study of (recent) scientific developments and on their theoretical implication.

10 This point of the definition is inspired from Christopher Rootes (2000, 2005).
that this kind of movements has two faces: they are rooted in a specific place and at the same time they carry various issues which do not directly concern the Larzac. But in order to be able and above all to be authorised to deal with more general issues, Larzac actors needs to base their discursive practices on a semantic bridge and on a collective grammar. They will find it in environmental discourse, which can bring forth the defence of a specific site as well as a green criticism of productivism.

Drawing on a longitudinal analysis of the Larzac mobilisation, we would like to explain how the Larzac territory has been established as a sacred and emblematic place of contention. This study is particularly based on discursive production of the Larzac community for thirty years (books, media, meetings) and on an ethnographic survey of protest events that occur in the Larzac. We clearly keep this case study with the general pattern of the constructivist analysis, insofar as place can’t be considered as a mere background or as a container within which the mobilisation process is constrained to occur. We would rather speak about place as it offers resources for people who speak in its name and about Larzac as a mobilising site and as a fund or “repertoire” of argumentation. As Abraham Moles puts it, “space is not neutral, it is not an empty frame to fill with behaviours, it is a source of behaviours” (Moles 1998:111).

One of the major features of contemporary protest movements is to be centred on specific concerns and at the same time to be closely linked to each other. For instance, the Confédération paysanne deals with peasants’ concerns, and at the same time is a founding member of ATTAC and is part of the Sortir du nucléaire network. This paradoxical aspect of contentious politics is part of environmental mobilisations. They can act locally, in order to defend local peasants against the extension of a military camp for instance, and they also act globally, treating space as a global good. We wish here to stress that despite being often presented as a constraint by analysts, this paradoxical dimension of contention is in fact a resource for activists. The environmental rhetoric acts as a triple bridge. It might first be considered as a temporal bridge which relates the seventies’ fight against the military camp to the current altermondalist contention (i). It is also a geographic bridge which connects Larzac to the rest of the world and thus allows connections of various kinds of contention (ii). It is finally and subsequently a (common) place of contention, that is to say a seedbed for contentious actions such as civil disobedience, and a hotbed from which various protest and environmental movements can draw experience, savoir-faire and legitimacy (iii).

1. The constitution of a sacred place of contention

First of all, we should specify what we mean with “environment”. We would like to stress the three main aspects of this notion, insofar as each of these aspects points out one of the constituent elements of the establishment of Larzac as a sacred place of contention. Thus we will successively consider environment and its defensive and reactive dimension, then environment as promotion of a specific place and soil, and finally environment as a common and global good.

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11 Our translation.
1.1. The fight against the extension of the military camp: an heterogeneous mobilisation

The starting point of contentious Larzac was the announcement without preliminary dialogue on the 28th October in 1971 by Michel Debré, the then Defence Minister, to enlarge the Larzac military camp, which was created in 1902. More than hundred exploitations are concerned by the project. The Larzac is a limestone plate in the South of the French Massif Central. It is part of the *Grands Causses*, a raised (between 600 and more than 900 metres) and arid zone located mainly in the Aveyron department (but also Lozère and Hérault). It is a rural and agricultural place where sheep and ewe are bred for their meat but above all for the well-known Roquefort cheese. Because of its semi-deserted characteristic, the government did not envisage any opposition to its project. However, the resistance against the military camp’s extension quickly got organised. After an almost unanimous protest in Aveyron and the mobilisation of local notables, the one hundred and three peasants concerned by the project took the engagement never to yield under the constraint: we call this moment the *Serment des 103* (the oath of the 103). They were supported by trade-unions, by leftwing political parties and by other protest and pacifist movements. Our concern is not to report the whole story of this conflict; let us simply say that in 1981, after ten years of hard fight, the new President of the French republic, François Mitterand, decided to give up the project of extension, according to his promise. What we want here to underline is that the contention organised around various heterogeneous “hearts of mobilisation” (Dobry 1990) that we will find in the current altermondialist contention again. We can distinguish five major poles of mobilisation:

- **The political contention**

  In the post-1968 context, the Larzac federated many of the leftist or radical groups such as Maoist or anarchists activists. They invested the conflict in order to try to influence the course of the fight and its main and relevant issues. Above all, Larzac was for them a new place of contention, and an emblematic one. If Paris was the centre of 1968 contention, the Larzac had to be the new one. This was a radical and extra-parliamentary form of contention, whose presence in the Larzac induced tensions among opponents, especially with local peasants. A specific agricultural political form of contention invested the conflict as well, such as the Working and Peasants Left (GOP, *Gauche ouvrière et paysanne*), that is to say the radical fringe of the PSU (United Socialist Party).

- **The trade-unionist action**

  Two kinds of trade-unions were involved in Larzac contention. The first one was local and especially involved in local problems. The *Fédération départementale des syndicats d’exploitants agricoles* (FDSEA) quickly reacted and called for a demonstration in Millau on the 6 of November, 1971. Furthermore, FDSEA peasants supported the Larzac ones when they walked the whole distance to Paris. It is finally interesting to notice that before the conflict, the FDSEA acted as a socialising place, and that the quasi-monopoly of this main trade-union would be contested and shaken by a second and more radical trade-union led by

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12 Here is the way Michel Debré presented the project of extension in 1971: “There are, nevertheless, some peasants, not much, who vaguely breed sheep, living in a middle-age way, and thus that we have to expropriate”. As well in 1972 in the Assemblée nationale: “This choice was imperative. This land’s austerity, the wind, the snow, don’t allow any activities” (Our translation).

13 After 1968, the PSU brought various tendencies included far-left groups. The GOP embodied the radical and movementist left.
Bernard Lambert. He was the founder of the working peasants’ movement which worked to bring closer peasants and workers’ trade-unions.\textsuperscript{14} This movement came from an internal opposition in the CNJA (Centre national des jeunes agriculteurs) and the FNSEA between a minor trend influenced by the May 1968 ideas and the leaders of the majority trade-union and its strategy of cooperation with rightwing governments. The rupture would be slow, progressive and would depend on each department’s situation. The working peasants’ movement was born from this conflict.\textsuperscript{15}

- **The religious and spiritual commitment**

Here again we have to make a distinction between two faces of this kind of engagement. First Larzac contention got quickly the support of the local clergy. Then this support extended beyond Larzac and was staged, symbolically and physically, when the Larzac peasants marched to Paris in 1973 and took a stone from Orléans Cathedral, with the agreement of the local bishop. What is interesting here is that this stone was used for the building of the illegal farm of la Blaquière. We can consequently say that religious commitment built the Larzac territory. Secondly the commitment of Lanza del Vasto contributed to diffuse protest practises such as civil disobedience. An occidental disciple of Gandhi, he was the founder of the first Arche community\textsuperscript{16}. He actively took part in the Larzac contention by fasting for fifteen days. The echo of this action was all the more resounding in the catholic Aveyron countryside that it involved the bishops of Montpellier and Rodez and some peasants. An ecumenical mass was organised at the end of the fast in La Cavalerie, with both bishops. We must also add that this religious dimension was important for local peasants, as their letter to Jean-Paul II gives evidence\textsuperscript{17}. We finally have to mention the influence of the JAC (agricultural and catholic youth movement) in the course of the mobilisation.

The main consequence of this spiritual commitment was the adoption by Larzac peasants of civil disobedience as the major way of resistance against the army. The refusal of violence is in fact the smallest common denominator.

- **The ecologist mobilisation**

This form of mobilisation materialised in two directions. First it was directly linked to the protection of a specific environment which was under the threat of the army. It is not by chance that Larzac contention developed close to local antinuclear struggles such as Plogoff in Brittany\textsuperscript{18} and Braud et Saint-Louis near Bordeaux. These two mobilisations aimed at

\textsuperscript{14} “Never more peasants will be Versaillais. That’s why we are here, to celebrate the marriage between Lip workers and Larzac” (our translation). This quotation rooted in the Commune de Paris experience symbolises this alliance strategy between two of the most famous contests in the seventies. Bernard Lambert and the working Peasants’ are the initiator of the first great Larzac meeting in 1973. For an analysis of Lambert’s writing, see Lambert (1970).

\textsuperscript{15} In 1987, the CNSTP (Confédération nationale des syndicats de travailleurs paysans), that is to say the independent leftwing agricultural trade-union and the FNSP (Fédération nationale des syndicats paysans), close to the Socialist Party, united and created the Confédération paysanne.

\textsuperscript{16} Referring to non-violence principles, Lanza del Vasto started with others famous people, such as the General de Bollardiére, the protest movement against torture during the Algerian war. He already demonstrated in 1959 in front of the Larzac military camp in which 3500 Algerian people suspected to belong to the FLN are interned. He found the first Arche community in 1948. As early as 1972 he supported Larzac peasants and installed an Arche community on the plate by squatting a farm bought by the army. He also took part to some of the most important demonstration against civil or military nuclear, such as Marcoule in 1958 and Creys-Malville in 1976.

\textsuperscript{17} Letter sent to the Vatican on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of October 1978, two days before the French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s visit to the new pope.

\textsuperscript{18} In 1980 Larzac activist peasants brought and settled thirty sheep in a newly built sheepfold on the site of the future station.
opposing the building of nuclear plants. Second we must remain here that the sixties’ contention encouraged the “back to the ground” ideology. Indeed since May 1968, a small fringe of urban youth was in search of a rural rooting, according to the utopian ideas of the end of the sixties. They fancied a sort of community life and the Larzac seemed to them this “community utopia” (Lacroix 1981), the land of their “utopian exodus” (Léger and Hervieu 1979). Even if many hippies (or baba-cool) went to the Larzac during the fight, especially for big meetings and parties, urban people who really took part to the conflict and above all who durably settled in the Larzac must not be compared with hippies. We would rather call them “new rural people” (néo-ruraux in French). The promotion of green tourism, of biological agriculture and of rural handicrafts gives evidence of the major influence of ecologist mobilisation.

-The constitution of a regionalist front

The sixties and seventies context was propitious to the spread of local movements who denounced central power and aimed at promoting regionalist issues such as language. So the Larzac was quickly invested by the Occitanist movement, according to the ideology of inside colonialism. The Larzac constituted a political and ideological stake for two main reasons. First, this investment in the conflict aimed at influencing the global social contention via the peasants’ movement. Secondly, they hoped this conflict and consequently the place would become symbolic and emblematic of their regionalist concerns. The commitment of the Occitan regionalist movement in the conflict left its print especially concerning the naming of place (the Rajal del Guorp, that is to say the Rook’s Raven in English, which is the natural site where most of the big gatherings took place) and slogans such as Viure al pais (live in native land) or Gardarem lo Larzac (we want to keep Larzac).

Besides these five major hearths of mobilisation we can make another heuristic distinction between two kinds of activists. On the one hand local peasants who have been working here for a long time and mobilised as a reaction against the project of extension of the camp, especially because they are directly concerned. They called themselves the pur-porc, that is to say the pure-pigs, or four-quarters peasants to make the difference with new rural people. On the other hand people who did not live in the Larzac at the beginning of the seventies and who went and durably settled on the plateau. José Bové has an emblematic trajectory of the latter kind. When the Larzac conflict started, he was a military defaulter who hid in an agricultural exploitation in the Pyrenees. He settled with his family in the Larzac in 1976 (in fact he has taken part in the conflict since 1973) by squatting a farm which had been bought by the army. From this point he became a peasant and bred sheep.

We can see that the Larzac contention constituted a heterogeneous front. Each component was motivated by specific concerns. Yet, it did not prevent Larzac from achieving victory; better, it gave birth to a mixed identity based on the Larzac place and above all on the protest values it was conveying. Two major mediums helped first to create and then to maintain unity among the various hearths of the mobilisation. The first ones are the Larzac committees, which have been created all over France in order to support and to popularize the Larzac cause. They are local coordinations of militant organisations (trade-unions, political parties, and regionalist movements, Christian people involved in social movements, anti-militarist activists and so on). The second one is Gardarem lo Larzac, a monthly newspaper

19 The Occitan cartography covers the area where Occitan language used to be spoken. For the Occitan intelligentsia, its border goes from Bordeaux to Valence, via Limoges and Clermont-Ferrand.
20 Today Gardarem lo Larzac is published twice a month. Until 2001, its head office was in Podensac, and today in Montredon.
founded in 1975, in the heart of the conflict. It aimed at the same time at counterbalancing what Larzac peasants considered to be a one-sided and pro-governmental report of Larzac events made by the major papers, and to create a forum and a link between all the Larzac committees. The paper is built on four main subjects which are Larzac today, the environment, rural development, national and international solidarities. We must however bear in mind that it is above all the participation to the same struggle which helps to maintain unity \(^{21}\); better, the Larzac conflict set a precedent generating shared and collective references among the different components mobilised \(^{22}\).

In this first part we saw that it is the protection and the defence of environment as a specific space which mobilised people. We are going to see now that environment is not only a given fact but something built and promoted by activists. If the army is a strong landscape marker, as the Larzac camp testifies, Larzac peasants devoted all their energy to limit this influence and to build a concurrent landscape, a contentious one.

1.2. The semiotisation of Larzac: the appropriation of place

We have seen that Larzac peasants first mobilised against a governmental project. What we now want to show is what their action has built, symbolically and above all physically. Following Claude Raffestin, we assume that Larzac is a re-arrangement of space, that is to say a place informed by the semiosphere (Raffestin 1986). Then it is essential to analyse the various coding processes of the Larzac place by people engaged into the Larzac mobilisation.

We can notice an example of a symbolic action aimed at marking the land: in 1972 the one hundred and three peasants (les 103) planted 103 trees on the banks of the RN 9. It is a meaningful example, but we think that talking about the constitution of a mythic place of contention and studying symbolic action of space appropriation is not enough to understand what we really mean by the process of space building. That is why we want here to concretely analyse how Larzac activists have shaped their environment as a contentious landscape.

Against the government strategy, which aims at buying the landed estates concerned by the army project, the Larzac peasants’ strategy adapted to their opponents and began to hold the place, in two ways. The first one was a legal one. At that time the concern was to buy lands on the area concerned by the extension project, and to do it, to collect the necessary funds. It is for this purpose that the Agricultural estate groups (GFA, Groupement foncier agricole) \(^{23}\) were funded. The first one named GFA Larzac 1 was created in 1973. Its goal was to buy the strategic lands and the “risky” ones, that is to say the essential zones for the army. The priority buying concerned first the isolated parcels, whatever their agricultural value, so that the land bought by the army should not constitute a continuous zone easy to use \(^{24}\); then the GFA focused on entire farming estates in order to maintain their activities. This strategy

\(^{21}\) It is not our main concern here, but let us just precise that the various organisations who took part to the Larzac contention used to meet regularly on the plateau for meetings, parties, or direct actions. All these micro-mobilisations consolidate the group about a common cause, in default of a collective identity.

\(^{22}\) For a more systematic analysis of this question of temporality in the study of contentious movements, see McAdam and Sewell (2001).

\(^{23}\) A GFA is a civil estate company who exclusively manages agricultural goods. The different Larzac GFAs are first strategic instruments meant to buy lands coveted by the army. In 1981, after the victory and the give up of the extension project, they changed into a settlement and perpetuation instrument for farmers. Today, the Civil Company of the Larzac lands (SCTL), which has been created in 1985, collectively manage the 6.300 hectares resold by the Defence minister to the Agricultural one. This innovating estate politics is a single experience of a collective estate managing in France.

\(^{24}\) We must tell here that the started of the conflict made clear a much crumbled situation concerning ownership: the army desired zone is owned by more than 450 landowners.
has been confirmed since because then the lands bought by the State have been divided up and because the private sales prior to expropriation have been limited. Other and complementary actions have been worked out in order to ease the settlement of new peasants or inhabitants: ruins repairing, farms paths building, water supplies. Simultaneously\textsuperscript{25}, illegal actions were led to hold the land. They contributed as well to shape the landscape. We can mention the ploughing of land belonging to the army or to presumed speculators, the digging of trenches through the RN 9 to bring water canals inside the extension area. But the most important and above all the most structuring factor concerning the building of space is the construction of illegal sheepfolds and the squatting of farms bought by the army by activists who would become new peasants. Two main places illustrate these illegal actions. Concerning the building of illegal farms, \textit{la Blaquière} is an emblematic case.\textsuperscript{26} It was illegally\textsuperscript{27} built between 1973 and 1975. It was the first concrete action of the Larzac committees. It was built with the help of taxes refusal funds collected among anti-militarist people, a civil disobedience direct action that we will analyse a little further. Three thousand people participated in the building, most of them (concerning men) conscientious objectors. So we can speak here of an anti-militarist coding. Two other kinds of coding can be observed. First a religious one; \textit{la Blaquière} is called “the Larzac cathedral”, because of what we told before about the first stone of the Orléans Cathedral. Besides, a Franciscan who had worked before on a Romanesque church took part in the building. We can also think that this nickname also comes from its huge dimensions (69 × 21 metres). Besides this religious coding, we can observe an internationalist one. At the time of the setting of the first stone, it was declared: “We don’t want to destroy but to build. This is not our sheepfold. It’s the one of all Larzac peasants, the one of people from France and from the world, people who hold their heads up high and want to stand up” (APAL 2000\textsuperscript{28}). For all these reasons \textit{la Blaquière} became emblematic of Larzac contention. Some of its stones are used as stands for writing messages in several languages. It even underwent an attack in 1975. In 1982, after the presidential elections and François Mitterand victory, the Plan Minister Michel Rocard officially inaugurated the illegal sheepfold with both region and department prefects.

Concerning the squatting of farms, Montredon is a relevant example. This Larzac hamlet located on the edge of the military camp had progressively been given up since the First World War and had begun to live again thanks to the conflict. Owned by the army during the conflict, it was squatted by opponents and restored. This new settlement went hand in hand with new agricultural productions: a sheep-meat flock and cheese making. Montredon has become a central contentious place for two main reasons. First that is the place where José Bové settled in 1976 with his family. If at this time he was not the true leader of the movement (people such as Bernard Lambert and especially Guy Tarlier, a former seminarist who previously engaged in the army before settling in the Larzac and breeding sheep), he was already very involved in all direct actions. The second reason is that Montredon hamlet progressively became the head office of some of the major structures of the fight such as \textit{Gardarem lo Larzac}, the GFA and the SCTL. It is relevant to notice that the abandon of the military project was celebrated in 1981 at Montredon (the victory lamb barbecue). Today Montredon remains this important place for the same reasons. Beside a well-known peasant-

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\textsuperscript{25} If it is true that many illegal actions are undertaken from the very first of the conflict in the same way to legal actions, we must precise that their number increased when the military camp extension was declared and confirmed “public utility” by the Council of State in 1977.

\textsuperscript{26} Others sheepfolds have been built, for instance in Cavaliès or Potensac.

\textsuperscript{27} The planning permission had been previously refused because it was placed in the heart of the previous extension area.

\textsuperscript{28} Our translation.
market, we can find here a resting place which was formerly a popular university for ecologists.

The last example of the protest shaping of space is the Rajal del Guorp, a dolomitic cirque to the north-west of La Cavalerie. It is an emblematic place of Larzac contention insofar as most of the big gatherings took place on this site. On the 25 and 26 of August 1973, the first great meeting was organised by the working peasants’ movement. Almost one hundred thousand people from various French regions and even Europe took part in the event. The second one took place on the 17 and 18 August 1974 (more than one hundred thousand people) and the third one on August 1977 (fifty thousand people). Finally (concerning the seventies conflict), in August 1981, victory was celebrated at the Rajal del Guorp. The participation to the Rajals is experienced as a contentious pilgrimage. We can observe in this case and in the Larzac one the same metonymical process: the conflict is associated to the place to such a point that it takes its name. The Larzac toponym means at the same time a localised place and a social cum territorial mobilisation. In the same way the Rajal del Guorp is a lieu-dit and also means contentious gatherings (the rajals). Generally speaking, we can notice a close overlap between the conflict and the geographical and geological environment. For instance, we can read in a booklet published by the Larzac eco-museum: “In the geological era, in a prophetic gesture, Larzac already stood up! Yes, stood up, 800 metres high” (Baillon 1982:2). Following Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s analysis, natural elements such as the Rajal del Guorp, while becoming expressive, have been turned into “markers” or “placards” which delimit the place and its borders (Deleuze and Guattari 1980:386).

This protest landscape had to be managed, during and above all after the conflict. The concern is the conception of environment as something to promote. What is interesting here is that promotion of environment is always closely linked to the Larzac contentious experience. The best example is the place called la Jasse. Close to the RN 9, this old Caussenard sheepfold shelters the Larzac House, a small museum of Larzac history. It is considered as the window of Larzac in its dual contentious and geographical aspects. We can find there farm products, local craftsmen and tourist information. It also sells books especially dedicated to the peasants’ fight. The place is managed by the Association for Larzac planning (APAL). This structure was created in 1973 and at this time the acronym meant Association for promotion of Larzac agriculture. In short (it will be the subject of a following part) its aim was to collect and to manage the three percent of taxes that people refused to pay, according to their estimation of the National Defence part in the global tax). Our concern here is the part it played after 1981 and the abandon of the military project. Then the APAL became a development instrument intended for coordinate and help young peasants’ settlement on the plateau, to think about new energies and to promote Larzac for the outside world. Today its activity especially focuses on social life activities (local information, debates, and exhibitions) and on the promotion of innovative projects for Larzac development.

Finally we can consider Roquefort cheese as a good example of the contentious coding of environment. Partly produced with Larzac ewe milk, it has become emblematic of this contentious soil and of the malbouffe problem (that we will study a little further). At Seattle in 1999, for the Citizen Forum against the WTO, the then leader of the Confédération paysanne José Bové spoke in English in front of three hundred people gathered by American NGOs and trade-unions to denounce WTO projects’ consequences for agriculture. In order to support his statement he held up a Roquefort cheese to illustrate junction between Larzac breeders and altermondialist networks, and as a symbol of Larzac and beyond altermondialist contention.

29 We talk about Rajal 73 or Rajal 74, which refer to the different gatherings which took place on this site.
1.3. Environment as a global good: international solidarity and de-sectorialisation of the conflict

Larzac contention first meant a defensive and reactive protest against an outside attempt of intrusion. But the contentious repertoire of activists quickly moved towards two directions in an attempt to make the conflict less corporatist. The first direction of these discursive actions is what can be called the international solidarity’s actions. According to the conception of environment as a global good, we can notice three cases of commitment in the field of international solidarity which refer to various constituent dimensions of the Larzac conflict. The first one is directed towards peasants of Southern countries. This kind of support is expressively staged by Larzac activists: for instance in 1974 was organised the Harvest for the Third World, during a meeting in the Larzac in which 50000 people took part. The result of the collect was sent to the Sahel peasants. Interdependence between both situations was underlined: the slogan of the manifestation was “wheat keep living, arms kills”. The second one concerns the opposition to state-power. In this way we can mention the conflict over the Japanese Narita airport construction. After an international meeting in the Larzac in August 1981 a delegation of Larzac peasants went to Japan in order to support the fight and to give it an international legitimacy and a regionalist dimension. As a Japanese activist noted, “Sanrizuka struggle did not only aim at defending the land. It also became the symbol of Japanese popular struggle against state power. Narita is the symbol of state violence and of Japanese people’s resistance” (Gardarem lo Larzac 1982:3). We can finally talk about the support to Polynesian people, which stresses both the independantist and regionalist dimension of the conflict and the anti-militarist concern. Indeed links between Larzac peasants and the Kanak cause were tight. As José Bové notes, “thanks to our lawyer, we took contact with people from New Caledonia, Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the FLNKS. Some Kanak people came to Larzac, and delegations from Larzac went there. In 1985 or 1986, members from the FLNKS introduced us to the Tahitian independantist leader Oscar Temaru. For peasants, for Melanesian or Polynesian people, the central point is land. The fact of being despoiled of it and being excluded from the future of this land brings us together and make us stick together” (Bové 1995). This support was strengthened by French policy of nuclear attempts in New Caledonia. During the whole conflict period, Larzac peasants increased this kind of international support and connections: for instance in May 1973 a delegation from the American Indian Movement and Irish people close to the IRA went to the Larzac to join a meeting concerning minorities protesting against State powers. Larzac contention took benefit from the peasants’ lawyer international network. Indeed François Roux, counsel of Larzac peasants, is also the counsel of Kanak leaders and of Polynesian independentists. He weaved contacts all around the world because of his non-violent and spiritual commitment with anti-militarist, independentist and pacifist movements. This experience helped to join heterogeneous fights by defining shared concerns (environment) and a repertoire of collective action focused on non-violence and civil disobedience.

The second point concerns the will of activists to de-sectorialise their cause, and so to link it with other types of conflicts. The emblematic case is the mutual support between two of the most famous French social conflicts of the seventies, Lip and Larzac. Lip is a French

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30 National Kanak socialist liberation front.
31 The AIM was fighting against their federal government to have their culture and their language recognised.
32 Interested in estate fights, he played an important part in the creation of the SCTL (Larzac Estate Company), which complicated expropriations of inhabitants for the benefit of the army. For more details see Roux (2002). He is well-known today for being the lawyer of the Voluntary mowers and of Zakarias Moussaoui. He also has been the counsel of Dieudonné, a famous French humorist accused of anti-Semitism.
company near Besançon who produces clocks. Its dismantling in 1973 induced protestation in the whole region. The workers barricaded themselves in their factory and took the clock stock. They started machines again and sold their production. They sent delegations everywhere in order to present and to popularize their struggle\(^{33}\). Lip workers went to the Larzac at the very beginning of their conflict. In 1973 many of the Lip workers joined the *Rajal del Guorp* gathering where the bringing together of workers and peasants is pleaded. This kind of link was all the more easy to establish that it answered to shared desire of fight enlargement. Besides this national case of solidarity we can notice local examples of connections between factories’ workers and Larzac peasants, such as the solidarity strikes of Millau workers. These connections as a whole have been staged in the Larzac and so contributed to build the Larzac territory as a contentious landscape. For instance, according to their estate action, Larzac peasants sold the Lip workers a parcel. As well, in September 1985 they symbolically offered the Kanak community represented by the FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou lands and a *cazelle*\(^{34}\). *Le Canard Enchaîné*, a French political and satirical paper who has been supporting the Larzac cause from the beginning and helped to the creation of *Gardarem lo Larzac*, got a pond from the Larzac peasants.

Since the seventies, people involved into Larzac conflict have been building a contentious place both symbolically and physically. Larzac has been shaped as a “bound passing point” (Callon 1986), in other words a contentious melting-pot for many protest movements committed into altermondialist struggle. Getting them strength from their victory, and according to an enlarged conception of environment, Larzac peasants provided necessary arguments in the construction of public problems concerning environment and a contentious address book at their partners’ disposal. That is what we are going to show through the construction of the GMOs public problem case.

### 2. “Malbouffe” and GMOs: the construction of public problems

The mobilisation of various protest actors about a cause such as the *malbouffe* implies a minimal agreement on the situation’s analysis, on the convenient repertoire of collective action and on the aim of the struggle. The *Frame Analysis*, from Erving Goffman to David A. Snow, turned its attention to the question of participation of people to a collective action. The concept of frame aims at overcoming the inadequacies of the theory of resources’ mobilisation. David A. Snow tried to show that the support or the enrolment of people in a collective movement or for a cause have been made possible through a “frame alignment” that means a strategic work done by the movement itself in order to match up its mobilisation frame with potential activists’ expectations. But we think that this theoretical approach faces three major difficulties. Very briefly, frame analysis tends first to weaken itself ant to simply mean any social movements’ cultural dimension. Second, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) already criticised the too strategist vision of Snow’s work. Finally, we think that this kind of approach is heuristic to a macro-sociological level, because it can stress important movements of frames, but struggles with the micro-sociological question of the concrete motives of people who commits into a collective action. That is why we try here to proceed to a

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\(^{33}\) On this emblematic case of self-management attempt in France, see Lourau (1974) and Piaget (1973).

\(^{34}\) A Cazelle is a hut built in dry stones, that is to say without mortar neither binder.
sociology of a contentious event (the dismantling of the Millau McDonald’s) and highlight the most concrete and tangible elements of the construction of the GMOs as a public problem. Narratives of the dismantling and above all the diverse appropriations of this event gave various protest groups the possibility to join a contentious configuration centred on the GMOs problem.

2.1. The dismantling of Millau McDonald’s: a localised transformative event

From the dismantling of the Millau restaurant, Larzac has been renewing not with protest but with media-centred contention. More, this event constitutes a turning point for Larzac contention. That is why we want to further the analysis of this episode of contention. Let us recall the facts. On the twelve of August 1999, three hundred people ransacked or dismantled35 a McDonald restaurant building site in Millau, Aveyron, in order to protest against the American policy of Roquefort taxation. Five peasants went to jail.

We first have to explain what we specifically mean by event. Indeed, we face here a specific temporality which is not reducible to a mere spatial and territorial occurrence. We consider, according to Paul Ricoeur, that an event is more than a singular occurrence. “It gets its meaning from its contribution to the intrigue development” (Ricoeur 1983). Studying the event itself is essential as far as the dismantling of the McDonald’s is concerned because an analysis based on the outcomes of the action does not account for what really happened this day (Bensa and Fassin 2002). More, the meaning people gave to the action when it occurred was not the same they gave later on the same event. Studying an event implies not to focus exclusively on the construction of the event through its media coverage, neither to adopt a too strategist approach. Indeed, if analyses such as Mlotch and Lester’s must be credited of stressing the intentional strategies of mobilisations’ actors, they undervalue the fact that it is not the event itself but the meaning that will be assigned to it later on which confers (or not) the event importance. There is no event without the meaning that is given to it when it is received. An event does not have an a priori meaning (Farge 2002). While assuming Raymond Boudon’s words, the “good reasons” people had to act when they dismantled the McDonald’s are not the “good reasons” they had later to justify their action (Boudon 2003).

We secondly would like to underline the localistic dimension of the McDonald’s dismantling. Indeed, the local context and the local concerns are in this case not merely a backdrop but are really part of the event (Sawicki 1988, Briquet and Sawicki 1989). This aspect seems interesting to us for three main reasons. First it took place in Millau, that is to say below the Larzac plateau. In the eye of the general public, this action was renewing with the seventies contention. We can also notice that some of the Millau co-accused were already part of the Larzac contention against the military camp36. Let us add that the dismantling had been decided some days before in Saint-Affrique, a town at the West border of the Larzac plateau. This indicates, and it is our second point, that it had been decided mainly by Larzac activists (in fact peasants belonging to the Aveyron Confédération Paysanne) and not by the

35 The choice between the two terms has been the subject of a rough semantic controversy between opponents and protagonists of the event.
36 For instance Christian Roqueirol, a Confédération Paysanne activist, who discovered Larzac in 1975 because of its engagement as a conscientious objector. He became a farmer in 1977 and joined the Worker peasants Movement, and then the Confédération Paysanne. He is one of the founders of the Cun, a local structure aiming at promoting non-violent resistance. Another example is Léon Maillé, a Larzac native peasant. For 1975 he has been participating in the writing of Gardarem lo Larzac. He is a member of the Confédération Paysanne and militates in the Green Party.
trade-union officials. The dismantling has not been voted by the departmental Committee of Aveyron Confédération Paysanne but by the ewe milk producers’ trade-union (SPLB), which is in fact the true instigator of the action. This trade-union is led by activists from the Confédération Paysanne who produce milk in the Roquefort area. Our third point shows that the action came under an analysis of local situation. Indeed, the event must be linked to the American retaliatory measures against the European refusal to import hormone meat. Roquefort cheese, which is the main outlet for Larzac breeders, was part of European products undergoing one hundred percent customs surtax for entering the American market. We must say here that despite its localistic dimension, the McDonald’s event gave Larzac activists the opportunity to activate their international networks and particularly to emphasize the American support. Everything was done to denounce criticism of anti-Americanism. For instance it is often remained that support after the McDonald’s dismantling came first from the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC). As well, the José Bové round from farms to farms with the NFFC was media-covered, as his presence in the Seattle demonstration in the AFL-CIO cortège. He explained in the main French newspaper: “I am not anti-American. I am opposed to a specific agricultural and industrial system, which is the GMOs and the hormone beef one, and to the merchandisation of the world. American peasants paid my bail and we are fighting together.”

Finally, we deal here with a transformative event (Sewell 2001). In Sewell view, “the key feature of transformative events is that they come to be interpreted as significantly disrupting, altering, or violating the taken-for-granted assumptions governing routine political and social relations” (Sewell 2001:110). In other words, following the French institutional analysis (AI) and especially René Lourau’s work, we can say that transformative events are instituting events insofar as they constitute a disrupting of temporality and a rupture of intelligibility. These “moments of collective effervescence” evoked by Durkheim can be considered as “instituting disorder” (Lourau 1974) that carry out social transformations. We must say again that an event is not intrinsically transformative; further events and accounts of them can make an event transformative or not. As Sewell notes, “it is not the event itself, but the importance that comes to be assigned to it in the immediate aftermath of the event that determines its transformative potential” (Sewell 2001:112). The dismantling of the Millau restaurant can be seen as a transformative event because it is first a spatially concentrated event, and secondly it introduced a new and potent template for French altermondialist movements. Our objective is not to underestimate the true relationship between the seventies conflict and this event. On the contrary, the McDonald episode ushered in a new epoch of Larzac gatherings (2000, 2003). But we want specifically to insist on the event as a “concentrated moment of social creativity” (Sewell 2001:102) and on the changes it raised. Briefly, the McDonald event introduced five elements which actually can be considered as resources for the altermondialist contention. It gave it first a new date of reference which symbolise resistance against economic globalisation. Furthermore, the anniversary of the event is celebrated in the Larzac and gives the opportunity to mobilise, according to a sort a virtuous circle. The after-McDonald period inaugurates a new contentious calendar given rhythm by birthday celebrations and commemorations (for instance the birthday of the first great Larzac gathering in 1973 had been celebrated in 2003 in the same place) and by major altermondialist dates such as social

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37 François Dufour, the spokesman at this time, knew about the dismantling but did not take the decision. He recognises that “the Aveyron Confédération Paysanne moves a lot and often aims straight” (Bové and Dufour 2000:40).

38 Sophie Meunier distinguishes seven figures of anti-Americanism. Among them the “nostalgic anti-Americanism” seems to be what altermondialisation contention is accused of being.

Secondly it offers altermondialist movements a fixing point, when until this moment their claims were often disincarnated. Then it took to the forefront new actors able to give social conflict their voice. On an individual level José Bové has been playing the role of the leader, and on the collective level the Confédération Paysanne henceforth became the leader organisation (with ATTAC) of French altermondialist contention. This strategic and central position of the peasants’ trade-union helped to constitute (this is the fourth aftermath of the McDonald event) a new public problem shared by most of the altermondialist movements which takes into account their specific concerns. This question of the GMOs will be the subject of the following part. Finally, this event provided a repertoire of discursive actions which is not really new but that Larzac activists are trying to make more legitimate. This point, and especially the question of civil disobedience, will be the concern of our third and last part.

2.2. The constitution of a discursive cause: the malbouffe

From the Larzac seventies conflict, and especially from the 1981 victory to the McDonald’s dismantling, some specific topics have been progressively put in the shade, or “virtualised” (Lupasco 1973), just like the Occitanist concerns or the religious component. They haven’t really been given up, but they are not the driving force of Larzac contention any longer. The new template of altermondialism has been activated, and the question of the “malbouffe” and beyond of the GMOs is becoming the new leader actualisation of Larzac contention. The connectionist aspect of the malbouffe cause refers to the complex and above all polysemic meaning of environment as it is defined by Larzac peasants. The relating to nature is the heart of this global ideology which involves the whole world. This conception goes beyond the mere problem of environment as we traditionally expect. Its central concern encloses social cares: community living is valorised and industrial and technical mediations are criticised. It gives rise to social movements whom concerns are much differentiated: GMOs, nuclear and so on. More precisely we want here to stress the main components of the malbouffe cause’s construction. According to J. R. Gusfield, “to describe the structure of public problems is to describe the ordered way in which ideas and activities emerge in the public arena” (Gusfield 1981:9). Three majors processes can be distinguished. They are not exclusive ones, but we analytically separate them as a matter of legibility.

The first component of the construction of this discursive cause is its economic dimension. What is mainly denounced here is the role of multinational companies in the commercialisation of transgenic seeds, especially in Southern countries, and the risks of dependence it generates for peasants. This criticism of “merchandisation” integrates the cause and people who support it into the anti-globalisation contention. It also gives the opportunity of alliance between quite heterogeneous groups such as the Confédération Paysanne and ATTAC.

The second feature is the international process of construction. We consider the June 2000 Millau trial about the dismantling of the McDonald restaurant as a good example of this strategy of internationalisation. Seventeen people intervened during the trial in order to

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40 Gardarem lo Larzac is a good example of what a turning point is. From the McDonald event, the paper began to report on the altermondialist contention. Some of its voluntary reporters went to WTO summits in Seattle and Cancun and to each World social fora in Porto Alegre. From this point the altermondialist issue represents a central concern for the paper.

41 This trial is also typical of practices aiming at turning a classical procedure such as a trial into a tribune in order to enlarge the audience. The strategy consists in inviting experts as witnesses for the trial.
legitimate the action and above all to de-singularise it and turn the trial into the WTO’s one. Four of the witnesses give evidence of this double strategy of internationalisation and de-decompartmentalisation. The first one is Lori Wallach, an American jurist and spokeswoman of Public Citizen, the consumers organisation founded by Ralph Nader. She is used to denouncing the opacity of ALENA mechanisms and to fighting against the consequences of globalisation on democratic principles. The second witness is Rafael Alegria. He is Honduran and international co-ordinator of Via Campesina, a peasants’ movement who brings about a hundred trade-unions from all continents together. During the trial, he defended the action according to Via Campesina principles: food auto-sufficiency, denunciation of seeds multinational companies’ seizure of Third World agricultural economies. The third witness is Vandana Shiva. She is committed to biodiversity respect and against GMOs and patents on living species. She is famous in India thanks to her idea of local traditions’ respect opposed to multinational companies’ productivist and standardising model. Finally, Susan George witnessed in the trial; she is president of the Observatoire de la mondialisation (Observatory on globalisation) and member of the Citizen Coordination against WTO (CCCOMC in French). We can easily draw a parallel with the trial in 1975 (already in Millau) for the illegal building of la Blaquière. This moment gave the opportunity for a public speech: “we declare that we couldn’t think of refusing the military extension here to accept its settlement elsewhere, further down south on the plateau as it is already muttered, or in another place in the country. Larzac won’t be the base camp of repressive forces, to break popular resistance in Ireland, in Tchad or elsewhere, against the Joint Français, against Lip, against Parisian dustmen, against the South of France wine growers and so on… Larzac, you won’t be the base camp to kick our face in!” (APAL 2000).

If we draw this parallel, that is to keep in mind that despite the innovating dimension of the contention, particularly the construction of a new public problem, the legacy remains strong and structuring, as we are going to examine concerning the actions’ repertoire in general and civil disobedience in particular.

The third component of this construction process concerns more directly environmental problems. Here again the rhetoric of environmental denunciation about GMOs balances according to a local/global dialectic. On a local point of view, GMOs are accused to endanger soils and products attached to those local soils. GMOs opponents especially focus on the dissemination problem. On a global level, the concern is food sovereignty as it is defended by the Confédération Paysanne and Via Campesina. What allows the junction between the two levels is the risk rhetoric. Analysis, criticism and actions from GMOs opponents are undertaken on behalf of the precautionary principle. We can easily remark here the way the malbouffe problem, and especially the hormone meat one, has been turned into the GMOs denunciation. This kind of strategy comes under the double orientation of expertise and scandalization (Offerlé 1994) suited to contentious movements. Larzac and Greenpeace...
have been collaborating for the second time about GMOs according to this kind of criticism. José Bové was actually particularly involved at the ecologist organisation side against French nuclear policy.50

These three features of the malbouffe and, beyond, of the GMOs public problem’s building have been participating to the constitution and the consolidation of an heterogeneous contentious front around the Confédération Paysanne and more precisely around Larzac. A first example of this type of informal grouping is Construire un monde solidaire (Building a united world). The dismantling of the McDonald’s in 1999 and the charges and imprisonments that followed induced the creation of the Support Committee to the Millau Accused. The dynamic of the gathering for the McDonald’s trial in Millau in 2000 has driven various organisations to coordinate and to work together. The collective Construire un monde solidaire was created in February 2003 in order to follow up this dynamic. Among those various associations we can quote the G10-solidaire (a leftwing trade-unions’ federation), Aarrg! (Apprentis Agitateurs pour un Réseau de Résistance Globale, in English apprentice agitators for a global resistance network), APAL (Association pour l’aménagement du Larzac, in English Association for Larzac planning), ATTAC, IRE (Institut pour la relocalisation de l’économie, in English Institute for the relocalisation of economy), Les amis de l’Humanité (an association that supports the communist paper L’Humanité), Radio Larzac (a Larzac-based alternative radio) and of course the Confédération Paysanne. The Voluntary mowers’ group is another example of this specific configuration. This informal group brings together people opposed to GMOs cultivating and ready to destroy the fields in question. Most of the French contentious organisations are represented in the collective, that is to say that their activists take part in destroying actions. That is the case for Greenpeace, the Green Party (Les Verts), the SUD trade-unions (leftwing contentious trade-unionism) and so on. Symbolically it comes from a call of Jean-Baptiste Libouban, a member of the Lanza del Vasto non-violent Community during the Larzac gathering in 2003. The constitution of this coalition testifies to a multi-directional building process concerning the GMOs and to the success of a discourse able to federate various organisations. And here again Larzac is the common denominator of the mobilisation, and this coalition of actors is centred on the Confédération paysanne. The chart of the Voluntary mowers is explicit: “actions will be coordinated locally by mowers collectives and will be supported by the Confédération Paysanne and the Arche Community of Lanza del Vasto (non-violent action coordination). Any groups, association or trade-union who would like to join the fight will be welcome”. Quoting J. R. Gusfield, Larzac is the “owner” of the GMOs public problem, insofar as Larzac activists (José Bové in particular) succeeded in imposing themselves as legitimate spokesmen and putting into words the public problem in the way of interesting possible partners (Callon 1986). At this point it is interesting to notice that in the construction of the malbouffe cause, José Bové emerged as the central link in the chain of activists who took part to the process. In addition to his individual qualities we can explain this fact because he was the only one to be able to rely on a double mobilisation network. Firstly via his trade-union, he has taken advantage of material, economic and human support. François Dufour, the spokesman of the Confédération Paysanne at that time, always defended him, for instance when he was in jail.52

50 In 1995 José Bové and Christian Roqueirol went with Greenpeace activists to Tahiti in the French Polynesia (more precisely to the Mururoa atoll) when the new French president Jacques Chirac decided to start nuclear tries again.

51 Information concerning the Voluntary mowers Collective can be found on the Internet site of Construire Un monde solidaire. Moreover its postal address is in Millau (4 place Lucien Grégoire).

52 This support is explicit in Bové, Dufour (2000).
Secondly José Bové can mobilise specific and personal Larzac support dating back to the seventies Larzac contention.

The constitution of an emblematic place of contention made available necessary arguments in the construction of the public problem of GMOs. This connectionist cause has been building a configuration of actors involved in a common conflict. We are going to see now that the constitution of Larzac as a sacred place of contention also supplies (and contributes to legitimate) a repertory of protest actions.

3. The common places of local environmental mobilisations

3.1. Larzac, a heterotopic place

In our first part we told about social appropriation as the key process in the construction of place. We have now to specify that an appropriated place means two things: a place that has been appropriated by somebody (the Larzac peasants) but also a place which is fit for concrete actions. That is in this way that we are talking about the common places of environmental mobilisations. By common places we mean a discursive practise, an argument that has been partly forged in the Larzac, that has been made available for other local environmental movements and that is efficient and on the way of legitimisation. That is what we will analyse further on considering the case of civil disobedience.

In order to understand how a specific argument, a localised rhetoric becomes a common place of mobilisation, we need to refer to the work of Michel Foucault and more specifically to his concept of heterotopy. With this concept, Michel Foucault describes closed and delimited places. Quoting him, heterotopies are places that “always imply an opening and closing system that in the same time isolated them and make them penetrable” (Foucault 1994:760)\(^{53}\). He adds further that a heterotopy is a place “which is a sort of counter-site in which any site that we can find inside culture is at the same time represented, contested and inverted, some kinds of places that are outside every places and in which a mythic and real contest of place we live in is expressed” (Foucault 1994:755-6). It seems that Larzac is an ideal-typic case of heterotopy, insofar as it is almost an empty semi-desert place\(^{54}\), which does not look like any other place and at the same time, it is the place where everything can happen. To some extent this problematic and paradoxical place has something to deal with utopian ideas; but it is also the exact contrary of what we call a utopia (a place that does not exist). Indeed, despite of being an idealised place, Larzac remains a “real and effective” place, “a kind of realised utopia” (Foucault 1994:755). We have seen that place had been built in a contentious way. What is interesting to note is that this meaningful dimension of Larzac is also noticed by Larzac activists. Elisabeth Baillon, who is working out both the promotion of Larzac contentious history and the valorisation of the Larzac patrimony, puts this fact into words: “if we simply cut some roads, this mountain becomes an impregnable fortress, defensive nature: here nature created function. (...) This land without enclosure is becoming the

\(^{53}\) Jean-Luc Bonniol adds: “A fundamental duality of the Larzac landscape can be seen in the opposition of what is open and what is closed. On the one hand lands which spread as far as the eye can see, without any obstacle to the sight and to circulation; on the other hand every closed spaces, from the farmyards to the stone encircled parcels” (Bonniol 2001:9).

\(^{54}\) Philippe Gardy, in his linguistic study on the Larzac toponym, notes that “Larzac is a non-space, an empty space on the mental map” (Gardy 1987:69).
true symbol of liberty. And this rough Larzac land is becoming the symbol of promise land” (Baillon 1982:2-5). We find here again the religious impregnation of the conflict. This heterotopic characterisation of Larzac stresses the tension between local and global, between specific and universal. And what is most often regarded as a constraint (we are talking about the local/global dialectic) is on the contrary a resource for both Larzac activists and other environmental mobilisations. Larzac peasants strategically appropriated René Dubos’ maxim “act locally, think globally” and so turned this strategic dilemma into a resource for their action. A good example is the rhetoric argument always used by José Bové when he is talking about any subject. He always begins his speeches with “as a peasant”, to give authority to his words. His legitimacy comes from his local and professional anchorage.

According to Michel Foucault, one of the key principles of heterotopies is that they have the power to juxtapose in a single real site various places and various types of arguments. In this way Larzac is a place of social condensation (Debarbieux 1995), an emblem for various social groups that created the site and for those that are using it. The toponym Larzac is a complete topos; in addition of its meaning of place, it has renewed with the second meaning of this Greek term which also means a general argument model. Larzac connects local and global levels, specific and more universal concerns. As Guy Di Méo subtly puts it, “the sacred place trifle with scales” (Di Méo 1998:40). In this way Larzac offers a base of mobilisation for many contentious movements. It also offers, and that is what we are now going to analyse about civil disobedience, a ready-to-use repertoire of contention.

3.2. Civil disobedience as an “invented tradition”

We want to show in this final part two major things. First that civil disobedience was built as an invented tradition that helped connecting the past and the present and in giving Larzac community if not a collective identity at least a shared driving force that creates unity. Secondly, besides this temporal and territorial rooting work of civil disobedience experiences, Larzac activists concretely applied to legitimate and popularise its principles in order to make civil disobedience available for other local environmental mobilisations.

According to Eric Hobsbawm’s analysis (Hobsbawm 1983), civil disobedience is an invented tradition. More than a mere protest or resistance action, it is a ritualised social practice expressed as a symbol and clearly built and publicised by claiming a continuation with the Larzac past. From the beginning of the conflict in the early seventies, Larzac peasants have been trying to base their legitimacy by claiming for the old peasants’ statute. The building of such an identity was running efficiently in the plateau by stimulating cohesion between heterogeneous elements, and outside by promoting general and generous arguments such as “three farms are better than a single one”, a peasant agriculture rather than a productivist one, and so on (Alland 1995:20). Civil disobedience was another practice aimed at marking a relationship between the two epochs of contention. Mowing acts are done in the name of civil disobedience principles and always refer to what Larzac peasants have done in the seventies. We can briefly mention three types of civil disobedience actions in the seventies Larzac. In 1972 sixty peasants sent their soldier booklet back. Three thousand people followed them, the trials concerning refractory peasants amplifying the movement. It is interesting to notice that he is all the more heard and above all listened to or justified to express himself that he talks about specific concerns relying on agricultural problems. When he takes a definite position on another matter, he becomes much less understood, as has been the case concerning the Palestinian problem. To carry on the analysis, we can refer to Michel Foucault’s distinction between specific and general intellectual (Foucault 1994:154-160).
Then the appeal to refuse the three per cent part in the global tax, which corresponds to the part of the National Defence and contributed to agricultural development and judicial support to accused activists, water supply, roads and agricultural buildings repairing, all the things aimed at making expropriations more difficult and at giving a positive image of the fight by showing that things can be managed without having resorting to legal institutions. The APAL is in charge to collect these three per cent tax. Before being a help for Larzac development, the APAL (Association for promotion of Larzac agriculture) was first from 1973 to 1981 an instrument of fight.

56. La Blaquière for instance comes from this kind of financing. Finally in 1976 Larzac peasants entered the military camp to destroy bills of sale. The most important for them, in addition of the spectacular aspect of this kind of action, was to keep with them documents tending to show that it had been speculation. Once arrested, those documents became exhibits produced in evidence, which had to be shown in court. That is the same strategy that is used by voluntary mowers. All these actions constitute a stock of experiences that helps to create unity among Larzac activists. This invention of a civil disobedience tradition, and we agree with Eric Hobsbawm, is a way for social groups to build and prove their identity and to turn an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) into a territorialized community. We consider territory as a collectively appropriated place demarcated by a recognised border which is naturalised by a shared history and a collective memory (Le Berre 1995:602).

57. In the same way, he told in his first main book about connections he experienced in Seattle with Direct Action Network, an informal group that prepared the counter-summit in 1999 and led direct non-violent actions such as sit-in on strategic crossroads, surrounding of delegated people and human chain in front of policemen (Bové 1999). He also gives its experience a theoretical base by referring to the “founding fathers” of civil disobedience, in fact Henry David Thoreau58, and thus makes available general legitimating arguments for people engaged into civil disobedience actions. Inside the Larzac movement activists contribute to legitimate principles of civil disobedience and non-violent action. The two key figures are François Roux and José Bové. The first one directs his legitimating work towards the specific non-violent question. His major influence, in addition of civil disobedience theoreticians and actors, and beyond his duty as a lawyer, is religion. A Protestant, he tells he acts “as a Christian”59 when he is doing missions in Palestine or Burundi. He particularly develops what he calls the “trade-unionism aikido”: “one of the civil disobedience principles is to use the adversary force in order to

56. The APAL is in charge to collect these three per cent tax. Before being a help for Larzac development, the APAL (Association for promotion of Larzac agriculture) was first from 1973 to 1981 an instrument of fight.


58. Thoreau develops two main ideas: first, the best government is the government that governs less (in Civil disobedience written in 1849), and second he can be considered as the precursor of a kind of environmentalism in the specific context of developing America of the 19th century (in Walden, or life in the woods written in 1854).

59. For instance, Présence Protestante, a French television broadcast, 10th October 2004. See also Roux (2002:56).
return it against him, what also is an aikido principle” (Roux 1980:31). François Roux is not behindhand in this denunciation of technician society and the logic of dependence it creates. His criticism directs for instance against research: “Messrs the researchers, please, let the nature uninjured; go back in your laboratories to carry on testing on those chimeras in an enclosed space”\(^6\). In his main book named *In a state of legitimate revolt* (Roux 2002), François Roux is explicitly in keeping with ancient or more modern great names of civil disobedience such as Antigone, Gandhi and Lanza del Vasto. According to him, civil disobedience is a revolt of moral consciousness when injustice makes the law. “We have the right but also the duty to revolt”, is pleading François Roux who considers supra-national judicial institutions (Human Rights European Court and international penal courts) as original and unprecedented appeal for disobedient people\(^6\).

José Bové also directs his work in the same way\(^6\) but he especially focuses on the denunciation of the “technician society” according to the analysis of Jacques Ellul. This atypical thinker, sometimes qualified as a philosopher, a politician or a theologian according to circumstances, influenced the Larzac conflict thanks to a triple criticism: the denunciation of the technician society, the distrust of State and power and the blaming of the consumer society\(^6\). What is the most interesting is the staging of what actually can be called a strategic influence. Any time he can José Bové refers to Jacques Ellul, and his books give him this opportunity (Bové 2000, 2001; Pingaud 2002). As an example of this kind of reference, let us simply quote an extract: “For Ellul, events that are the most in position to change the world come from revolts that are rooted in specific places” (Bové and Luneau 2004).

Finally there is an important structure on the Larzac plateau that has been contributing to legitimate and popularise civil disobedience principles and non-violent action throughout the seventies. It concerns the *Cun* (the corner in Occitan). This structure organises training courses and conferences about non-violence. It constitutes an open space towards the outside of Larzac and contributes to invite great names in the Larzac and so to popularise both the Larzac cause and above all non-violent and civil disobedience practice and experiences. The *Cun* was created in October 1975 by four conscientious objectors\(^6\). The building was owned by the army and has been squatted by Larzac activists. The *Cun* constitutes an important mediate structure between the two periods of contention in Larzac; it helped to manage with the crisis ending after the victory in 1981\(^6\).

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\(^6\) Let us precise that this type of action is not a Larzac invention, even if it is often presented as a new contentious practice. The trade-unionist aikido refers to Saul Alinsky’s “masses political ju-jitsu” (Alinsky 1971).

\(^6\) *Libération*, 30\(^{th}\) September 2004.

\(^6\) To go further on non-violent questions, see Muller (1981).

\(^6\) His book *For civic disobedience* (Bové 2004) tries to justify illegal mowing by recalling the great dates and great names of civil disobedience (Thoreau, Gandhi, deserters, aborted women). We can notice that his attempt to theorise civil disobedience principles broadly repeats Mario Pedretti sociological work on the question (Pedretti 220).


\(^6\) The conscientious objectors’ statute has been created in 1963 and gives young people the right not to do their military service without being sent to jail. A 1972 decree specifies the time of objectors’ service (two years instead of one for military service). Conscientious objectors now have to work for the National forest office (*ONF*). The law envisages as admissible reason philosophic and religious convictions. Moreover it is forbidden to make any promotion about this new statute.

\(^6\) The *Cun* has been restructured in 2001 by dividing its professional training activities (association *Conflict-culture-co-operation*) and its animation functions (association *The Windmill*).
Conclusion

The spatial dimension of social facts in general and of environmental concerns in particular has been occulted for a long time. We tried here to consider space as a constituent of environmental mobilisations and to analyse it through the prism of the Larzac experience. The Larzac territory and its identity are inventions that have been progressively built by the semiotisation of the place, by the construction of markers which have impregnated French contentious mythology. Quoting Maurice Halbwachs, “everything tends to show that the group thinking can’t rise, survive and become conscious of itself without relying on visible kinds of space” (Halbwachs 1938). On such symbolic bases space becomes a strong instrument of social mobilisation. Larzac has been invested with its proper contentious values that also are proper to other local environmental mobilisations. This paper intended to explore the way environmental discourse is mobilised to denounce global problems from a local place, and above all how a particularistic place is turned into a think tank of general arguments available for local environmental mobilisations. Larzac operated as a matrix for environmental mobilisations and, beyond that, for other contentious movements.
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